

REEL 7

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Interview with Paul Ecke, Jr.

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Paul Ecke, Jr.

We'd like to help you understand a little bit about the business that kind of business that we do here. I'm Paul Ecke. It was my father that started this business here in 1923. Today, my son, Paul is 45. He does run the business. He does a very nice job with it, with the new people, we are no longer just in poinsettias but we are involved with the spring annual plants you saw out in front and that's where the big growth and the goodness is. But here we're talking about poinsettias, and when my father started the business in the early 20s in Los Angeles, the business was an outdoor business, it was like the nursery and he grew plants out in the field that were harvested in the spring of the year they were shipped out to greenhouse people in the mid west and on the east coast, they took these mother plants and they produced cuttings so they would have cuttings in Minneapolis or Miami or Memphis, wherever there was a population of people who in almost all of these major cities were greenhouse producers and flowering plants but as time came and went we turned an outdoor nursery into a greenhouse situation, we intensified our production activity to when where it used to take us three years to grow a plant out in the field that we sold for \$2.50, we then went into greenhouses starting in 1963 and instead of three years, we grew a plant in three weeks and instead of selling it for \$2.50, we sold it for \$.25. And that little plant which is a whole lot like what we're looking at right here, a plant like this if it tipped in the spring of the year, as a mother plant to a grower in Chicago, he could plant this in March and by September we could've taken 40 cuttings off this plant. and it's the cuttings that come from this mother plant that the local growers use to make their own crops for Christmas time. Now, at this time, for this ranch, the main business is producing cuttings as I've shown you here. Either they are rooted or they're fresh off the plant without a root.

REEL 7

We grow a crop of flowering poinsettias for Christmas like you see here but that's a less than 10% of our business. Our main business is producing cuttings. We ship to other growers around the world. But we start out by saying that our main business is breeding new poinsettia varieties, that's what we're doing. The market is about 75% red, and the other 25% is now made up of white, pink, marble and the newest one is some would call purple, called plum pudding. Women seem to like this. The problem is our customers are growers who we send the cuttings to and they haven't got it yet. That's just the way it is. So it's gonna take a couple of years before the growers are convinced that they can market plants that are purple. That's just the way it is. But as I said, 75% of the market is red, nationally or internationally, and now we're getting into shades of pink and this is one called monet, and now the last year or so the emphasis has been on plants with very foliage, and so there are people now who are choosing poinsettias because of their foliage color rather than their brack color. The normal time for poinsettias to bloom in the northern hemisphere is in the fall of the year. And the reason for that is in the northern hemisphere, when the days get short and the nights get long, the poinsettias go from being a vegetative plant to a reproductive plant. In the southern hemisphere, it's just the reverse seasons so they bloom naturally in the late spring and summer. So we know that if a plant has 14 hours of complete darkness

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Who in this room ever heard that poinsettias are poisonous to people or pets? Let me see a show of hands. How many people actually believe that? Two, three, four, five, six, seven. Well, I want to assure the seven of you and I'll tell you something if you promise to tell 10 other people, poinsettias absolutely guaranteed are not poisonous to humans or dogs or cats. It started in 1919, a native Hawaiian woman in Hawaii went to barracks, military base, she had a sick child. She went to the dispensary and the doctor asked her what had the child eaten? And she said I don't know, maybe a poinsettia. The child was well the next day. But there was a rumor that the child died, and since 1919, here we are some few years later and there are several of you that still believe this old wives tale. And it's been proven at Ohio State University and Dusquene University and several of the federal agencies that have to worry about the problem of health that poinsettias are not poisonous.

I believe you and it's one of our biggest challenges, because we took a roper survey of Americans a few years ago and 54% of people today still

REEL 7

believe it. It's crazy because even Kaiser created a whole garden in their hospital of poisonous plants and they put poinsettias in there. There was a goofy professor from Cornell, Kingsley, who wrote a book on obnoxious and poisonous plants and while he was in the process of getting the book printed we showed him the research that was done at two universities that proved that poinsettias were not poisonous, and he said that was only on one variety. And so he wrote it and he's some sort of authority and it's too bad. But I can assure you, I can guarantee you, but please tell 10 other people.

