



# HORTICULTURE INTERNSHIP

## FINAL REPORT

BROOKE GASTEYER

## **Introduction**

Obtaining a horticulture internship in Europe has been something I wanted to do ever since I started attending the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. However, I never dreamed that it would actually happen. I am so grateful that I have been given the opportunity to do this amazing experience. I greatly appreciate everything that Communicating for Agriculture Education Programs and the Communicating for Agriculture Foundation have done to make this internship possible! This has truly been a life changing experience.

## **Goals**

My goals for this internship were to learn as much possible about horticulture in Europe and to seek every opportunity I could. I wanted to tour a variety of different horticultural companies in Europe and learn about the technology that is used so that I could bring back ideas to the United States for use in my future career. I also wanted to learn about the landscape design in Europe and compare it to landscape design in the United States. Lastly, I had a goal to do as much traveling as possible so that I could see many of the places and countries that I have been waiting to see for many years.

## **Internship Summary**

My internship started on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. I was introduced to all of my coworkers and then set to work right from the first day. My coworkers and I would meet with our supervisors at the beginning of every work day to find out what we would be doing each day. If we would finish our tasks, then we would ask one of our supervisors for the next task. Most of the time our supervisors would pair us up so that we could work on a task together. Sometimes there would even be three or four people working on one main task.

During the first couple months, my fellow coworkers and I worked a lot with primulas and violas. These two plants were very important because there were so many different varieties of them and very large quantities of the various varieties being produced. However, the unusual weather patterns this spring made it challenging to sell these plants. Many people would not want to purchase plants for fear of losing them to frost damage. The beginning of the growing season kept being pushed back because of the winter that did not seem to want to end. Then, once it did start to warm up, people were ready to move on from the spring flowers to summer flowers; again making people less willing to buy the violas and primulas that are usually sold in large numbers in the spring.

As time went on my coworkers and I started planting more and more new plants. We also started taking Goji cuttings. One of the owners of the nursery has a very strong passion for Goji plants and is trying to grow and propagate them so that he can sell them. Therefore, as time went on we took more and more cuttings of the Goji so that he could hopefully increase the amount of Goji plants he had to sell. However, propagating the Goji plants was very complicated because each variety was very different. Some varieties would produce new roots on the cuttings very easily and others would not. I spent my last month and a half or so doing an experiment with the owner to hopefully learn more about the propagation of the cuttings. We had seven different experiments as well as one control. At

the end of the experiment we were still left with a lot of questions because we could not conclude very much from our results as they were so variable.

Throughout my internship my coworkers and I moved and spaced plants to make sure that we had enough room for the incoming plants. We continually planted new plants in different size containers, but most of them were in 12 centimeter pots. During my internship, I did some watering, mainly to water in the newly planted plugs. I also learned a new method of planting seeds. Towards the end of my internship I helped to plant hanging baskets that will be sold as fall containers.

### **Horticultural Experiences in Europe**

Throughout my internship, I tried to learn as much about horticulture in Europe as possible. One of the most common topics I talked about with my supervisor was about an organization called Landgard. This organization has several locations in Germany where wholesale growers can bring their plants. At these locations, people who own garden centers can come and buy the plants. The wholesale growers set their own prices and compete with each other. Some of the plants are even sold in auctions. If the growers sell their plants, Landgard will get a portion of the money. However, if the growers don't sell their plants, they are usually sent back to the growers by the end of the week. In March, I made two visits with my supervisor to tour one of Landgard's locations. I was amazed by the wide variety of plants they had there!

I visited some nurseries as well. One of them was a greenhouse owned by a colleague of my supervisor. This grower had only a few different types of plants but had large quantities of each one. The nursery I visited was a very large operation with a lot of automation and therefore very few employees. I have seen some of the same types of equipment that he uses in nurseries in the United States, including boom sprayers and movable benches. However, there was one large machine that was different than what I have seen before. This machine could not only fill containers with soil but it could also plant plugs in the containers. I think it could even plant multiple plants in the same container.

