

Innovation for Commercial Nurseries®

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Most nursery operations are done a particular way because “That’s the way we always have done it” or even because “That’s the way Dad always did it.” This paper is about how to break this thought process.

At Lancaster Farms, our approach to innovation starts with the idea that if something does not add value to the product then it is waste. The innovation might be a faster, easier, or cheaper way of working but if quality or safety is compromised then it is waste.

Successful innovation begins with your attitude. You must want to change a process. You must have a sensible approach. You must be willing to commit time and resources. You must not be afraid of failing. And you must be willing to ask others for help.

Every innovation at Lancaster Farms has been a collaborative effort from the very start of the project. It can be your idea and you can have a very clear picture of what you want to accomplish but it takes teamwork for success. Skilled machinists, welders, parts suppliers, and employees who will use the innovation, are all integral parts of the equation. We talk together about the project and try to break it down into small parts.

Once the decision is made to proceed we remind ourselves that not every great idea is going to work. So do not be afraid of failure. Looking back, I think about 50% of our “great ideas” never proceeded beyond the trial stage and any tools or equipment we made in connection with them are thrown on the junk pile. Many times over the years, we go back to the pile and find useful components for the next innovation.

Be more than willing to commit the resources, time, money, and talent necessary to see the project completed. Because rarely is innovation a one-step process. Change one thing and the need for further changes becomes all too obvious. To half-complete a project is “no deal.”

When the project is completed it is essential that you recognize everyone involved with thanks and praise for their input. This way success breeds success.