

REEL #2

Interview with Paul Ecke, Jr.

REEL 3

00:01.17:00

Paul Ecke, Jr.

Then we'll take you into this area, which is, uh, a secure area. And in here, uh, if you were to enter here, it's all screen and this keeps out the, uh, uh, insects that could be potentially a problem to these crops. And so we have to screen them so they can't fly in and then everyone has to wear a white suit when they enter in here so they wouldn't bring any diseases or pests on their clothing. And another time we will do just that and then you can see this operation, uh, that's all on the inside. But I could maybe...

00:02.15:04

By the time we'll get you outfitted in a white suit and then we'll just go in and you can see everybody else is in a white suit, and uh, they're, uh, propagating the material and then harvesting it, putting it into boxes and then everything goes out the same way.

Mark Freeman

What's in there right now?

Paul Ecke, Jr.

Well, in here would be a whole variety of crops: it would be uh, snap dragons, pansies, ravina, straw flowers, pacopa, uh, uh, new guinea impatiens... I'd have to go down the list, but there's just a whole wide variety, we must have...I think I'll give you a catalog so you can just be up to date about what we're gonna show you the next time you come back.

REEL #2

00:03.08:20

Uh, the pests and diseases are, uh, always our biggest threat so we have to make sure, that, that the sanitation process is absolutely, uh, as good as it's possible to create. That is really a high, high priority for us. Uh, 'cause we have to have disease-free and pest-free cuttings that we send to other growers because our responsibility is to give them clean stock so they don't have to fight a problem we gave them throughout their growing period when they open the ventilators wherever, if they're in Maine or Miami or Mississippi there's gonna be other crops, I mean, other pests that will fly in and so they have to fight them so we have to be sure we don't send them these pest to begin with.

00:04.09:17

...Are evaluating, uh, poinsettias varieties and what we have here are our uh, standard varieties, as well as some of our potential introductions and we're growing them side by side uh, with our competitors varieties to make sure that we understand how, why ours are better, if they are, uh, than our competitors, and we do this here, we also do it in various greenhouses around the country uh, again in these various different climates so that when we, uh, get ready to decide on the introduction of the new variety, we have had the advantage of knowing how well it performed in these different climates around the country. And Florida is certainly, and the hot south, is a very difficulty place to grow poinsettias but there are certain varieties that perform well. When you get into the pacific northwest, the weather is pretty bad as far as sunshine is concerned so we have to have varieties that will perform well under those low light, dreary conditions, uh.

00:05.28:20

Folks from around the country come and evaluate the plants here so they can see, and at the same time offer their comments as to how well the plants produce or grew in their particular regions and that's a very, very important part of the whole introduction of the new variety process because we have to be sure that we have something that's going to perform for the grower and the consumer in their regional climatic zone, and so today they're all in a big conference sitting around talking about what they've seen, what they've learned from each other and they'll be making a decision today

REEL #2

about uh, which will be the new varieties that'll be introduced by the Paul Ecke ranch, uh, next year.

A very, very big decision because, uh as you can imagine when you make a decision to introduce a new variety it's your reputation that's, uh, is at stake as well as the cost of getting a variety ready to market, and uh, and uh, if the growers don't purchase the cuttings of the new variety, it doesn't mean much. So that's why we want to be very, very sure that uh, what we introduce is something is of value, meaning that it's uh, it grows better for the producer and it well, I was told this morning by Steve Reinhart that uh, he's arguing for seventeen new varieties for next year. Uh, I don't know that that's a firm number yet, because as I said, they're in a meeting right now arguing, debating uh, really what to do, but that's what he'd like to do and he's a product development guy.

Mark Freeman

What are the pros and cons of seventeen new varieties?

Paul Ecke

00:07.31:18

Well, uh, the pro is that your bringing to market assuming the assumptions were correct that it's an improved variety which we believe all of our s are. An improved variety, a new shade, a new color. Something new and improved, then the consumer has a bigger choice in the market place of these new varieties, some have better colors on their foliage, variations on the like, others have different brack forms, we've got one that the bracks go up at a forty five degree angle, it's called jester. It looks like a court jester.

The positive is that we've got new and interesting things for the consumer, the negative might be that it's a nightmare to have to introduce this many varieties and keep track of them in all the ways that are necessary to manage the production because different growers want their cuttings at different times of the year and with new varieties you aren't always able to have the correct amount of what somebody might want until you get your order and maybe your productions won't allow you to fill that order, so it's really a logistics issue when you're talking about seventeen, if it really happens, seventeen new varieties in one year. And these new varieties will be,

REEL #2

maybe four or five of them will be good for the Florida, Georgia market, maybe four or five of them will be good for New England or the Pacific Northwest where the weather isn't so hot and the rest of them would be middle America. So every grower wouldn't have to consider whether he wants some or all of the seventeen new varieties.

00:09.30:10

Now, here, these with the red borders are our new varieties that are given number and letters for the most part. Those are the competitors over there. The ones that have the red band are ours. And of course what we have here in the daylight, and this is beautiful daylight today, all of these varieties look pretty good.

And so what we do before we make a final decision, if we like everything about it, we will have to take it into our light test room where we have seven different types of fluorescent light bulbs and we see how they look under that environment, because they can look great here, but if you put them into a retail situation, and if they have incandescent bulbs, which they don't, they all look pretty good, but if you look at some of these varieties under certain neon bulbs, fluorescent bulbs, some of the dark ones have too much blue and they fade out so they don't look so good and so we have to have varieties that will look good in the sales environment as well as the home environment. Here in the greenhouse, they all look pretty good and you can see the variations and make a decision on that, but the final decision is made in what we call our light test room where we have to see how they look under poor fluorescent bulbs.

