

Rob O'Hara is a Head Grower of the Year Nominee

Get to know the finalists for Greenhouse Grower's 2013 Operation of the Year and Head Grower of the Year Awards.

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For the second consecutive year, Rob O'Hara is a finalist for Head Grower of the Year. As someone who has truly helped to grow a business from the ground up, O'Hara's reputation is synonymous with hands-on innovation, education, crop quality and leadership. In the 16 years O'Hara has been at Rainbow Greenhouses, the company has grown from just two acres to three fully automated locations that will grow to 50 acres by next year, with a 200-person staff.

O'Hara grew up in the greenhouse at his parents' small operation on the prairie in Alberta, Canada. He studied greenhouse management at Alberta's Olds College, where he continues to dedicate time and resources to up-and-coming students. Currently, he is helping students there research the use of renewable biochar to enrich growing media. Education has always been a focus for O'Hara, who promotes horticulture at a local secondary school program, where he mentors students and teachers on modern greenhouse production and helps students grow and sell hanging baskets.

As the head grower overseeing greenhouse operations in three locations, O'Hara effectively manages the overall production and operations through constant communication, trust in his assistant growers and regular visits. Through constant information gathering and sharing,

O'Hara is committed to keeping himself and his fellow growers educated on the latest plant varieties, production techniques and technology.

"Rob demonstrates leadership by actively reviewing crops in the greenhouse with growers," says Rainbow Greenhouses owner Stan Vander Waal. "When they have a question about a crop, he will always say 'let's go look.'

He also teaches growers to think through all they have done to the crop to encourage self-problem-solving. Rob motivates by demonstrating a tireless and dedicated approach to the crops and won't leave a crop unless it's shipping – that's his great commitment!"



With significant expansion projects currently underway at two of Rainbow's facilities, O'Hara has been actively

researching and implementing sustainable new systems. New boilers will burn waste to minimize natural gas usage; production areas will reclaim, treat and reuse all water; and the operation's leap of faith using energy-efficient LumiGrow LED lights in two new acres of state-of-the-art propagation greenhouses at the Chilliwack facility will reduce electricity usage by one-third.

Under O'Hara's leadership, Rainbow Greenhouses is also moving into using more biological controls up to 100 percent in some areas of the operation. O'Hara says Rainbow is

working toward a broader use of IPM and biological controls as more become available.

“Rob O’Hara lives and breathes plants, as well as the equipment and environment needed to grow plants,” says Ken Denbok of Rainbow Greenhouses. “Whether by reading industry magazines and websites, or traveling to industry conventions and spring trials, Rob is always looking for new crops to grow and new ways to grow crops. He’s also a natural leader and even

in this area, he is always adapting and improving. He takes great pleasure in seeing his growers develop, and wants them to be self-sufficient, but also accountable. Delegating is natural for Rob where he sees ability, commitment and a green thumb.”

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