

A Nursery Management PRIMER (People, Resources, Information, Marketing, Economics, and Risk)

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Nature of Work: Although most items used in the production of plant horticulture in a nursery have written instructions to assist the management team in properly using such items, there are a few crucial inputs to a successful nursery that do not come with written instructions. Among these inputs are *people* (employees, customers, suppliers, competitors), *money*, and *management* itself. Survey results from nursery business consultants and horticulturalists indicate that more dollars are lost annually within the industry due to poor or misguided business management decisions than due to faulty or erroneous horticultural production decisions. Having a green thumb typically refers to one's ability to grow plants, not produce greenbacks (dollars)—however, if a production nursery does not sustain profitability (not just mere profits), it will surely fail financially and economically.

Therefore a nursery management primer was developed for the nursery industry. The nursery management primer is a management program designed to help individual businesses survive and succeed in the first decade of the 21st century. A *primer* (prim' er), according to the dictionary, is (1.) an elementary textbook, and (2.) a book covering the basic elements of a subject. The emphasis and/or content of the primer is not on horticultural production practices per se, but more on making more green (as in dollars). There are six sections to the primer: people, resources, information, marketing, economics, and risk.

Results and Discussion: A workshop was conducted on November 11 and 12, commencing at 1:00 Wednesday at the Center for Applied Nursery Research near Dearing, Georgia. The workshop was offered to a maximum of twenty registrants due to (a) the size of the room in the CANR and (b) the desire to keep the attendance to a manageable number without major disruptions. The attendees each received a three-ring binder (the primer) containing information on each of the six aforementioned topics. Specific topics and activities addressed within each section included:

People:

- Job descriptions and profiles
- Hiring suggestions and hints
- Training and motivation
- Rewards, benefits, incentives, bonuses and perquisites
- Calculating true cost of labor
- Employee rights and employer responsibilities
- Being a team
- Customer and public relations
- Arbitration and conflict resolution

Resources and Information:

- Data sources (publications, the Internet and WWW, networks)
- Technical information and assistance and interpretation
- Trade associations and activities
- Government agencies (agriculture, labor, commerce, etc.)
- Land-grant universities and cooperative extension service

Marketing:

- Image building, positioning, logo and mission statement development
- Advertising and promotion
- Pricing strategies
- Customer and competitor responses to observed (or perceived) price changes
- Using trade shows, catalogs, flyers, leaflets, circulars
- Plant merchandising and displays
- Forecasting sales
- Developing marketing plans
- Evaluating performance

Economics:

- Writing business plans
- Budgeting (enterprise budgets, partial budgets, capital budgets, operation budgets)
- Financial performance and the four formal financial statements
- Comparable or common-size analysis within the industry
- Minor changes can equal major money

Risk:

- Probabilities and uncertainties
- Contracts
- Insurance
- Diversification, technology, and outlook
- Communications

Activities available for the participants to be involved in included:

- case study analysis (financial statements and performance, and pricing/merchandising strategies)
- person-to-person skills (consensus decision making—the NASA experience, customer relations, employee arbitration, crisis management)
- worksheet applications of concepts (labor costing worksheet, equipment/budget costs, enterprise budget development, partial budgeting exercises, making a bid, what price?, advertising budget, forecasting sales).

The ten hours of nursery business management workshop were well received by the attendees, as evidenced in the evaluations. The PRIMER itself has been requested by many other individuals who did not attend the workshop. Similar workshops can be arranged by contacting either the county extension office, the extension horticulture specialists, or the extension agribusiness specialist with the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.