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But we do not encourage people to eat plants. But thank you for doing your part. Any questions here before we go on to the next part? Why are you having them bloom now in June? Normally, it's just during the season that we have them but throughout the year we bloom them for trade shows, for people who want them for advertising, for Christmas display and -

This we've had for a couple of years now, and it took our breeder 32 years to tame this and make it into the plant that you see today and as we go into the next season, there will be pink and white and marbled ones as well as the red ones. That lasts very well and in fact we're gonna have a group of them out as fresh cut flowers so that's gonna be a brand new flower for the holiday season.

Well, to the best of our knowledge, the earliest records we can find, any botanical records in the world was found in 1825 in Tosco, Mexico by our first US ambassador of Mexico, a man named Joel Robert de Poinsetta. And he found them where they were growing them on the side of hills and he was using them in the catholic church for the nativity scene in 1825 and he sent some cuttings back to his plantation in South Carolina and so the story begins.

As I mentioned earlier, the poinsettias has been our family's business and still is our family's business but about 12 years ago, 15 years ago we started working in some spring plants. First with new guinea impatiens, and then we thought we could develop on that spring business we could keep our greenhouses better occupied with crops in the spring so we started to work with some spring annuals which you saw in the front, you've seen them in Carlsbad at the Flower Fields and that is where the real growth is right now is in the annuals business and so we have breeders in Denmark, Israel,

REEL 7

Germany, Japan and Australia. And they breed these new varieties to our specifications and then we bring them to North America and then we distribute them all under the brand name of Flower Fields. And that could be brackstone, all types of daisies, you'll see them in the barrel right out there in front of the greenhouses. And that's a real growth market there's a great interest in gardening these days and this was the first one that came from Australia. It doesn't have a real pretty name, it's called Spigola, but it's called purple pan, that's a variety that we have. It's doing real well. But we're getting all kinds of double petunias, trailing snap dragons, trailing - normally when it freezes - and this is a tree form of a winter rose. And that hasn't been here long enough to set a bud and make the flowers. The bracks are really modified leaves. The center of the flower, where the yellow buttons are, those are the real flowers. The colored bracks are really leaves.

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If you're gonna grow a plant indoors, for a second year then you just have to remember three days - and you can remember those three days, I know.

Chuck Ades

And the sprays that you find, being used in agriculture, that's a good point. As long as they're here, we take care of them, but we can't control them when they leave us. Some of the soaps and shampoos can you imagine the caution in shampooing your hair?

The problem of the pesticides or the chemicals are the materials shipped in from other countries, I told you we're the most strict country, there are other countries who have very few regulations but we get food and produce from them, fruits and vegetables, and we can't regulate them and so those are the two problems. In the home and the lack of education enforcement in the home and also the material that is coming in. The department of agriculture does do spot inspections of the material coming in but they can't inspect it all. They do what they can but they have a bunch to do but those are really the two problems. By reading the paper, you cannot get that information, you have the information that agriculture is a problem on sprays and that's one of the reasons that I wanted you all here today is so that I say you're the problem. Okay, I'm really glad you came and I didn't do this as a joke or anything, I did this seriously and I hope you all think

REEL 7

about it and there is another station and they're gonna talk about propagation of plants and that is really what you want to learn you didn't want to learn this but I'm gonna lock this up because it's dangerous.

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You don't realize what a great opportunity you have and what a great industry you have here and you should be publicizing it and I raised my hand and I said the only reason I'm here is to have a behind the scenes tour of the wholesale greenhouses so at that time they even changed the committee name and put flop of the heritage flower celebration or something like that anyway and the art people and the surf people and all the people that put all their efforts into it and we approached the city, they gave us \$15,000 seed money to pay for the buses, the porta potties, the signs and all that to get it all started. We only had three months and by the time we got the money to get it to happen that's the reason there were a lot of things that you didn't know about before hand and all that so we're hoping that this makes it so that next year will be bigger and better.

