Dennis T. Ray
ASHS President

As ASHS President, this is my first of 13 Reflections that I am asked to contribute to the ASHS E-News. I have to admit that just coming up with 13 different topics is daunting, but my first topic just fell into my lap. On June 27-28, 2019, it was my pleasure to attend the Horticulture Programs Enrollment Summit, hosted by Seed Your Future and Longwood Gardens, to discuss promising practices in recruiting students into 2- and 4-year horticulture programs. This was absolutely the most rewarding two days I have spent at a meeting in a long time, and I left energized with an amazing amount of new knowledge and ideas.

ASHS has been involved with Seed Your Future from its inception in 2013. John M. Dole, while he was ASHS President, wrote an excellent Reflections column on the history of Seed Your Future (Seed Your Future—Promoting Horticulture, August 2017). I would also refer you to the Seed Your Future website (https://www.seedyourfuture.org/) for additional information on what is being done now and more information on this Summit. ASHS supported Seed Your Future’s first educational campaign, BLOOM!, in cooperation with Scholastic—which was designed to build awareness of the field of horticulture and the rewarding careers it provides, and was intended for an audience of middle-schoolers, their parents, their teachers, and their school counselors. The interests of Seed Your Future and ASHS continue to be intertwined, in that we now want to develop information and campaigns targeting additional audiences such as high school and college students, and even mid-career changers.

At the Seed Your Future: Horticulture Programs Enrollment Summit, we got to know a little bit more about the different audiences we want to recruit into our Horticulture programs, investigated promising practices for internal and external recruiting, discussed how to collaborate with industry, shared promising practices in marketing programs, and sorted through great ideas on how to leverage marketing through partnerships. Perhaps most important, we were continually asked, “What can Seed Your Future do to help you?” We must each develop and adopt strategies that are appropriate for our particular institutions and audiences, and Seed Your Future could serve as a clearinghouse for resources, samples, and other materials for us to use.

There are way too many examples and ideas to cover in this column. Honestly, we have 12 pages of word-processed notes, as well as the slides with ideas and data from the many presenters who shared specific practices working at their institutions. Seed Your Future is working quickly to assimilate the notes and begin to prioritize strategies. Personally, I am excited that Summit participants have the opportunity to be the cohort that will help determine those next strategies adopted by Seed Your Future.

However, a take home message to me was that there are no cookie cutter solutions. We must customize our approaches for each audience we are trying to reach.
So, where do we get the information and ideas as to how to market our programs? This is where Seed Your Future has offered to help. Here are just a few ideas that came from the Summit (these are ways the participants believed Seed Your Future could help). On the Seed Your Future website they could **significantly expand their listings of horticulture scholarships and internships**, as well as **expand their “Where to Study” listings to include certification and training programs** (in addition to the already robust list of 2- and 4-year horticulture programs). The participants also suggested that Seed Your Future could **push out more social media; create more of their cool horticulture career videos; develop a social media toolkit for programs to use, including templates; provide a list with contact information for Seed Your Future supporting organizations; continue to develop student/industry networking events** (such as their pilot event at the 2019 Philadelphia Flower Show); and **develop/curate resources for starting apprenticeship programs**.

Why is this important? It is important because there is a decline in interest in plants and in pursuing careers in horticulture. It is important because there is a lack of appreciation for how plants impact the world, and their importance in the biosphere and human affairs. It is important because most people are unable to “see” plants in our own environment. It is important because only 61% of the annual jobs in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources or the environment, are filled due to lack of qualified candidates (data from the Seed Your Future website). In order to get more students into our programs, we need to educate students, parents, and advisors about the importance of plants, and the many interesting and diverse aspects (art, science, technology, and business) of careers in horticulture. What I have presented here is very general, but the information is important and I am working toward putting together a workshop at the 2020 ASHS Annual Conference in Orlando to help us understand and use the information from the Horticulture Programs Enrollment Summit to recruit students into our programs.

If you would like a copy of the notes, and/or to become involved in this initiative of Seed Your Future, please contact Executive Director Susan E. Yoder at [syoder@SeedYourFuture.org](mailto:syoder@SeedYourFuture.org). I would also like to thank Susan for her leadership in this effort, and for reviewing my facts and helping in the writing of this *Reflections* column.