

HORTICULTURAL EDUCATION — DOES IT FALL SHORT OF THE MARK?

PAUL L. SMEAL

Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Over 10 years ago, following the IPPS meetings, members of this group, university personnel, and representatives from the American Association of Nurserymen met to discuss how to get more young people interested in ornamental horticulture and the type of programs that should be offered. Since that time, there has been tremendous interest in ornamental horticulture from youth and adults. The interest has grown in the secondary schools with particular interest in the high school vocational agricultural programs; the vocational-technical schools; the two-year community colleges; the two year program at the four-year institutions; the four-year colleges and universities; and with adult education.

To answer the question given to this panel, "Horticultural Education — Does It Fall Short of the Mark?", I emphatically can answer NO. We may not be "dead center" in the bullseye, but we are on the target.

Those responsible for providing horticultural education have responded to the demand at all levels of education. At these early meetings, discussion was centered around whether the existing high school vocational-agricultural teachers could provide the horticultural education. These teachers have received horticultural training and many of the teachers now are horticultural graduates or agricultural education graduates who have taken several horticulture courses, and the in-service training or workshops have certainly provided good high school programs. The assistance from industry in giving guidance, guest lectures, tours, donating plants and supplies, plus hiring the students has been beneficial, and the teachers are thankful for industry support.

At all of the four-year colleges and universities, there have been large increases in horticultural enrollment. In the short time of 5 years at Virginia Tech, the horticulture enrollment went from 50 to 350 students, which happens to be 60 to 70% girls. Staff, classrooms, greenhouse space, nursery, etc., have not grown proportionately, which means teaching is taking time, space and funds away from research and extension. The larger enrollments are removing the personal contact the staff used to have with the students. College teaching is becoming impersonal, which is detrimental to the student's education. Horticulture and allied courses provide the graduate with many of the "why" answers. But, the graduate has not received the "how" because time and facilities

prevent this from occurring. Students are encouraged to take part in the cooperative work program, summer employment, drop out of college for a quarter or a year to gain some practical experience. Students now recognize the need for practical experience if they are to secure a job in the tight job market today. For this reason, they are more willing and wanting to be on the co-op or work study program today than they were a few years ago. The industry deserves a big thanks for its advice and cooperation in providing jobs to those students on the co-op work study program and summer employment.

There are some weak areas in the college programs. A couple that come to mind are the student taking plant propagation his freshman year and then forgetting most of it when graduating 4 years later, or not being interested as he has no idea what type of job he will be taking. The same could be stated of other courses. I would suggest continuing the freshman course, but then have an advanced plant propagation course the senior year for those entering the nursery industry. This would help to prepare the student better. Also, in the senior year, an oral and written comprehensive exam should be given to see if the student really has a concept of what was taught and how it can be applied.

There are other areas of horticulture education that should not be overlooked. One is the continuing education that is provided by the national, area and state nurserymen's associations, plant societies and the cooperative extension services. This education may be at meetings, short courses, field days, field demonstrations, personal visits and through publications. The progressive plant propagators or nurserymen are those who take an interest in attending and participating at these events. This has always been a strong and important part of horticultural education, and it will continue.

Educating the consumer is another area of horticulture education. It has only been recently that the general public is becoming more aware of horticulture. The American Association of Nurserymen is to be complimented on their efforts through the Green Survival Program. But, the A.A.N. can't do it all, and there has been little or no support from the state nurserymen's associations or individual nurseries. It is time for those within horticulture to know and understand that horticulture is the production, marketing and utilization of fruit, vegetables and ornamentals. Horticulture is now segmented and it is time someone takes the leadership and gets all the segments working together as the problems for all are about the same.

There is one other unnoticed area of horticulture education that is taking considerable time of the state extension specialists and county extension agents. This is the request from individuals and firms wanting to start or enter some phase of ornamental hor-

ticulture. It may be growing flowers, bedding plants, azaleas, trees, or landscaping, grounds maintenance, garden centers, etc. These people are most willing, usually have the capital and land, but the lack of knowledge. It seems more time and effort are being given to these requests than to existing nurserymen.

Horticulture education has not fallen short of the mark. The desire and tremendous interest for horticultural education have developed faster than the educational processes can provide the education.

HORTICULTURAL EDUCATION — DOES IT FALL SHORT OF THE MARK?

GARY LONG

*University of Missouri
Columbia, Missouri*

Four months ago when I agreed to be on this panel it seemed like a rather simple task; after all I have been involved in education in some way or other for most of my life. During the past 4 years of working with commercial nurserymen I have developed some insight into the problems nurserymen face in trying to hire qualified personnel. After 4 months of research and thinking about the subject, I wonder how I could have been so naive about the problems of education in general and horticultural education in particular.

One of the first things that I concluded from this study is that the problems of horticultural education cannot be separated from the problems of education in general. College professors complain that many of the students are coming to college unprepared for college level work. Secondary school teachers have similar complaints. Many of the problems seem to go back to primary school and beyond.

Teachers at all levels reported problems of discipline and increased difficulty of motivating students to want to learn. Part of this can be blamed on our affluent life style, part on our economic system in which in the majority of homes both parents work and thus have much less time to spend with their children and certainly the influence of television has to be mentioned.

There seems to be a great deal of uncertainty among educators at all levels. Many of the educational innovations that were designed to enrich the student, improve his learning ability and foster creativity are now being questioned. We now see what seems to be the start of a trend back to more emphasis on the basic reading, writing and arithmetic that were considered old fashioned a few years ago.