

New Project

PO 005

Column stocks (cut-flowers): An Investigation into the cause(s) of poor establishment, growth and flower uniformity in commercial crops

Project Number: PO 005

Title: Column stocks (cut-flowers): An Investigation into the cause(s) of poor establishment, growth and flower uniformity in commercial crops

Start and end dates: 1st March 2011 to 31st December 2012

Project Leader: Mr Lyndon Mason, L&RM Consultancy Ltd

Industry Representative: Mr Colin Frampton, First Flora Ltd

Location: Lambs Flowers, Spalding
Whiteheads of Boston, Lincs.
Tuxhill Farm, Kings Lynn
E M Coles Farms Ltd, Spalding
STC Research Foundation, Selby

HDC Cost: £48, 640

Project Summary:

With sturdy flowers, a good range of colours, 'guaranteed' fragrance and a long cropping season, stocks are popular cut-flowers routinely carried by most of the major retailers (supermarkets), who also have a preference for the superior UK-grown product. In recent years, however, unacceptably large numbers of plant failures – up to 25% in 2010 - have been experienced. In reality, a minimum of 95% of the plugs are required to reach a marketable stage to achieve profitability. Unfortunately, current crops are failing to establish, grow and crop (flower) uniformly with resultant increased labour costs owing to increased grading and repeated cuts. Unless resolved, this problem could result in UK growers ceasing to grow an otherwise highly acceptable, and in-demand, cut-flower crop.

This proposal is for a two stage approach to the problem, with the first year being dedicated to a "fact finding" survey mainly involving four key growers who collectively represent about 70% of the UK column stock industry. This will involve weekly visits by Lyndon Mason to assess the extent of the problem in each growing unit and record key agronomic factors such as variety, seed supplier, soil type, chemical applied, temperature, method of sterilisation, time from sterilisation to planting etc. Appropriate analyses will also be undertaken for soil nutrient status presence of disease etc. A provisional protocol has been agreed by the growers involved with the project and will be finalised if the project is approved

In year two (2012) the findings from year 1 will be used to identify key issues and undertake appropriate trials at Stockbridge Technology Centre which will address any issues identified.

The ultimate aim is to elucidate the cause(s) of the recent, but persistent, plant failure and varied crop uniformity and to propose solutions to ensure continued viability of UK stock production in the future.

Aims & Objectives:

Project aim(s):

To elucidate the cause(s) of an increased incidence in plant variability and decline in marketability of cut stems of glasshouse-grown column stocks in the UK.

Project objective(s):

- To assess the extent of plant & crop failure in commercial glasshouse crops of column stocks.
- To determine the most likely causes of the above problems by means of a detailed survey of key column stocks growers during the 2011 growing season.
- To use the findings of the 2011 trial to establish a replicated trial at STC to investigate the key issue identified in the year 1 survey and provide practical solutions to the problems.
- To communicate results (and recommendations for further work, if any) to HDC members.

These objectives are largely interdependent. No specific risk that might inhibit attaining the objectives has been identified, though there is always the possibility of adverse weather or unexpected pest or disease attack that might interfere with, or prevent progress towards the objectives

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