It's pesticides. But it's probably isn't what you came here to learn about, You want to know about growing plants and all that and we're going to talk to you later on in one of the other sections about that but I want to talk about pesticides because the reason I wanted to have a tour the inside tour is there are misconceptions about greenhouses and the other is everybody just sees the plastic on the outside, and I admit it's not very beautiful, but we do have a lot of beauty inside, take a look, it's a big revelation for some people to say oh, it's not just a wall of plants, it's just plants. But I wanted to talk about the pesticides because there are some important things you should know. And usually the public is behind what is the truth. Whatever it is, it doesn't make a difference, whether its medicine or new things or cell phones. Or whatever. Usually the public is behind. The knowledge of it is behind. And the same is true about pesticides. You are living in the most strict county in the enforcement pesticide laws. And San Diego county is in the most strict state in the union in the enforcement of pesticide laws. And California is in one of the most strict nations of the world in pesticide enforcement. So your living in the most strict county, the most strict state, and the most strict nation in the world. And the use of pesticides. And the regulations that are imposed upon us are great and I don't say anything negative about the regulations that are there. I feel that it's good that they are there and we are in a position that is very difficult not to abide by the

REEL 7

regulations. And I'll tell you about them. we're the in California, the sprays are pre-tested before they can be used by the industry. Sometimes they're even used in Europe, maybe seven years. I know some cases of some materials that have been used seven years in Europe before they got to the United States and then it was another two years before they got to California, so it was like a ten year span before they finally got here. So all the materials are tested to see whether they should be used or are safe to be used. When we do our spraying, we have to report what we spray, where we spray, the location on the map, where it's sprayed, what we sprayed on, how much we used and how much area we covered. And that's reported 100%, everything we use, 100% it goes to the department of agriculture, from there it goes to Sacramento and it's stored on microfilm until the microfilm deteriorates however long that is. So it's all recorded, whatever happens is recorded so that fifty years from now they can say they know what was sprayed there. In addition to this, the department of agriculture does spot checks, they know when we're gonna spray, but we don't know when they're going to check us and so we may be spraying and they come and check and see if we're spraying the right material, the right concentration, the right plants that are being sprayed on. So it's a double check. We're told what to do and then they check us again. and you may wonder well what about the workers? The workers are watched too. It specifies on all of the materials what gear they're supposed to be using, depending on where the problem is on the material and how serious the material is. And we have different types of gear, we have boots that spray will not go through, not penetrate through, gloves the same way, and we have spray suits with a hood on it that cover the person, pants the same way. respirators, the respirators have two canisters the sprayers are taught how to check them to be sure they're functioning that day, and spray mask, spray shields. So we have a lot to do now. When the regulations came out about putting this on and the neighbors saw workers out in gear like this and they thought wow, the stuff they're putting on must be really terrible, what am I doing living next door to this? It was the same material they were using before the only thing is the regulations were being enforced on what they were wearing so the worker was protected. And then there is a spot check by the department of agriculture of that gear, they'll come and they'll check those, maybe while the person is doing spraying, be sure there's no holes in the spray gear, be sure the mask is worn as its supposed to, the boots are not leaking, that sort of thing. so the worker is protected, they have to have a minimum of six hours of spray education each year, even if it's the same sprayer for ten years, every year he has to get educated

