

## IPPS — Planning With Purpose®

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**The IPPS International Board is planning for the future. Using a model developed by Peter F. Drucker, the Board has asked important questions of the Society's leadership and its members to determine how best to meet members' needs and expectations. In addition, IPPS is moving into a position internationally of higher visibility with opportunities to become a worldwide knowledge resource for horticultural plant propagation and production.**

### INTRODUCTION

Peter F. Drucker is one of the gurus of management theory, a pioneer in corporate management and organization. In 1993, he published a book called *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*. I've borrowed from his book and his thoughts about how organizations need to plan for the future.

Organizations work hard at self-preservation — sometimes long after their original mission and purpose is still valid. Planning goes beyond self-preservation. Planning forces an organization to pause from time to time to think about its purpose, its members' needs and wants, and how to be a viable resource to its membership.

Remember that doing things right is not the same as doing the right things. Sometimes an organization — created because a group of people saw a need and had a passion for an outcome — actually achieves the goal; as a situation changes, the need changes, too. So, there comes a time in an organization's life cycle for what has been called "organized abandonment." That's a scary thought to many, but important to keep in the back of your mind about any organization to whom you give time and money.

Back in 1951, IPPS was founded with a focus on improving commercial propagation of ornamental plants. Over 58 years, we have seen great strides in propagation discoveries and techniques: auxins, cytokinins, tissue culture, use of artificial media, plastic structures, and many other practices.

So have we achieved our mission?

Look around: do we have a shortage of plant material? Has the demand for plants outstripped our ability to produce them? With a few exceptions, are we still challenged in propagating sufficient plants for the market?

I think the answers to these questions tell us we have come close to being able to say we have done what we set out to do. So, what do we do now? Take down the sign and slap ourselves on the back for a job well done? Turn IPPS into a social group that just enjoys the camaraderie of like-minded colleagues? Or, do we realign our mission with the new challenges facing the industry?

The IPPS International Board has begun to look into the future to ensure the continued viability of the organization for the membership, and has revised the IPPS

Mission Statement to reflect that. Each region should give thought to doing the same, for IPPS is really most viable at the regional level, where the members are.

The five questions Drucker challenges us to ask do apply to IPPS — let’s look at how they fit.

### QUESTION 1: WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

A mission statement must have deep meaning, according to Drucker and his colleagues. It must be something you believe in and know is right. The IPPS mission must be understood and supported by every member. Our mission statement says why we do what we do so that all members can understand how what they do contributes to the goal of IPPS. The new mission approved by the International Board in 2008 states:

The mission of IPPS, with a focus on the global community of those involved in horticultural plant production, is:

- To share knowledge, information, and skills.
- To provide guidance and support for lifelong career achievements.
- To increase recognition of the profession.
- To maximize the integration of research, education, and horticultural knowledge.

So the Society has set out to broaden our mission beyond the original goals. We aren’t just about propagation anymore; our focus now takes in the wider spectrum of plant production in a global economy where new challenges test our knowledge and abilities every day.

Even the new logo reflects a different image for IPPS — the acronym preserves our history, but the tag line speaks to our future.

It’s important that all members of IPPS see themselves contributing to this mission.

**To Share Knowledge, Information, and Skills.** All of you have knowledge, information, and skills. The historic motto of IPPS, “to seek and to share” still applies and the International Board believes members have a responsibility to share their knowledge, information, and skills with others in the membership and beyond.

This is why IPPS organizes conferences, collects articles for newsletters, hosts field days, arranges nursery visits, mounts websites, and fosters activities that allow members to interact — and learn — with and from each other.

**To Provide Guidance and Support for Lifelong Career Achievements.** Horticulture lends itself to lifelong interest. A passion for plants doesn’t come and go with economic downturns and advances in science and technology. You might see people move in and out of banking, manufacturing, technology, and other occupational fields but the inherent interest in plants and their production doesn’t go away. Even for those who eventually move their careers to other areas, their passion for plants never dies. And so, supporting those who hope to make a career in the business of plant production is a natural fit for IPPS.

