



- John R. Clark, ASHS President

First off, I want to comment to our international members. In the United States, one of our national holidays is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November, known as Thanksgiving Day. This holiday is usually credited for first having been observed in the 1600s and later was made a formal U.S. holiday. Rejoicing and thanks for the successful completion of the harvest season among other items was a common focus. Of course, with the changes in society in the U.S. since then from a more agricultural to industrial and service-based, the celebration or even awareness of the “harvest” season by a large number of our citizens is not that substantial today. However, the overall giving of thanks is a noteworthy mechanism to bring awareness and appreciation to all our many blessings and gifts that surround us. In this spirit, I want to share some horticultural thoughts of thanks at Thanksgiving.

I am a big believer in trying to focus on recognizing the positive in situations and happenings. The basis being that positive feelings bring forth positive results both now and later. One substantial way to achieve this is through gratitude and appreciation of whatever issue or item is at hand. Thus the idea of celebrating Thanksgiving seems to be a pretty good application of this principle. Gratitude, or possibly the path to this that some might call grace, can provide a bright course of approach to shift from one of frustration or disappointment, which leads to more negative feelings of frustration, sadness, or anger.

That said, what are some items that as ASHS members and horticulturists we might recognize and give thanks for at Thanksgiving of 2008? A few come to mind.

Foremost to me is that this is a grand time to be a horticulturist! I know that we all have our area of specialty, and some consider themselves more a “horticulturist” as a member of ASHS than others. But, whatever area of horticulture we work in, we are associated with a true life-giving component of our world. Food, flavor, beauty, the overall enhancement of life, are some things

that come to mind when I think of Horticulture. Isn't it nice to be in the middle of something this great? And, what about the level of appreciation that our fellow citizens have for Horticulture? They are tasting, smelling, seeing, and experiencing other sensations of Horticulture—our area of focus—and their lives are better for it. I give thanks for the opportunity to be working in this as a central professional focus of my life.

We as horticulturists have a new area in name to claim, and the fame to go with it—Specialty Crops! I know that some of you have heard about all of these words you care to after the big shuffle to attack through grant proposals the Specialty Crop Research Initiative recently. Most of us were not successful in attaining one of these, but a number of our members were successful. Congratulations to them! But rather than focusing on issues of intense competition, frustration with matching fund concerns, short deadlines etc., we should back away and look at the big picture. I give substantial thanks that in a three- to four-year period that the diverse set of horticultural crops and the industries that produce these worked to come together to put forth the idea of “specialty crops” as a substantial and identifiable sector of our agricultural production in the U.S. Further, their work resulted in increased funding for research and other items highlighting specialty crops. I am still amazed at seeing the group of senators and representatives announcing at a press conference the achievement of the passing of the Farm Bill, and to hear almost all mention specialty crops in their comments. That is not something that likely has happened before. And I am willing to bet that some of these national officials knew little about horticultural crops or industries prior to the Farm Bill formulation. I believe that, like most things that bring substantial good, we are on a long and positive path in getting more attention to horticulture and the benefits of specialty crops to our society.

One area that I get funny looks for at times is the thanks and appreciation I hold for leaders—our department heads, research leaders, deans, directors, and other officials that manage and administer our organizations. I know that some might feel they are paid too much, create too much additional paper and other work for us, at times lack vision, or a host of other complaints. But, a few years back when I studied closely on the idea if I wanted to shift to that line of work, and decided not to, I realized that if all these folks were not willing to do what I choose not to, who would do the administering? They generally are required to give up all or most of their academic work (research, teaching, extension or other original career foci) to be a manager. I appreciate their willingness to do the leading so I can do what I choose to. Thanks to all y'all!

Growers and industries that use our technological developments are high on my list of appreciation. Many of you are doing what I do in the fall and winter months, that being travel to meetings to share new developments coming forth from research. My work as a breeder of small fruit results in me updating growers near and far on new cultivars either ready for commercial use or those that are in the works. One of my jobs is managing the intellectual

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property rights of the fruit cultivars released from the University of Arkansas. In that line of duty I get all sorts of inquiries about these—from how to grow in back yards to how to be licensed to propagate tens of thousands of plants. Given, the large propagator may get his or her email returned quicker than the back yard gardener, I will get all the messages answered in a rather short time. I appreciate all of their interest and inquiries and when I am overwhelmed in this area I always remind myself that if no one cared, that would be the ultimate professional and personal disappointment. The blessings of interest in what we do—a key to our continued enthusiasm!

Friends and colleagues to interact with professionally ranks right at the top of my list of items of Thanksgiving. I sometimes have to stop and think if I am having more fun with the plants I work with or the colleagues I interact with! That is an area where ASHS plays a key role for me—providing an opportunity at our Annual Conference to get together with a wide range of people with common interests. I can't say enough good about the friendship and goodwill I harvest daily in my professional activities.

Thanksgiving provides a time to focus on the many gifts and good things that surround us. It also provides a chance to see the value of being in a state of gratitude, and to recognize that value of carrying around that feeling year around. I may simply be writing to myself here, but it sure sounds good to me.

I express thanks to you for allowing me to serve as ASHS President. And for me to say another time, Let The Good Times Roll!