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Online Only: Three Questions With ... Ken Altman and Jim Bethke

May 14, 2009

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GG: Ken, what inspired you to create a grower-focused research center with [CFAHR](#)?

Altman: I think there were several reasons. For one, in California we have a really huge industry with very few places to come together. As for research, we've had a great experience having John Erwin from the University of Minnesota consult with us. I've seen some great results that have come from experimenting he's helped us with.



Ken Altman (above) and Jim Bethke (below)

I'm on the board of American Floral Endowment and as part of our meetings we visit universities where we've funded research. We meet with some of the researchers and seeing what they have accomplished has been pretty motivating. They're very impressive and they're always looking for resources. Locally, our UC ag Extension advisor, Jim Bethke, can use some help with resources, too.



Bethke: Due to the lack of convenient research facilities in San Diego County, my colleagues and I in Cooperative Extension have been using our offices and desks for our research. Having a research facility only 10 minutes from our office here in San Marcos, is ideal. I can conduct a variety of research trials that are geared for greenhouse or nursery production. Another advantage to the facility and its location is that it is surrounded by numerous ornamental production facilities of all types, which means that if I need host plant material, I can find just about anything I need, and it's close.

Altman: All of these things, plus my enjoyment being around people who are thinking about what's next and advancing the field made me think this would be a great opportunity to bring growers and researchers together, give them a place to connect.

GG: You've mentioned this research will really benefit growers in your area. Is it more important to have this as a resource that helps local growers or is it more important just to get good research?

Altman: It's more important to get good research for the whole industry. It's a bonus to be able to bring people here together locally as a resource.

More On The CFAHR

To read Greenhouse Grower's June 2009 feature on the Center For Applied Horticultural Research, [click here](#).

To see a slideshow tour of the facility, [click here](#).

For example, part of the center here is a good-sized meeting room. We've had a lot of educational meetings so far. Some of have been called "Ask The Expert" and Jim Bethke has been there to answer questions from growers. A couple of weeks ago we had a consultant, Ann Chase, come to talk about disease and pest control. That was very well attended.

CORF, which is California Ornamental Research Federation, has used it to have meetings. And the very first day we were open – as the paint was drying – the

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Young Plant Group was here to talk about what research is being done and what people would like to see going forward.

GG: What's your expectation for what the center might achieve if everything could happen the way you hope?

Altman: This is maybe a different way for growers to give to the industry. I think part of the thought was to let people see it and maybe it would stimulate ideas with them.

I probably should have mentioned the [McCorkle Center for Applied Nursery Research](#) in Georgia – we stole part of their name. Skeeter McCorkle invited me there and I got to see what they do. That was really helpful and inspiring also. We should give him some credit too.

Bethke: I have conducted several studies there already, including testing root promoters, different types of silicon additives, pesticide and phytotoxicity trials. In addition, we have caged colonies of insect pests and infested plants that we can use for trials, and we use the headhouse for a cage building. And we use the laboratory often for microscopic work, for example identification of pests, recording the results of trials, or drying leaves and roots for shoot and root dry mass.

Altman: My hope is we will be able to do and publish a fair amount of research that would be useful to people. And that we find growers more and more trying to help each other and cooperate with the industry by giving to the researchers and academicians.

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