**To Increase Recognition of the Profession.** Does the public really know what it takes to grow a plant? Do they care? Most don’t, really, but IPPS is committed to raising public awareness of the contributions members make to the overall quality of life as a result of their work. Many of you have experienced that “teachable

moment” when you had the opportunity to explain to an uninformed individual something about the art and science of plant production. The IPPS members are the evangelists of the horticulture profession — spreading the word about the value of plants in everyone’s lives.

**To Maximize the Integration of Research, Education, and Horticultural Knowledge.** On the scientific side, IPPS commits itself to bringing together the academic research, educational, and applied knowledge elements of horticulture. The unique mix of members allows the scientists to learn how their discoveries are used in everyday production methods. The educators — at all levels — take what they learn from the scientists and translate those findings into ways in which the industry improves its products and its services. And those “in the field” bring back to the academics and educators the real world feedback on what really works and what doesn’t — and why. The practical application of research findings and new methods must fit with what the grower wants and needs — and that information comes from those who work with those end users.

Note the new mission statement includes language about the “global community.” We’ve had the word “international” in our name for almost 60 years. But there has been no time like now in the history of IPPS when the world global defines — even challenges — IPPS members to see themselves outside their geographic boundaries. Members sell to markets around the world, and while cultural practices might be bound to the environment in which we grow plants, the market in which we sell them has no limits.

## **QUESTION 2: WHO IS OUR CUSTOMER?**

As IPPS, we have to look at this question carefully. The easy answer is that our members are our customers. But what do we mean by “customer”? Drucker defines the customer as one who values your service, who wants what you offer, and who feels it’s important to his or her own goals.

In any organization, there are primary customers and “supporting” or “secondary” customers — those who also benefit from what the organization does. Often, organizations dilute their effectiveness by trying to offer value to too many customers. In IPPS, our focus must be on our primary customer — the members.

But who are the members? Are they the same people that IPPS wanted to serve 50 years ago? Will today’s members still be IPPS customers 10 or 20 years from now?

When the International Board wrestled with this question, it finally came to consensus on the following list as the primary customers of IPPS:

- Plant producers (including propagators)
- Managers of the production process
- Horticultural educators
- Horticultural students
- Plant breeders, explorers, collectors, conservationists, etc. — who may not be in commercial businesses related to plant production

Even in this list, in my opinion, there are primary and secondary customers. Each IPPS region might approach this list differently in deciding where to focus its energies and resources. The critical point is to make a clear identification of who IPPS serves, without diluting efforts to communicate with outside audiences.

IPPS also needs to pay attention to how our customers — our members — have changed over the years. Today’s professionals operate differently from the way they did 50 years ago or even 10 years ago. Technology has had a huge impact on how we do business. New generations communicate and learn differently from the way we do. Products are bought and sold differently. All of these factors make a huge difference in how IPPS must deliver its value to our members to keep their commitment.

### **QUESTION 3: WHAT DOES OUR CUSTOMER VALUE?**

Once we have defined who our primary customers are, we need to know what they expect from their membership or their participation in an event or their use of an IPPS service. We assume a member is looking for a “return on investment” of their dues. The days of joining an organization to show support for a cause, or because membership looks good on a job application, are over. Today’s generation looks for the benefits to a career, or professional development, or personal growth.

In IPPS, we may have trouble with this question. The membership is diverse and the members may want different things depending on their geographic location, their work in the industry, their position in their organizations, and so on. We believe education is important. We believe the ability to interact with others doing what we do is important. The Board believes that promoting the profession or industry is important, and mentoring those coming up in our industry is important. The question we need to ask is what our members value most — so we can apply the resources to those programs first.

How do we find out? Again, the regions are the face of IPPS to our members. Each region should consider a survey of members to find out how satisfied they are with their investment. With care about what questions are asked, a surprising amount of information can be obtained.

Another test of customer value is to learn why people leave IPPS. Aside from the usual reasons of retirement, job changes, businesses closing, and so on, what were the expectations that weren’t met? These kinds of “exit interview” can bring good information back to regional boards on whether benefits are being properly positioned.

