

A New Zealand experience: review of the IPPS Western Region member exchange for 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The title for this year's Western Region conference is "A Different Point of View," and I was fortunate to be able to gain an absolutely different point of view in New Zealand earlier this year.

IPPS has a great program for exchanging members from one region to another. This exchange program is a unique opportunity to travel to a different region and interact with members there. This program fully embodies the IPPS motto, "to seek and to share". I was extremely honored to be chosen by the selection committee to represent the Western Region in New Zealand. It was quite a distance to go to seek, but what was shared with me was priceless.

This was the chance of a lifetime to see how the plant industry functions in a different region. Before I left, there were many questions I had hoped to answer: How different is the climate from the Western Region? What are the unique challenges facing nurseries there? What interesting techniques or information could I bring back to members here? How many Hobbits would I see?

If you are a young professional and thinking about whether or not to apply for this program, I encourage you to do so. More information and an application are available on the IPPS-Western Region website. Many of you may wish to visit New Zealand and this is a fantastic way to do so. The country is known for its scenic beauty, good wine, and adventure tourism. I don't want to say anything silly like "you should go". But, having said that, you should go! The people are wonderful, the scenery is beautiful, and the industry is fascinating.

TOURISM IN NEW ZEALAND

The New Zealand population is about the same as Kentucky and the land area about the same as Colorado. Oregon is a close match to New Zealand in terms of size, population, and climate. New Zealand shares all of the latitudes of Oregon and includes latitudes similar to Southern Washington and Northern California. The region is very similar to the Western Region in many regards. The population there is about 4.5 million compared to 4.0 million in Oregon, and New Zealand receives about 3.1 million tourists a year. This means about 6% of the population at any time are tourists. Among these tourists, 6% cited The Lord of the Rings trilogy as being one of their main reasons for visiting, whereas 1% said it was their only reason for visiting. That 1% of visitors translated into more than NZ\$32 million in spending. With all the wonderful things to see and do, I did not get a chance to visit any Hobbit-related areas.

Tourism from China is increasing in the country, with about 222,000 visitors annually. The amount is up only 2.7%, but the length of stay is up 31%. The popularity

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of New Zealand is increasing due to media exposure through celebrities and TV. One reality TV show with segments in New Zealand was seen by 400 million viewers.

What does all this tourism exposure have to do with the plant industry? Visitors to New Zealand come to see the natural beauty of the country, and this is reflected in the conservation and restoration work done throughout the country. Upon completion of construction projects, the plantings around public infrastructure must use locally-sourced native plants. This ensures both a natural look to the vegetation and use of plants adapted to the local climate. With Asian countries receiving 30% by value of New Zealand's horticultural exports, marketing and tourism has a compound feedback effect. Promotion leads to a better perception of quality. This improved perception can lead to the ability to command higher prices, result in more visitors, and lead to increased consumption of New Zealand products in the visitor's home country.

HORTICULTURE IN NEW ZEALAND

In terms of the horticultural industry, the New Zealand market brings in over \$7 billion each year. Of that amount, 60% is for export, with the largest categories being wine, apples, potatoes, onions, and avocados. While dairy exports account for a much larger amount (almost \$17 billion), dairy production requires almost 14 times more land area. Horticulture value is about \$31,000 per hectare, whereas dairy is worth only \$10,000 per hectare. The top export destinations around the globe are Australia, the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Europe, and China. Given the geographic isolation of New Zealand, the focus is on value. Higher value/lower volume exports, such as produce, dairy products, and Hobbit films, are easier to distribute than higher volume/lower value products, such as wool.

It is clear to see that there is a growing demand for high quality products. Both exports and tourism are increasing. More people are coming to New Zealand and demand for products from New Zealand is putting pressure on the availability of food products. Growers want new genetics. Many of the people I spoke with were concerned about the amount of time it takes to get new varieties through the strict quarantine process. To support the industry in this region, we should ask ourselves what we have and how we can work to provide it to the growers that want it.

During my time in New Zealand, there were so many wonderful things about the experience, from the culture and food to the nurseries, cities, and natural areas. But the best part about trip, far and away, was the people. Their kindness, generosity, and good humor is something I will never forget. I learned that the industry has a fairly large segment focused on locally sourced native plants, their exported food products are known for their high quality, and everyone is open and willing to share.

During this trip, I learned so much about the industry and many of its unique aspects. The challenges facing growers in the New Zealand Region are very similar to ones you are all familiar with here in the Western Region: 1) increasing labor costs and a shrinking pool of workers; 2) changing laws and regulations with regards to working hours, construction of buildings, and land use restrictions; and 3) new pests to fight, weeds to pull, and continuing disease pressures. Even though the market seems to be growing again, costs are rising and profits seem harder to obtain in order to invest in employees and facilities. In spite of this turmoil, many are adapting and transforming. Garden centers are becoming lifestyle centers and educating their

customers that they are more than a place to get some plants and maybe a decorative pot. Now it's about helping customers to make the most out of their yard and garden. Wholesalers are finding ways of enhancing value, such as providing after-sales support to help growers to be successful with new plants and varieties. Some are supplying marketing materials and complete programs that highlight new and unique features of plants that customers might not be aware of. The companies that are showing their customers the true value of their products are the ones that will survive this transformation.

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