The State of the Alaska Peony Industry 2012

by
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Introduction
Tracking the growth and development of a new industry is critical to the assessment of its success. Growers, industry support groups, legislative leaders, educational and research organizations and more need to know basic statistics on crop production, markets, and growth over time in order to support and fund activities that promote this industry. Hard numbers provide a great “wow” factor. To say an industry is thriving is quite superficial unless it can be backed up with solid numbers and trends.

Beginning in 2011, University of Alaska Fairbanks Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station volunteered to be the repository of industry statistics. We summarize confidential grower information to provide baseline data that the industry can use to obtain funding, make business decisions and promote their industry.

Roots Planted
Planting for commercial production began in 2004 with small test plots in Fairbanks, Kenai and Homer. By 2012, more than 100,000 roots have been planted by the 38 survey respondents (Fig 1). Individual fields range from 18 plants to nearly 14,000 plants. The number of roots in the ground more than tripled since 2011. An industry estimate for average yield is 10 stems per plant (varies with location, cultivar, weather). Projected statewide harvest by 2015 is 1,200,000 fresh cut peony stems.

Who bought Peonies?
Twenty-eight of the 38 growers who completed the survey did not harvest stems in 2012. It takes three to five years after planting to attain harvestable yields. Ten growers reported commercial sales of fresh cut peonies (Table 1). More than half of the sales were to Alaska pack houses and direct sales to consumers. Prices ranged from $2.00 to $10.00 per stem depending on the buyer. The highest average price was from florist sales.

Results & Summary
Number of grower respondents = 38

Fresh Cut Peony Sales
Sales of fresh cut peony stems more than doubled in 2012 from 2011 records (Fig 2). Sales to other states dominated the markets, and a small quantity were shipped internationally to Canada and Taiwan. More than 25,000 fresh cut peony stems were sold in 2012.

Methods
A survey was designed by growers in the peony industry and members of the Alaska Peony Growers Association. The questions included the following:
1. Number of roots in the ground and future planting plans.
2. Total stems harvested and sold to state, national and international markets
3. Top selling cultivars
4. Price range for cut stems by flower color
5. Percent sales by buyers (florist, wholesale brokers, etc)
Surveys were sent to growers statewide in mid July, and results were tabulated after the final harvest in October.

Cultivars
The most frequently planted cultivar was ‘Sarah Bernhardt’ (Fig 3). It has been shown to be the most consistently productive and vigorous plant of all colors. ‘Duchess de Nemours’ was the most common double white cultivar although growers are looking for a better white that shows no shades of pink, blush or streaks of red. Fifty-seven different cultivars were reported by all respondents, many of them trial plants, to learn which cultivars grow best in Alaska’s diverse growing conditions.

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