In addition to nursery visits, I also visited some botanical gardens. In the beginning of April, I visited a botanical garden in Strasbourg, France. However, due to the late spring, there was not a lot of plants blooming. I still enjoyed my time there and the variety of plants they had from different areas around the world. During my time in Berlin, I spent an afternoon walking around a huge botanical garden there. I really enjoyed looking at the variety of plants they had as well. I also enjoyed seeing how they landscaped everything.

During my time in England, I visited Kew gardens, which is a large public garden, the Hampton Court Flower Show and Floranova. During my time at Kew Gardens, I enjoyed walking through their conservatory that had 10 different climatic zones. It was fun to look at their collections because they had so many unique plants. Kew Gardens is located next to the Thames River, making it a very beautiful setting. It had many trees and a lot of open space, as well as several beautiful gardens. The Hampton Court Flower Show was held in London. It had a large trade show, several garden plots designed by different designers, and a tent to purchase a wide variety of interesting plants. Several of

the designers of the garden plots were available to talk and ask questions with. During my time at Floranova, I enjoyed learning a lot about plant breeding and touring the facility. I thought it was really interesting to learn about the various processes involved with plant breeding.

At the end of my internship, I visited a huge garden center. This garden center is one of the many garden centers located in various parts of Germany that are owned by a company called Kölle. This company grows many of the plants that it sells. In addition to growing plants, this company also purchases plants from other companies. For example, the nursery where I worked sold several thousand plants to this garden center, many of them were to fill orders that were already put in place a year in advance.

### **Travel Experiences**

In addition to visiting several horticultural businesses, I also wanted to do some traveling to see places that I had been dreaming about visiting and to learn more about other cultures. Some of my first travel experiences were bus tours that left from Heilbronn, where I was staying, and went to another city for the day. These experiences were very intimidating and a bit overwhelming at first because I was not sure if anyone would understand English. Most of the people were probably in their 50s or older and were from Germany. Even though I was nervous, I stepped out of my comfort zone and asked some people around me if they knew any English. Fortunately, I was able to find people who knew enough English to help me out and allow me to spend the day with them. I visited Konstanz located on a lake at the border between Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. I also went to Strassbourg, France.

For my third bus trip, I went to Holland but only stayed with the tour group for a short time because I had plans to meet someone in another city. After a boat tour of Amsterdam, I took a train to Castricum, where I met the person I was going to stay with for the weekend. He took me to Noordwijkerhout and some towns in the surrounding area. Since this area was so far to the west, I had the chance to see the beautiful coastline. The highlight of my trip was walking around at the Keukenhof flower show.

In June, I spent about five days touring Italy with a friend of one of my classmates. She showed me around where she lived and took me to some very beautiful places, mostly in northern Italy. While I was there, we drove around Lake Garda, stopping at some of the interesting towns along the way and also spent a night in Verona, where we watched an opera play. We also went hiking in the Dolomites. I couldn't believe how similar this northern part of Italy is to Austria. In fact, this part is so similar that they even speak German in addition to some Italian and the towns have both German and Italian names!

After Italy, I spent 6 days traveling around Europe with my parents. We met at the airport in Geneva and then drove around the lake, stopping at some beautiful places along the way. We stayed in Evian, France that night. The next day we drove to Zermatt, Switzerland where we saw the beautiful Matterhorn and ate the famous cheese fondue. We then drove to Italy and stayed there that night. The third day we drove from Italy, around a lake, then up into Switzerland, through Liechtenstein and

then Austria where we spent the night. On the fourth day we drove to Neuschwanstein Castle, one of the most famous castles in Germany. We then drove to a city located on Lake Konstanz. The fifth day we drove to Freiburg and spent a few hours touring some of the city's highlights and then went to Triberg, a beautiful town located in the Black Forest. We bought some of the famous Black Forest Cake for my host family and then drove to Heilbronn. The final day, I gave my parents a tour of the nursery where I worked and of the vineyards behind the house I was living in.

