April 13, 2020

**An Open Letter from our President amidst Uncertain Times**

As the Covid-19 situation continues to rapidly evolve―and our sense of “normalcy” with it―we are all (understandably) experiencing a sense of worry about what the future holds. During these unprecedented times, the only certainty is that we will continue to face uncertainty and new challenges over the coming weeks and months.

Both on a personal, and a professional level, I am not immune to the feelings of concern. However, despite being confronted with a constant barrage of “bad news” from the media, I remind myself that it’s often the hardest times that lead to the greatest opportunities. This I know from personal experience.

A few years ago, after many years in the printing industry, I found myself questioning the future of the traditional printing industry given the massive transition to a Print-on-Demand model that was underway―at the same time we were in the economic recession of 2008. After reflecting on my situation, I made a commitment to myself, that I would never again put myself in a position where my livelihood was dependent on the longevity and stability of a particular industry.

A short while later, I received a call from a recruiter about an opportunity to head up a well-established, independently owned company that manufactured horticultural lighting products (P.L. Light Systems). My immediate reaction was that the agricultural industry was another unstable industry, as my uninformed perspective at the time was that much of our food supply chain was imported from abroad and therefore subject to local decline in production. The more I thought about and investigated it, however, the more I realized that the agri-food sector was probably about as recession-proof as any industry could be. Think about it. The most fundamental of human needs are access to food, clean water and shelter. Irrespective of the socioeconomic climate, people will always need to eat. Jeff Bezos, when asked about what changes he felt the world would see over the next ten years, responded by saying he was far more interested in what was **not** going to change in those ten years because “*you can build a business strategy around things that are stable in time*”. Since the need for a secure, sustainable supply of healthy food will always be there, the need to grow food will also remain one of life’s greatest constants.

After meeting with the owners of the company and learning more about the industry as a whole―as well as the company values―I knew without a doubt that this was the opportunity I had been waiting for. It was a chance to be part of an industry committed to the long-term, sustainable production of fresh, locally grown food. In addition, in recent years, the mind-shift of people to want to eat/shop/buy their food products within a 25 km radius of where they live, and to know that the produce has been grown sustainably, responsibly, and is grown without pesticides and chemicals that are harmful to ingest, has further increased the demand for businesses to support our locally grown food supply chain. That commitment seems particularly important today. We at P.L. Light Systems are proud to be supporting the growers that people are relying on to deliver fresh, nutritious produce in almost every community across Canada and the USA.

Although our hearts go out to the ornamental growers, many of whom have suffered great losses as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, we also believe that new opportunities will open up for growers of food crops, as food supply chains are scrutinized in the aftermath of the pandemic. During the pandemic, not only has demand outstripped supply in several areas of the supply chain but, in many cases, there was no contingency “plan B” to fall back on. As such, retailers and distributors will be looking to ensure future security of the entire food supply chain―along with reduced lead-times and seamless access to localized production wherever possible.

Hence, the sustainable agriculture and agtech sectors should see increased investment and support as both governments and consumers demand more secure access to healthy, sustainably produced food.

The pandemic has also exposed how vulnerable growers are to disruptions in their production when relying on foreign vendors and foreign workers for their infrastructure needs. Many new greenhouse builds or expansions came to a grinding halt, as air travel was suspended and European consultants and builders were unable travel to North American job sites. Similarly, many equipment suppliers, who manufacture their products offshore, have experienced massive disruptions to their supply chain and have been unable to deliver products to their customers. So, in the current climate, growers who opted to work with a North American supplier (like P.L. Light Systems) for critical equipment, are at a big advantage. Not only are they assured of a reliable supply of quality products, but they also have access to local service and support teams.

At P.L. Light Systems, our team of in-house experts (including light planners, manufacturing team, customer service and technical support)―as  well as our locally based regional sales managers―are, as always, fully available to support our customers and quickly resolve any issues across North & South America.  Our own success is, after all, rooted in the success of our customers.  We know their challenges, and are here to support them before, during, and long after they have invested in our products.  When you choose a P.L. Light Systems’ product, you are investing in the peace of mind that you are dealing with an established, local company offering local service and support―especially during the times you need it the most, as we have done since 1981.

I have always been proud to lead our extraordinary team, but in these uncertain times, I am beyond proud of how everyone in the organization has stepped up to the challenge. Motivated by what they see as a responsibility to local growers, and the opportunity to make a difference during these challenging times, our employees are still working hard to ensure customers are receiving all the support they need to keep growing―both today and in the future.

**Todd Phillips**

President, P.L. Light Systems