

GIVING THE PLANT PROPAGATOR RESPECTED STATUS

JOHN STANLEY

JOHN STANLEY ASSOCIATES

142 Hummerston Road

Kalamunda Western Australia 6076

The motto of I.P.P.S. is to "Seek and Share" and the Society has done an excellent job in achieving this since its inaugural meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A. forty years ago. I, like other I.P.P.S. members, realise that in the next decade the major challenge we are going to face as a Society and industry is in attracting new propagators to our industry.

Our past International President, Mike Dunnett, recently spoke at a U.K. Conference on this very issue, whilst our present International President, Elton Smith, has identified this issue as one of the major challenges. I have had the opportunity of working in many countries with the nursery industry and the picture is the same in any country. We do not seem to be attracting the young propagators in the numbers we require and we are, in some areas, such as budding and grafting, losing the skills of propagation.

Firstly, we should ask ourselves why we are not attracting young people into propagation. The answer seems to be quite simple. To them, our profession is not attractive. As I.P.P.S., we need to get into the schools to "sell" our industry. To help us achieve this we need the material to do this professionally. The Horticultural Trades Association in the United Kingdom and The Nursery Association of South Africa have prepared videos to help sell our industry and perhaps this is an avenue we should explore further.

In the modern world, we are competing with other industries in a shrinking labour pool. This leads me to the second reason we are not attracting the right people. We must sell a career and status. In the marketplace this is what young people are now looking for and, therefore, we must sell what they require.

A career path needs to be explained to the prospective propagator at the start of his or her career. Unfortunately, many prospective employees look on the job as a dead end job. We need to show the potential career structure, which should include nursery management and marketing, as well as the potential in starting their own business.

We need to promote apprenticeship schemes and a set training program either through the T.A.F.E. system or via in-house training programs.

The most important issue is that we must provide the propagator with status, and by this I don't mean a high salary and a fancy

car. I believe I.P.P.S. has a major role to play in the future in actually giving young propagators the status that they seek.

PROFICIENCY TRAINING

In the United Kingdom the horticultural and agricultural industries have a proficiency tests system that is controlled by the trade. An employee has to pass these skills tests before they are recognised as being skilled and a great deal of status is put behind such skills awards.

NATIONAL PROFICIENCY TEST NURSERY STOCK PRODUCTION

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

NS 1	Glasshouse Frame Case) propagating
NS 2	Field propagating	
NS 3	Seed propagating	
NS 4	Preparing growing medium	
NS 5	Planting or potting	
NS 6	Pruning, staking, tying and aftercare	
NS 7	Field lifting	
NS 8	Packing	
NS 9	Plant identification	
NS 10	Tractor driving or fork lift truck or tractor	
NS 11	Pedestrian controlled rotary cultivator	
NS 12	Recognition and control of pests and diseases or weeds	
NS 13	Irrigation	
NS 14	Mechanical planting	
NS 15	Mechanical potting	

A proficiency test certificate will be issued to candidates who complete successfully not less than five activities comprised in this test including

One activity from

NS 9 Plant identification

Plus at least one activity from

NS 1 Glasshouse
Frame
Case) propagating

NS 2 Field propagating

NS 10 Tractor driving

The candidate may choose in which of the other activities he is to be tested

The training is often carried out by the colleges, but the examining is carried out by industrial examiners. Students are examined in the areas of both skill and speed, i.e. before passing the candidate has to be skilled at a set commercial speed. Once successful, the candidate is awarded a certificate.

If we are to encourage young propagators into our industry, I propose I.P.P.S. should look into the following considerations.

1) *Training Guides*

Our Society is full of skilled propagators and we should encourage those people to share their skills by producing training guides on specific propagation techniques. These could be edited by I.P.P.S. and sold as I.P.P.S. training publications.

2) *Proficiency Tests*

I.P.P.S. could set out the examination requirements for each skill in regards to the quality standard and proficiency standard that would be required in industry for a skilled operator.

3) *Examination*

Examination of such skills to be carried out by an I.P.P.S. member who is familiar with the skill. Such a person could be reimbursed for their time by encouraging candidates to pay for exams. (A practice that is not uncommon in other countries or other professions).

4) *I.P.P.S. Diploma*

Successful candidates should be awarded an I.P.P.S. Diploma on completion of a set of propagation skills.

I am sure some people are feeling this is a revolutionary proposal that looks like hard work. I believe it is part of the evolutionary process of I.P.P.S. and that we as a Society and industry must get more aggressive in selling our profession to young people if we are to recruit the appropriate calibre people in the required numbers.

I hope that this paper will help in the discussions of how we attract the people we should and that valuable skills are being lost. If some of these principles are accepted, it would give the Australian Region the opportunity to lead the way.