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LET'S PLANT SOME SEEDS

> At the Society of American Florists' convention in September, I attended "Breeding Future Floriculturists," a program about ways to get young people enthused about horticulture. Its theme: If we want our industry to thrive, we will need to "seed" our industry with new employees and customers. It touched on many of the same points that convinced me — 45 years ago — that floriculture was my calling. Interestingly enough, one of the program's presenters, Anna Ball of Ball Horticultural Company, was among the first people who invested in me.

Twenty-five years ago, when I started at the University of Georgia, the school did not have a very good greenhouse program. We had difficulty teaching modern methods using circa 1920s greenhouses. I mustered the gumption to walk into Ball's office in Chicago and make a pitch for a new greenhouse. That requires lot of money, and there wasn't a lot of money coming from the state. I told Ball, if she would give me the seed money (\$25,000), I would work with other organizations to raise the rest and make it happen. She handed me a check, and I leveraged that donation into \$150,000, which got that greenhouse built.

With that greenhouse, we trained high school teachers in greenhouse management. Consequently, each year, 25,000 high school students now learn how to raise flowers from seeds and take them home to their parents. We don't do this to generate hordes of floriculture professors or business owners; rather, we're training people to appreciate flowers. Yes, we also train about 30 undergraduate students each year who go on to work in greenhouses and in management-level positions. By planting one seed, Ball helped us develop a program that reaches thousands.

Many years ago, at the urging of the late Paul Ecke Jr., I became involved with the Vic and Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program, run through the American Floral Endowment. It has transformed the department at UGA. Internships are now the mainstream of our curriculum. Students come back confident, invigorated and focused on a career in the industry. What's more, their

adventures motivate others to pursue internships, many of them with SAF members, including Lane DeVries, AAF; June and Ken Tagawa; and Art and Abe van Wingerden. These leaders transform students into inspired, enthusiastic industry members.

UGA was recently awarded a \$5 million USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative grant to study the cost economics of LED lighting in greenhouses. The only reason we received such a hefty award is because we had great preliminary data, which came from an earlier AFE grant. That "seed" grant allowed us to get things started and prove our ideas. And where did that money come from? Ladies and gentlemen, much of the AFE money comes from SAF members. Your donations help advance floriculture research. On behalf of my colleagues, let me say that we are grateful!

It was also an SAF member who seeded my future. On a cold November day in 1977, I walked into the Buffalo Grove, Illinois, office of Jim Leider, AAF, and asked for a job. He and his entire team made me feel welcome, and they supported my future endeavors. Everything I've achieved started with Mr. Leider saying "You're hired!" That's how you plant a seed.

There are other ways, too. You could plant ideas in young minds. Spend some time in middle schools or visit youth groups and tell them what you do. Once we spark their interest, we are on the road to success, because our industry is very, very good at nurturing people.

I'm nearing retirement, but throughout my entire career, I've had the support of many SAF members, including Marvin Miller, Ph.D., AAF; Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF; and the Mellano family. I am thankful for all their help, and I challenge us all to embrace their ways. Planting seeds is essential for our industry's growth. I believe we can do it! 🌱

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