

We now have Mr. Peter Vermuelen who will give some of the Eastern views on "How Modern Marketing Affects Propagation". Peter —

HAS MODERN MARKETING AFFECTED PROPAGATION AND, IF SO, HOW?

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There can be no doubt that marketing, whether it be modern or ancient, does affect propagation. There is a line, sometimes broken or dotted and sometimes weaving but nevertheless a line, from the cash register to the propagator's list. Few ornamental plants really taste good. When one considers propagation in its pure sense however it would appear initially that propagation techniques in themselves would not be altered markedly by marketing or, for that matter, any other factors that are normally associated with growing as against propagation, *per se*.

In my lifetime practical propagation has advanced from a largely methodical and empirical concept to one of a more techno-scientific nature. Our nursery has always specialized in commercial propagation and the sale of liners and so we have tried to keep abreast of new methods and techniques and even to look into the future through research, our own and that of others. It seems to me that change in propagation has been brought about by the same general factors that have influenced most other products. Since I was to speak here today on the subject, I decided to explore beyond our particular operation and observations and so wrote to a number of propagator friends throughout the wide geographical base comprising the Eastern Region of our Society. Replies were received from New Jersey, of course, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Virginia, Ontario, Georgia, Ohio, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Alabama.

Allow me first, however, to comment on how marketing has altered our propagation at John Vermeulen & Son. Like many others, we have been heavily engaged in mist propagation for some years. Initially all of our work was in greenhouses. Gradually we fitted this technique to our particular environment, facilities and requirements and over the years were able to achieve personally gratifying and commercially rewarding results. But there remained problems of environmental control specifically involving light, heat and air that could not be overcome without extensive and expensive capital investment. Additional investment would be required due to increasing quantities and additional items. So we turned to mist beds outside, first experimentally and then, as we learned our lessons and our knowledge accumulated, working up to large quantity production. There the unit costs are con-

siderably less and the results consistantly good to excellent.

As the demand for certain items increased, especially for peat potted items for container growing, and because we were not alone in finding this technique rewarding, competition became more keen. We therefore started to think about and experiment with rooting cuttings directly in a rooting-growing medium in containers. Our work has been reported to this society on three occasions and many others have been busy with this technique in various methods. The literature cited in my paper "Rooting-Growing Media", published in the Combined Proceedings, I.P.P.S., Volume 15, is a handy though not complete reference to discussions of rooting cuttings in rooting-growing media. I will therefore not speak of it at this time other than to say that "PROPICON", meaning "propagation in containers", has proven outstandingly successful for us on a long list of plants. There seems little reason to doubt that seeding, rooting, budding and grafting directly in the ultimate selling container is practical and will become a more widely used technique as time goes on.

"PROPICON" then represents the major change in our propagation techniques but I can not say that it was brought about solely because of modern marketing although such was a definite factor of influence.

One other technique that we and others have used to some extent, and which I believe will bcome more widely used as we become more proficient with it, is that of starting with much larger cuttings and scions than usually used. Very large cuttings will root and they do cut the total time considerably from cutling to saleable plant.

Now let me go back to the survey. If I were to summarize briefly on this limited survey it would appear that modern marketing has affected propagation mainly as change relates to items and quantities produced but that propagation techniques, in general, have not changed appreciably. To illustrate and also to bring forth some points to ponder and perhaps discuss here, I will excerpt from the letters.

From Nebraska: "In our operation the propagation techniques have not altered to a great extent over the years. If one considers the sales end of marketing (or vice versa), then certainly propagation lists have changed drastically."

From Connecticut: "The only way modern marketing has affected our propagation is that we seem to grow fewer and fewer varieties" "It disturbs me sometimes, that we are giving up some of the good varieties, because I personally like them; however, business-wise, I am convinced we have been doing the right thing".

From Ohio: "Modern marketing is moving larger numbers of individual items. The nurseryman today has the alternative of increasing the size of his operation or taking the dangerous alternative of reducing the items on his list".

