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James Faust, Ph.D., from Clemson University Receives the 2021 Alex Laurie Award

ALEXANDRIA, Va.— September 24, 2021— James Faust, Ph.D., a professor of floriculture physiology at Clemson University and a leading expert on poinsettias, is the 2021 recipient of SAF’s Alex Laurie Award, honoring an individual who has made broad-scope, long-lasting contributions to research or education in the floriculture industry. Marvin Miller, market research manager at Ball Horticultural Co, presented the award to Faust on September 23 during the Stars of the Industry dinner at SAF Orlando 2021, the organizations 136th Annual Convention, which took place at the Loews Royal Pacific Resort in Orlando, Florida.



After graduating from Murray State University, Faust worked in a commercial greenhouse, where his very first job was growing 12 acres of poinsettias. The experience sparked a passion that’s continued for more than 30 years. Faust, who continued his formal education at Michigan State University, has studied the plant in its native home—Mexico—as well as at the Paul Ecke Ranch in Encinitas, California, which was the world’s largest producer of poinsettias before it sold in 2012. At Clemson, he oversees an ongoing study on light and heat’s effects on poinsettias.

Faust’s research has been funded by the American Floral Endowment for many years and includes work on daily light integrals, developing protocols to prevent leaf necrosis on cut flowers, and

biological control. Most recently, he has spent the past five years conducting practical research on botrytis at GR Chia SAS, one of the largest flower growers in Colombia.

“His teachings have been of invaluable help especially because he came from the pot and garden industry,” says Juan Carlos Gonzalez, executive vice president at GR Chia SAS and an AFE board member. “He broke down paradigms of cultural things that were present for many years. He has a humble attitude that helps him listen and learn from the cut flower industry, while also being ready and willing to answer our questions. His only aim is to improve flower quality and productivity.”

For his botrytis project, Faust recruited three Spanish-speaking graduate students in his program to help with research and in communicating the results. “While it is easy to see his success in research, he has demonstrated a special talent to work with and mentor students,” says Terril Nell, AAF, professor and chair emeritus at the University of Florida and research coordinator for AFE.

Faust is also a founding member of the Floriculture Research Alliance, a collaboration across universities and organizations to develop science-based solutions to sustainability issues for floriculture. This past summer, Faust, along with John Dole, published a book entitled “Cut Flowers and Foliages” that they hope to become the leading international text for the cut flower industry.

For more information about the Gold Medal Award or to submit a nomination, visit safnow.org/awards or contact awards@safnow.org.

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Editor's Note: Images from the SAF Awards presentation will be posted at [Flickr.com/SocietyOfAmericanFlorists](https://www.flickr.com/photos/SocietyOfAmericanFlorists/).

About The Society of American Florists

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