

IPPS Western Region exchange 2015[©]

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In conjunction with IPPS Western Region and IPPS New Zealand I was selected to travel to sunny California for 3 weeks in September 2015 to visit nurseries and learn.

My Hosts, Jim and Andi Conner, picked me up from LAX and we drove to their seaside condo in Oceanside where vast number of nurseries reside. Jim and Andi were the most superb hosts, they had planned my visit to a tee. In the first week we visited around 10 to 12 nurseries in from Rainbow to Vista. I've never come across such big nurseries and was totally in awe of the space (but maybe I don't get out from the nursery much here!) Fields upon fields of growing spaces, prop houses. Nearly every container nursery I visited did their own propagation and vice versa.

The family operated nursery, Olive Hill Greenhouses, in Fallbrook was a nursery of note, and it was like being in a tropical rain forest with ferns above and bromeliads and palms below. All the houses were on rolling benches and above, in some places, growing spaces three tiers high.

Jim and Andi's 100 acre nursery, Alta Nursery, located in San Jacinto is a tidy well operated nursery with the most amazing back drop of Mt. San Jacinto towering above the nursery. I enjoyed working in the nursery for the day and I had a very valuable lesson learning how to sow seed with chicken grit, vermiculite, and to work on their production line.

First Step Greenhouse in Temecula was also a well set out nursery for its three quarters of an acre size with the entire nursery under cover and on rolling benches. I managed to squeeze in some work to my busy schedule at First Step and Village Nurseries. It was difficult to talk to any of the staff as I didn't know any Spanish and most of the ladies were on a piece rate, so I think that some of them were getting annoyed with me slowing down their production line.

I knew the USA was big but until you travel there and visit these nurseries, you don't get a good perspective of land mass. Hines and Altman were both of the two biggest sites I visited; Altman has seven sites and more than 3 million square feet of greenhouses. Hines had a number of nurseries; I visited one which was around 600 acres. They are also linked to Color Spot Nurseries.

We drove up from San Jacinto to Modesto through the biggest growing plains I've ever seen. I fell asleep for two hours and when I woke I felt like we hadn't moved, it was incredible to see the vast amount of fruit and nut orchards on flood plains. My outstanding hosts took me to some very fancy restaurants and wineries along the way to break up the driving.

We arrived in Modesto for the 56th annual meeting of the IPPS Western Region on September 23rd and started our tours at 7 A.M. It was a long day, but very fulfilling as we visited a diverse range of nurseries, seed companies, and tissues labs. It was exhausting but intriguing at the same time as I learnt so much.

I had arrived to California with no knowledge of growing under difficult conditions like water shortages, high salt content, and competitive markets. I'm glad we don't have that here in New Zealand, but I'm thinking that maybe time will tell with how the climate is shifting.

A very big thank you to all involved with organising this trip and to Jim and Andi who put a huge amount of time and effort looking after me. I hope to go back and visit again.

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