



Educator PROfile

Dr. Jim Faust, Interim Chair Dept. of Environmental Horticulture

By Ellen Vincent, Clemson University Environmental Landscape Specialist

Jim Faust was born in Pittsburg, PA. From an early age he was interested in agricultural development in the third world, but he was dubious about making a living in this field. He was a sophomore at Murray State University, in Kentucky when he took his first horticulture class. He was delighted to discover ample career opportunities existed within this field and he graduated in 1988 with a bachelor's degree in agriculture. After graduation he returned to Pennsylvania and worked as a landscape designer for six months. He soon found this was not a good fit for him—the sales and retail contacts were drudgery. He realized that what he really wanted to do was grow plants. So he took a job with a greenhouse grower for two years, then returned to graduate school earning his master's and Ph.D. (1994) in horticulture at Michigan State University.

His first job after graduation was with University of Tennessee at Knoxville as an Extension Floriculture Specialist. He worked there for five years until an opportunity arose to apply to Clemson University. He joined the Clemson Horticulture Department in 1999 as a faculty member with 70% teaching responsibilities and 30% teaching. His wife Kimberly, now a graduate student in Clemson's Institute of Family and Neighborhood Life, daughter Sierra, and son Quinn, have prospered

in the upstate environment. Faust agreed to serve as Interim Chair for the Department of Environmental Horticulture in October, 2009 when Ted Whitwell assumed new duties as Associate Dean.

Dr. Faust's research involves floriculture physiology to solve greenhouse related production problems. He develops "decision support tools" to help growers manage their crops. These tools help growers make intelligent decisions rather than relying on best guesses. The bud meter is one tool developed by Faust that can predict the number of days to flower, based on bud size. Another tool, the poinsettia bract meter, was developed for growers who are trying to reduce their heat costs. It matches bract color with temperature to predict the number of days to market.

For 10 years Dr. Faust has been the primary instructor for the greenhouse production course called Growing Landscape Plants and the herbaceous plant identification class titled Annuals and Perennials. As an instructor, Faust makes a point to emphasize big concepts rather than a multitude of facts. He explains, "I try to focus on big concepts that students can remember 5-10 years down the road and avoid miniscule details that only last a short time." He also exposes students to entrepreneurship through an annual plant



sale event. Each year the students in Growing Landscape Plants grow a choice selection of herbaceous plants for sale to the campus and general public. The students from the Annuals and Perennials class don bright colored tee-shirts and become sales people on Friday afternoons during the month of April. This year the student growers created exotic succulent wreaths which at the bargain prices of \$30-\$35.00 sold out in the first day. Profits from the sale fund the student activities and pay for greenhouse use.

When Faust first arrived at Clemson the greenhouses were located in the botanical garden, about one-mile away on Perimeter Road. He



remembers that simple tasks such as watering plants were difficult for students due to the distance from campus. Now, the greenhouses are only a few steps away from Poole Agriculture Center, the building that houses the Environmental Horticulture Department. "We have the best greenhouses in the country with state of the art climate controls" reports Faust. "We invested in top of the line facilities and we also invest in their maintenance. The greenhouses are almost eight years old and still look brand new." The greenhouses, according to Faust are a primary recruitment tool for both students and faculty.

Allison Justice is a graduate student in Plant and Environmental Science who feels the Clemson experience is preparing her for a successful career in the field of floriculture. "It is a pleasure and honor to be able to work under one of the leaders in research of the floriculture industry.

Dr. Jim Faust goes out of his way to mentor students and point them on their way to reach their personal goals all the while having an encouraging and positive spirit" she claims.

As Interim Chair, Faust oversees all the administration of the department. In this new capacity his involvement with the students has increased, and is largely focused on maintenance and recruitment. Maintenance duties include advising students, keeping students on track for graduation, and matching student interest with high quality internship experiences. Recruitment responsibilities include, but are not limited to communicating with prospective students and their parents and improving Web site presence. All of these new responsibilities are "fun and rewarding" he claims.

Chair responsibilities also include communicating Clemson's reaction

to the budget cuts that are sweeping the state. Faust reports that Clemson is committed to maintaining the activities in the state through Extension agents and the research and education centers. State funds for campus Extension personnel however are virtually non-existent at this time, but Clemson administration is responding with efforts to bring these people in to the classroom as teachers. Classroom activities are dependent on student tuition rather than state funds and are less affected by the budget cuts and the student experience will remain of high quality. He is learning a lot about university and department financial operations which he finds interesting.

Faust is committed to helping people succeed economically in the field of horticulture. In South Carolina his research helps growers save time and money. At Clemson his strong relationships with the floriculture industry across the country help students find quality positions. "It is rewarding seeing students being successful. They get good jobs and can support themselves. They are doing interesting things" he claims. He also has been supported in his efforts to help developing countries such as Guatemala and Kenya improve their horticultural businesses. In 2006 he received a Fulbright Scholarship to teach in Kenya. In 2007 he received US AID funds to improve practices of horticultural export businesses in Guatemala. Research dollars from off-shore American and European businesses operating in Central American also fund his consulting activities in developing nations. Success, according to Faust, is when he hears back from growers he has worked with, "It worked. We saved money and my job is easier."

Healthy Lawns Are Important to our Environment

Healthy and well-cared for lawns are important to our environment. More than 30 million acres of lawns exist in the United States. It's estimated these lawns remove 5% of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and provide a significant amount of oxygen. Lawns also trap more than 12 million tons of dust and dirt annually, trap and filter rainwater, and prevent erosion. Additionally, they provide a cooling effect in summer months, help boost energy efficiency, and provide children and families with safe areas to play and recreate that are free from dangerous insects and weed allergens.