00:11.10:24

...that become a little lighter red, a little darker red, maybe a salmon, maybe a lot of different shades of red. But there's never been anything like this one we call plum pudding. Because this is our first purple that we've ever had and it appears that a good number of the women in America have been waiting for a purple poinsettia because the purple goes better with the decor in their homes than the red or the salmon or the white or the various shades of pink, and so we're expecting this to be a big, uh, big in the market for the year 2001, plum pudding. So here is how it looks as compared to a very popular one called cranberry punch, next to our competitor's white.

REEL #2

Now across the way....and it's this one that we call orange, and you can see it really is orange for the most part, here's one that didn't quite make orange and neither did that one, but as we work with this variety and keep it true to form, then all of the plants would be orange, but there's evidently one mother plant that is not as true as we thought she was so we'll have to keep working on this before we have this ready for the market. But that's a wonderful color and many of us like this one a great deal.

00:13.01:10

Light colored with the red flex on the older bracts, and then as the younger, newer ones come, there a little darker. Here, the one that's called monet twilight, starts out darker to begin with and gets better and more dark as the plant develops. But in Florida, this one just doesn't do it all, and the Florida growers love this monet twilight so that's a regional thing where the Florida growers will just demand this one over the original monet. So that's a part of the process of having the varieties that will work in a particular region and it all has to do with the growing climate that exists there....

00:13.55:00

That's different from the pink, so there continues to be these sorts of mutations that develop in the market...seems to what?

Mark Freeman

How many varieties do you...? (cut off)

Paul Ecke

I'd have to go look at the price list but I'd have to guess that we've got fifty commercial varieties right now and in the pipeline, we have another fifty coming along that we're trialing and think very highly of.

Mark Freeman

And in the whole world of poinsettias, how many more might there be that aren't yours?

REEL #2

Paul Ecke

Well, in the poinsettia world, there would be other breeders who would have similar plants and I would guess that in the world market there might be named varieties that are created by other breeders, could be fifty or more. Many of them are very much like ours, they were just spores and mutations and with the way the patent law works in this country, you can do that but if you get something just a little bit different, in Europe they have a system called a Breeder's rights program that says if you find a new plant that was essentially derived from someone else's protective plant, then it is a situation where you cannot claim the plant for commercial purposes, you can claim it to grow for yourself but you can't sell cuttings...

00:15.44:13

Mark Freeman

About thirty years it took to develop the winner rose?

Paul Ecke

Thirty-two years to grow, to develop the winner rose, and that was just a particularly long, long time. I would say the average time to develop a good variety would be anywhere from five to eight or nine years. That's what we expect. There have been a lot of selection done in that and when we first found it, it didn't have stiff enough stems, it didn't root well enough, it didn't branch well enough, the flowers were the wrong color, there was just a lot of things that weren't right. Then, about thirty two years later, we had the winner rose and now we have these other sports that are coming along which is really going to make a beautiful family, the winner rose family. And we have a budget for a space and for a staff and they work all year long they do their thing all year long and we hope that at the end of the year that we'll find one or two new varieties that we didn't have before, but if you work thirty two years on one plant obviously it cost a lot more for that one than it did for colored sport or mutation that came from a variety that you spent three or four years perfecting. So we have a research budget to take care of all of the breeding efforts but no, I couldn't tell you what it cost to produce a new variety...each one.

REEL #2

00:17.31:11

And it's a tremendous cost to breeding. I was just going in here to try and see something. I think we'll have to come back in the spring and see that propagation. I thought we had some poinsettia propagation, but we don't. So I think that probably we'll look at the calendar, but I think the next time to come back to see about the poinsettias propagation that's going on as well as the flower fields effort of the mother plant development and propagation and then the spring flowering trials, we'll look at the book and make an appointment for that.

00:18.23:00

(Off-kilter shot in beginning)

....Marvelous to have this weather right now without the rain...

Mark Freeman

Tell me what it means if it were raining right now.

Paul Ecke

Well, if it were rain, it would be a nightmare because of all of the moisture that would be (poor sound quality) in the atmosphere and it usually would mean that there is a lack of sunshine, and with that then you get, plants don't grow as well, but the main thing if it rains or we get a heavy fog, and the temperature usually come down at the time, then the risk for bitritus increases considerably, bitritus like your bread bowl, once it gets started, it's just hard to stop, and when the spores are in the air and if they light on a brack or a flower part where there's free moisture, then they will immediately start to grow cause they only grow under the presence of moisture so what we try to do is try to keep the air moving and keep the heat coming into the greenhouse and keep the air moving and that will take the moisture off the surface of the bracks so the brititus won't....

Mark Freeman

In a bad year, what percentage of your crop might be damaged so you couldn't market it?

REEL #2

Paul Ecke

(Poor sound quality)

I think maybe the worst year we've ever had, it would be three or four percent of the crop, but the problem is in the flower business the markets aren't that strong and big and so if you lose two or three percent of your crop, that would be your profit, or a big chunk of your profit, if you lose the plants, you can't sell them. So the costs go into producing whether you sell them or you don't and so that's where the rub is, even one plant is a problem, but bitritis is the big threat when it's foggy, cold, and damp, particularly when it's raining.

00:21.14:00

(Poor sound quality/beeping sound)

Mark is a professor out of San Diego State, lives in Arcadia, he teaches film and communications and he makes videos about special things, and so he is starting how to do a year, year and half study of the ranch in various fazes.

(chit chat back and forth with another man)

(talking to the other man, moving poinsettias around)