From Alabama: "Only that the demand for specific types (such as dwarf growers, rotund and columnar varieties) has caused us to be more careful in planning our cutting list."

From Virginia: "The idea of modern marketing seems to be a cheaper item with less cost." "We have had to speed up in some areas to meet the rising costs".

From New Jersey: "Modern marketing has, of course, affected our propagation, principally in the selection of varieties grown" "The development of container-growing has also put us back into the propagation and sale of varieties which we formerly had given up" "The other change in marketing which has altered our propagation is the greatly increased demand for clonal shade trees of improved varieties".

From Pennsylvania: "Modern rooting technology can easily lead to overproduction which must be carefully watched. Since we are now a wholesale nursery only, we have reduced the numbers of varieties we grow although we have increased acreage and number grown".

From Rhode Island: "With modern marketing the volume of plant material being sold has increased two-fold in my business. This calls for "positive propagation" "Today a propagator has to set high percentages in his propagation to keep up with the demand" "I am trying to get a larger plant from the start I always use as large a scion as my understock will support" "I would say: modern marketing has kept me seeking newer and faster ways of propagation while meeting present-day demands with old and reliable methods".

From New Jersey: "Yes, I believe that modern marketing has affected my production program in requiring large quantities of specific items which are being promoted for volume sales".

From Georgia: "This means we have to start with a big liner and have little or no shock in the transplanting process". "It means also the elimination of varieties that grow poorly for us".

From Wisconsin: "In summary, modern marketing practices have not affected our basic methods of sticking and treating cuttings or planting our seeds, but it has prodded us into giving a great deal more consideration into the cultural practices that take place once the cutting has rooted or the seed has germinated".

From Pennsylvania: "In our greenhouse operation, we are keyed to the production of plants that are more readily adapted to growing-on in containers and are now planting many plants in Jiffy pots, which go directly into containers rather than being transplanted in the beds before being sold or lined out in the field".

From New Jersey: "Availability of mist has allowed us to consider rooting in a rooting-growing medium".

From Ontario: "My answer is yes, but not to such an extent as to radically change our procedures. We do propagate more items directly in pots to be shifted into larger containers or planting-on which we formerly handled bare root. Our main interest is in faster and more economical production, such as *in situ* propagation, rather than in better or newer marketing procedures. I naturally envisage a more and wider use of containers but, at present, have no immediate plans due mainly to over-wintering problems and to customer acceptance".

From Indiana: "All this adds up to one thing; as for propagation, it means the need for far more plants . . . not only must we meet the demands of a more affluent society, but also the demands of the cash and carry shopper — the one who is satisfying an impulse by purchasing the smaller plant — one he can carry home and plant (and one he can afford)".

From Pennsylvania: "An exerted effort is made now toward mass production in containers, utilizing polyethylene for winter protection, sparing no expense in growing excellent plants in the shortest possible time through constant feeding, multi-pruning, all grown under highly concentrated conditions".

From Ohio: This one was difficult to excerpt. In summary he stated that modern marketing has seemed to take the craftsmanship, with its resulting pleasures and pride, out of propagation — trading skills for dollars — and has tended to create a mass production and buying attitude that does not properly respect the quality plant but rather the popular ones, and these mostly because of price.

These comments, plus what we have gathered from our own experiences as well as reflections on the future, lead me to conclude that the demands created by modern marketing when integrated with the developments in propagation techniques require that the present-day nurseryman choose between one of two possible areas of specialization:

- (1) Mass production of any or many of the popular and fast-moving items, or
- (2) Patient production of the more difficult, more costly, slower growing, rare and unusual plants, for which, I am happy to say, there is an increasing demand.

Happy is, and hats off to, the one who can do both!

TOK FURUTA: Our next speaker is Jack Matsuda. He will discuss the effect of modern marketing on propagation as it pertains particularly to bedding plant growers. Jack:

MODERN MARKETING EFFECTS ON PROPAGATION

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Propagation in the bedding plant industry has been basically the same for many years — sowing seeds, transplanting,