PRODUCTION FORECASTING

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In the nursery business we do many types of forecasts, labor, expense, weather, sales, market, and production. The sales, marketing, and production forecasts have proven to be in the greatest need in the last two years.

Production forecasting can cover a wide range of areas. Some of these areas are scheduling supplies, labor needs, and equipment availability, but the most important area is in forecasts of product saleability. The forecasting of product maturity is important because if plants do not sell when predicted, warehousing becomes necessary and is very expensive.

Production forecasting is interrelated with and dependent upon accurate market and sales forecasts. Sales forecasts consist of sales by product line, territories, by month, week, or other time period, and by accounts. When making a sales forecast certain intangible factors must be estimated before measurable data is completed for the sales forecasts. These include long range trends of prosperity or depression, seasonal patterns of sales, and fluctuations of sales due to weather and other out-of-the-norm factors. It is the objective of the market and sales forecasts to determine what product and quantities will be needed for a given market. This information is necessary to set up the production schedules.

Production forecasting of plant material readiness becomes more difficult with relationship to age and size of desired finished product. Some bedding plant crops can be started and grown to maturity in only a few weeks while some specialty and landscape plants may take several years to reach the desired size.

It is very difficult to see market trends and react accurately because production cycles are so lengthy. At Wight Nurseries we have set up production schedules for all our crops. If we want to have a certain size plant in a certain size container within a certain span of time, we have a scheduled date by which the plant must be planted. Fifty percent of our sales occur in the months of February, March, April and May. Therefore, we schedule our production accordingly. This method is not 100% accurate, but it is very effective. The weather has always been a variable that affects the production schedules of any nursery. Temperature, rainfall amounts, and freak storms such as tornadoes, hailstorms, and hurricanes can

alter the production forecasts and plant saleability prediction.

At Wight Nurseries we also try to keep our production time span as short as possible. We try to shift the largest plant economically feasible to the next size to shorten the time it takes to make the plant saleable. Shortening this time span allows us more time to read the market and react accordingly. Shifting a large mature plant also improves crop uniformity as it eliminates some growing variables.

In today's economic situation production forecasts have been less beneficial than they should be. This is true because one can forecast with a fair degree of accuracy when a plant will be saleable, but many plants are being shipped well past their predicted availability dates. This is due to the soft retail market and the percent over-production dilemma in the industry.

Forecasts are based on past experience, present conditions, and future market outlook; they are an integral part of the planning process and must be based on carefully interpreted information, not guesswork.

PROPAGATION OF ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

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Abstract. From the world collection of 350 ornamental grasses, 15 were rated as superior performers in climatic zone 8A. Their propagation modes were studied simultaneously with evaluation as landscape plants. All annual grasses were propagated readily by seed with the exception of purple fountain grass, which is sterile. Many of the perennial grasses are sterile, necessitating vegetative propagation. Stem cuttings of four sterile perennials rooted readily.

Clump-forming ornamental grasses have been grown for centuries in Europe where they are used in informal designs, naturalistic settings, and as specimen plants. Only pampas grass, fountain grass, and blue sheep fescue have been used to an appreciable degree in this country. Since energy consciousness and limited landscape maintenance budgets in recent years are making low-maintenance plants more popular, ornamental grasses are receiving attention and acceptance from landscape architects and nurserymen. These grasses are ideal low-maintenance plants since they have low water and fertility requirements and are pest tolerant. In addition, most of them produce plumes that are ideal for dry flowers, making them dual purpose plants.