



PRESS RELEASE

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Hionis Proves Vibrant Spot for EPC Leadership Class Tour and Seminar

For Immediate Release: October 8, 2021. Hionis Greenhouses in Whitehouse Station, NJ, provided another learning experience for the third Eastern Produce Council (EPC) Leadership Class. The group toured the operation's greenhouse facilities on October 5th and benefited from another seminar on leadership by John Eric Jacobsen, a trainer with the Rutgers Office of Continuing Professional Education.

Tim Hionis, co-owner of Hionis, summarized the operation's three-decade history, started by Hionis' father and mother (Spiro and Angie) and now run by him and his three brothers (Pete, Spiro and Gerry). "My parents started with a one-acre greenhouse in 1985," he said. "We have now grown to two locations with a total of 15 acres under cover, producing a wide variety of products year round."

Kelsey Rose, sales at John Vena in Philadelphia, PA, found the Hionis operation remarkable. "It's very impressive they've built such a large operation and stayed successful over the years, even surviving the struggles and being creative during Covid," she said. "The greenhouse plant and floral side is different from what I see in my produce job on a day to day basis."

Greater incorporation of the floral side of the produce business is an aim of the EPC. "Floral and plants have become an increasingly important aspect of the produce department," said Susan McAleavey Sarlund, EPC Executive Director. "We want more floral entities increasingly involved with our organization and the various sectors of our industry. Visiting Hionis was part of this integration plan."

In addition to the plentiful fall mums inundating the entire facility, EPC participants viewed greenhouse operations for succulents, poinsettias and tropicals. The operations also produce Easter flowering bulbs, spring bedding plants and annuals, and flowering baskets. Hionis explained the role of the operation's technology and particularly pointed out a new computerized robotic "sticking machine" used to plant un-rooted cuttings in seedling trays. "This machine has been a lifesaver for us this past year with the labor shortage," he explained. "Without this machine, my brothers and I would have been here all night doing this work."

Hionis also talked about new marketing opportunities in greenhouse product. "We are seeing increased demand for succulents," he said. "We also have started offering coffee

plants which have become a novelty item. We offer a special shipper with them for retail to easily display.”

In the afternoon, the class once again sat under the tutelage of Jacobsen as he covered how to master listening and feedback strategies. Jacobsen emphasized the importance of rapport in leadership and feedback and spent time discussing key aspects of subconscious behavior and body language. “Research indicates 93 percent of all communication is non-verbal,” he pointed out. “The best leaders must be tri-channel communicators, delivering effectively on all three levels – how you look, how you sound and what you say.”

Sarlund commented on how rapport is such an important part of the produce industry and the EPC. “So much of what the EPC does is about developing rapport,” she said. “The relationships in our business mean everything and all our activities from this leadership program to the New York Produce Show center around building rapport between industry members.”

Meeting people who work in all different parts of the produce world is a key benefit of the EPC’s Leadership Class noted Vena’s Rose. “I’m used to what I see everyday in my office at the produce market,” she said. “In our EPC class, there are people who deal with transportation, or buying, or other aspects of the business. Gaining an understanding of what they deal with daily is helpful. It puts everything into perspective.”

Phu Dinh, inside sales at FreshPro Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ, valued learning how to listen more effectively. “I thought I was a good listener but John really showed me how to be a better listener,” he said. “That aspect of the seminar was very helpful.”

The EPC Leadership Program chooses up to 20 up-and-coming produce professionals for each Leadership Class, a professional development experience for those with less than 10 years of experience in the industry. Participants selected for this year’s program include Rich Arduini of FreshPro Food Distributors; Kevin Carroll of Wonderful Citrus; Frank Ciammaruconi of Wakefern Food Corp.; Dylan Dembeck of Minkus Family Farms; Phu Dinh of FreshPro Food Distributors; Rachel Fabrizio of Four Seasons Produce; Michael Harwood of New York Apple Sales; Andrew Hernandez of LGS Specialty Sales; Brian Kenny of Wakefern Food Corp.; Justin Kerner of Ballard Spahr LLP; Mattie Leid of Hess Brothers Fruit Co.; Michael Paolino of Wakefern Food Corp.; Annie Pape of Frank Donio Inc.; Gabrielle Procacci of Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.; and Kelsey Rose of John Vena Inc.

PHOTOS:

Group Hionis – From Left to Right: John Eric Jacobsen, Rutgers; Dylan Dembeck of Minkus Family Farms; Michael Harwood of New York Apple Sales; Frank Ciammaruconi of Wakefern; Al Murray of the New Jersey Agricultural Society; Tim Hionis, Hionis Greenhouses; Susan McLeavey Sarlund of EPC; Olga Welch of Rutgers; Andrew Hernandez of LGS Specialty Sales; Kelsey Rose of John Vena Inc.; Phu Dinh of FreshPro.

Greenhouse – Tim Hionis (far right) explains greenhouse operations to the EPC group.

Coffee Shipper - Andrew Hernandez of LGS checks out the retail coffee plant shippers.

Sticking Machine – Tim Hionis explains the function of the new machine to plant un-rooted cuttings in seedling trays.

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