REEL 7

again for the minimum of six hours, all of the workers have to have education too on sprays even if they're not putting sprays on. In addition to this we have a book that tells about all the materials we used, tells what the hazards are and it tells what you should do in case of accidental application on a person. In addition to this, we have a bulletin board we have the name of the doctor, the local doctor, we have the phone number of the doctor and the hospital and so the department of agriculture and osha and these others those are things that they check, they come and they look at our bulletin board and they will fine us if we do not have the doctor's name and numbers and the hospital. So the worker is very protected and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it should be done. There's a new evolution that's happening in the sprays and the public this is they're behind what's happening and there are sprays that they use that are there is one particular spray that I am thinking of that actually is a product that is bacteria makes when it's ingested by certain types of worms it paralyzes their intestinal tract and they starve to death. And its only on certain ones, caterpillars, its not on all caterpillars and so you spray it on the leaves of the plant and when the caterpillar eats that leaf then he can no longer eat and he dies. There's another spray that we use, mites that eat other mites, and they make this mite in such a condition that they spray the mites on the plants and they crawl around and find the other mites that you want to get rid of, the spider mites, and they eat them up. There's a whole new direction that sprays are going in that the public is completely unaware of but we spray that and we still wear the gear, even though its dangerous spraying the mites, initiating too many mites you may get sick, but those regulations are still there. But there's another part that I want to show you and that's I want to talk about the pesticide and their classifications. Now also we are required in agriculture to keep all pesticides and chemicals under lock and key at all times and so this is my trunk and I have the key and this is the lock. Pesticides are in three categories, the least injurious is a caution and this is tell star, this is one of the materials we use, its a caution material, and it says to keep out of reach of children, harmful if swallowed (etc) and then it tells the personal equipment and like I said all of the material we have tells you what personal equipment you should be wearing. That's a caution, that's what we call category 3 material. Then we have the next most severe material and those are warnings. And this is avid this material we use quite often its broad spectrum, it kills lots of insects. And this says...causes substantial but temporary eye injury (etc) so that's a little more severe, that material. Then we get the last material and that is danger, danger means skull and cross bones, this things going to kill you. and it has skull and

REEL 7

cross bones on the cap, it has danger in red, and this will kill you if you ingest this, if you drink this. Now we do not use, this we've had for several years here, we are trying to just use category 1 and category 2 and we've had this around for two or three years and one of these days we'll use it just to use it up, but we're not buying anymore, we're trying to avoid category one material. I want to talk about some other ones that you may be more familiar with. The caution type of materials. Maybe this is one that you've seen before. Keep out of reach of children -

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Different thought, right? Because it's the same thing. You ever use anything like that? The same thing, caution material. Did you know that was a caution material? It says in case of accidental ingestion, seek professional assistance (etc) - Here's a skin protectant for moisturizing skin, this is warning, this is a little more injurious than the other, petroleum jelly, antihistamines, read the back, its warning. Maybe if you use these -

Maybe they've got the multivitamins. It's got a warning on it, same thing it can cause severe problems. Here's one that's going to blow your mind. Warning, not caution. Warning. -

It's a warning material, can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea but the mental thought is so different because of the publicity that the newspapers and all of that have given, television, that you do not think about this being in the same category as that warning material. Second most dangerous material we spray with. You don't think of that. You want to talk about the danger category, the things that you have in your home that kill? Have any of you ever used toilet cleaner -

I'm not making fun of these materials. The point of this talk is to show you that agriculture is doing the right thing we are under rules and regulations which are enforced. The department of agriculture and other organizations come in to check to be sure we are doing the things we are supposed to do and if we aren't there are fines connected with it and if I ignore it, I can even go to jail if my workers are injured because of my neglect. But there is a point to this story, there is a point, the biggest point is that the danger lies in the home. Because there is no education going out into the public about this chest of chemicals that's in your home. The precautions you should make. You shouldn't be afraid of using crest but

REEL 7

you should read the directions and use it correctly. And the same with these other materials. When we use the sprays, probably when you put bleach in your washer, you should have that on so you don't sprinkle it in your eyes. If we get a chemical, if any type of chemical in the eyes of an individual worker here by law we are neglectful and be fined or jailed if we do not send that person to the doctor. Even if we look at it and say we rinsed it out and there's no problem We send them to the doctor, any eye injury that goes to the doctor he has to by law record it and then its investigated. I use materials which were cautioned, you've seen what bleach is, I've used materials that were cautioned and I got reprimanded for using it. The other problem that exists is that other nations, I told you that we're the most strict nation in the world, other nations aren't as strict as we are and so there may be material, fruits or vegetables -

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Is in your home, and educating yourselves and your neighbors and friends and families about those problems. The last of the tour is going to be more upbeat. Maybe not as important, but it will be and if you go to the next location you'll be learning about some of the plants. Thank you so much for coming.