My next trip was a quick trip up to Berlin to visit a friend who was an exchange student at my high school. We spent some time catching up and visiting some of the highlights of Berlin. One of the most interesting places we visited was the site of the Berlin Wall. I had the chance to learn some of the history of the wall and actually got to see what it looked like because part of it was still standing. I just cannot believe how small the wall is compared to how big I thought it would be!

My final travel adventure was a 9 day bus tour of Europe and then a quick trip to Venice by myself. The tour started in London after I had spent a few days learning about some of the horticulture there. During the tour, I was able to see Paris and Nice in France, Monaco, Switzerland, and Pisa, Florence and Rome in Italy. Some of the highlights of my trip were skydiving in the Swiss Alps, eating chocolate soufflé in Nice and walking around the beautiful city of Florence. I also really enjoyed visiting the ruins and the famous Coliseum in Rome. After this group tour, I took a train to Venice and spent about 24 hours there. I met some friendly girls from London who let me hang out with them during my time there. My highlight of Venice was riding on a gondola through the city while it was lit up at night.

### **Cultural Experiences**

Before arriving in Germany, I had heard about a few stereotypes of some of the countries I would later visit. Even during the first month of being in Europe, I really learned that I have to take each stereotype I heard with a grain of salt because they are not always true and it is difficult to generalize an entire country into a few simple facts. Even with hearing the stereotypes, I told myself from the beginning that I would need to be open minded, and I tried very hard to do so. The more people I met, the easier it was for me to be open minded because I started noticing differences between each of the people I met.

One of the most interesting cultural aspects I learned about while overseas, was the different foods that were famous in each country. As many people know, Germany is famous for its sausages. I had the chance to eat sausages that were from different regions of Germany. My favorite one was a white sausage from the Bavarian region of Germany. During my time in France, I tried escargot and chocolate soufflé. These foods can be eaten in other countries as well, however, I believe that they are especially important in France. While in Switzerland, I tried the famous cheese fondue and I learned about the tradition that goes along with eating it. If a person drops a piece of food such as bread into the fondue pot they are supposed to kiss the person next to them.

### **Impacts Now and in the Future**

Spending five months in Europe certainly had an impact on me and will continue to in the future. I learned so much about myself and about life. I have matured even more and learned how to be more confident in myself. I have also learned to be more independent as well as more flexible. In the year or two before my internship I really started to enjoy having things planned out, but before that I seemed to be more spontaneous. Now I am able to plan ahead or be spontaneous.

I believe that this experience will help me to obtain a career after graduation and to do better in my career once I have a full-time job. This experience gave me an opportunity to work in an area of horticulture that I have not previously worked in, broadening my horticultural experiences. Also, working in another country opened my mind and gave me more perspective. In addition, I made connections with people from different horticultural companies in Europe, which may help me to make more connections in the near future when looking for jobs.

Lastly, this experience has broadened my horizons and helped me to be more open to new things. Each challenge that I faced made me stronger and taught me something new. These challenges also helped me to change my views to a more positive outlook. I am now more willing to face my fears so that I can hopefully overcome them.

### **Conclusion**

My experiences in Europe have truly changed my life and taught me a lot. Doing a five month internship overseas was a very good experience for me. I enjoyed learning about and working in an area of horticulture that I had not previously worked in. I also really enjoyed traveling around Europe experiencing the different cultures and trying new things. I would definitely recommend this experience to others!

### **Thank You**

Finally, I would like to say thank you so much for making these experiences possible for me! I could not have done them without your kindness and generosity. I greatly appreciate all of your support and everything that you have done to make my experience a better one. I hope you can continue to support other students in the future because this experience is one that will open people's minds and change their lives! Thank you!