There’s an old adage in the association world: Members need what they don’t want and want what they don’t need. Be careful when you discuss feedback from members that you are true to your mission while also being responsive to your members. Perhaps the mission needs to be revisited — but perhaps some members also have unrealistic expectations. There will be those for whom membership isn’t appropriate, those for whom it cannot provide value. An organization shouldn’t be afraid to let them go.

The key is to always be testing the waters, always asking about value, always open to new ideas.

### **QUESTION 4: WHAT ARE OUR RESULTS?**

IPPS began in 1951 — that makes us 58 years old. What have we accomplished over those years? What have we accomplished over the past 5 years? Last year? Can we clearly and concisely document our achievements over a defined period of time and compare that to our mission statement and our goals?

The International Board, in its new planning process, has defined specific goals and annual objectives for each of the program areas.

**Goal 1: Education.** We will help our members produce plants more successfully; raise the standard of excellence in the horticultural profession; strive for “best management practices,” and increase the pool of highly skilled plant production professionals.

**Goal 2: Promotion.** We will raise the profile of plant production as a profession; serve as the premier global resource for horticultural plant production knowledge and information; and provide the primary forum for the integration of horticultural production knowledge among growers, researchers, and educators.

**Goal 3: Mentoring.** We will facilitate a high level of personal satisfaction and career development for members and increase the level of accepted plant production knowledge and skills in the global horticultural community.

**Goal 4: Supportive Services.** We will create a sustainable organization to bring together, at a global level, those involved in horticultural plant production.

We call these “program areas” in our planning process and for each of these, the International Board has agreed on more measurable objectives for each year. This allows us to evaluate our activities against what we said we want to accomplish. The Society has made progress in each of these areas but there is much more to be done, one bite at a time. We cannot do it all, because our resources of funding, staffing, and volunteer time are finite. So we must set priorities and focus those resources each year on what is most important to achieve in that year. The following year, priorities may change and the resources may then shift to address other needs.

#### **QUESTION 5: WHAT IS OUR PLAN?**

The leaders of IPPS have, over the last half century, set a solid foundation and then made many leaps, keeping the organization focused on the members. As important as IPPS is to the members in each region, today we live in a global society and a global market. IPPS is a unique organization with a tremendous opportunity to position itself as a global knowledge center. But IPPS is a very well-kept secret! It has kept its focus so well on being valuable to its members and member prospects that it may have lost sight of a bigger role it can play in the international community. There is no other international organization that has gathered the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of its membership into an organized collection of materials in the field of ornamental horticulture. Other groups might do bits and pieces, but IPPS is the premier resource for plant propagation and production information in the world.

We haven't thought about ourselves in that way before. We focused our energy inward to keep engaged with our membership. Even those in the horticulture industry were often unaware of IPPS and what it did. But times have changed, and IPPS will need to examine how it fits into the new world.

We've started that journey. For example the International Board agreed to the offer from the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) to become a partner in that group's plan to establish an international clearing house for plant information. Abstracts from papers from all of the IPPS *Proceedings* will be mounted on the PubHort website, giving people from all over the world the chance to look at our knowledge center. And they can select and download the full papers from the abstracts they review. This is a major financial investment for IPPS and a decision the International Board did not make lightly. But the opportunity for worldwide visibility and potential new members, the chance to recover the financial

investment with paid downloads from members and non-members and the security of knowing this vast pool of knowledge won't be lost and will be available to all — these were factors fully considered.

Now that IPPS has expanded its focus, what's next? Perhaps we think about taking our regional conferences to the next level — international symposia on specific areas of plant propagation and production. Perhaps we go beyond recording our papers to developing “best practice” manuals and curriculum guides for the next generation of professionals. Our challenge in the next decade is to be nimble at responding to what is happening around the world, as well as what is needed in each of our regions, and determining where and how to best use our resources.

David Brinkley, a well-known newscaster in the U.S.A. a few decades ago, speaking at a seminar for business leaders, opened his speech with this comment: “Greetings from Washington — where we do very well many things that need not be done at all.” All of you can relate to the same concept from your country's central government. We must not let IPPS fall into that category. Let's make sure IPPS is not just doing things right, but doing the right things. Let's make sure IPPS is relevant to what our members want and need, and also claiming its well-earned position of “sharing plant production knowledge globally.”