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Words Matter

Jennifer Polanz



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As a writer, I try to choose my words carefully. It's vital to stay up on the latest iterations of the language, as it's always evolving. For instance, my kids just told me a common word I used has a different, rather sinister meaning to today's Gen Z crowd (they also told me not to worry, no Gen Zer would think I meant ill will, they realize I'm old—so that's great).

The reason I bring this up is not to point out that I am, indeed, old, but because there were more discussions at this year's Indoor Ag-Con about what we call ourselves as an industry and how we describe the growing process. Our words here matter. Is it indoor growing? Does that conjure an appealing image? Is controlled environment agriculture the right terminology when one large state in

the union—California—doesn't even call it that formally? They call it controlled environment horticulture (CEH) instead. How do we lift an entire industry when we use different terms to describe it?

I don't have a solution, unfortunately. But I do think as this industry as a whole works at growing its footprint and its mark on the U.S., we need to solidify how customers understand the products. It's a natural part of the evolution of a space that has seen an awful lot of change over the past five years.

Case in point: BrightFarms, this year's Operational Excellence winner for the Cultivating Excellence Awards—CEAs that we gave out with the folks at Indoor Ag-Con at the show in Las Vegas in February. This is a grower who started out with the model of hyper-local (as in, situated above or within miles of the grocery store) and eventually evolved to the model of regional large-scale hubs within hours of large sections of the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and South. You can read about their journey and where they're headed [HERE](#).

If our industry is going to serve more people and create additional demands, it'll require exploration of new crops. Freelancer Dave Kuack took a look at what else growers could offer seasonally and to whom. Click [HERE](#) for that story. As the offerings expand, it also pays to grow the best possible varieties to reduce disease pressure for a better crop. That's why we continue to run field trials on new downy mildew-resistant basil options. You can find those results [HERE](#).

Often taking a closer look at a crop can provide greater nuance to growing it. The research team at Michigan State University continues their four-part exploration of lighting and strawberries in this issue with some interesting findings about improving early flowering in everbearing strawberry varieties. Read more [HERE](#).

And, finally, back in the words matter category, I was honored to help present our long-time researcher, educator and industry supporter Dr. Gene Giacomelli with the first Trailblazer Award at Indoor Ag-Con. A True to the award's name, he continues to help the industry push boundaries and, though he's technically supposed to be retired, one could argue he hasn't slowed much at all, attending industry events and writing a quarterly column for us. You can find his latest on co-location and co-generation [HERE](#).