Green industry digs into consumer trends for growth

By Matt Ernst, independent writer

Nursery and greenhouse firms in the U.S., challenged over the past decade by slow new housing construction and slow recovery from the broader economic woes of 2008-09, continue searching for consumer trends and new products that can help boost profits. This article will report a few of the plant and product trends observed by the green industry in Kentucky and nationwide.

Some firms turned to diversification during the downturn. This resulted in some greenhouses expanding or experimenting with greenhouse vegetable production, as noted in an article in the July CCD newsletter.

Product diversification has also continued. Green industry firms are known for rolling out new and improved plants for consumers, especially selections that maintain color over a longer period of time and are low- or easy-maintenance for the homeowner. In Kentucky and similar geographies, plants that are not so tasty to deer are also desired. For example, a recent blog update from the Kentucky Nursery and Landscape Association noted the popularity of Spilled Wine® Weigela (Weigela florida ‘Bokraspiwi’), a 2- to 3-foot-tall hardy shrub with dark purple, curling leaves and pink trumpet flowers.

The home consumer also continues to be interested in novel types of industry standbys, such as daylily and hosta, which have benefited from hybridizers. Kentucky and Tennessee are

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home to several farms and firms, of varying sizes, offering daylily on-farm and internet/mail-order sales.

Consumers continue to be attracted by products with a great story, and plants are no exception. Daylily producers throughout the region have turned to on-farm festivals and other events proven to increase product sales.

Eco-containers, and other product attributes appealing to issues-minded consumers, receive plenty of press; but, the jury is still out on producer profitability impact from next-generation containers. At a corn technology conference earlier this year in St. Louis, a Nebraska firm developing biodegradable plant containers from corn ethanol by-products acknowledged its technology is in demand from the green industry – but that the technology is still not cost-competitive with other options.

Deciduous shrubs and evergreens continue trending toward some native plant offerings. The region continues to beat the national average for percent of plant sales from native plants of all types, according to a national survey in 2013 by the Green Industry Research Consortium. UK Horticulture professors Dewayne Ingram and Win Dunwell summarized that trend in a December 2015 summary of the survey data. “Some of this is possibly due to acknowledgement of the number of traditionally grown plants that are actually native as well as an increased demand for native plants to meet the demand for restoration and conservation projects and possibly, garden center customer demand.”

Total native plant use for restoration and conservation projects is difficult to estimate, but the trend is persistent by both public (municipal) and private landowners. North Dakota equipment manufacturer Bobcat Corporation even features an annual contest evaluating restoration projects.

Like food industry firms, green industry firms are trying to determine how to bring old and new products to the younger millennial consumer. Some strategies veer from classic horticultural techniques; for example, the nation’s largest houseplant producer, Florida’s Costa Farms, features a line of brightly colored (dyed) cacti, presumably to appeal to a younger consumer demographic. These products will not appeal to every green industry firm, or consumer, but demonstrate that there continues to be room for innovation and growth in the green industry, which continues to have very significant economic impact in Kentucky and surrounding states.

References


First Southern Cover Crops Conference draws hundreds

In late July, farmers and agriculture outreach workers from across the southern region gathered to learn and share information about cover cropping in this part of the country. Participants came from across the South, including everywhere from Texas to Virginia and Kentucky down to Florida. The two-day SSARE-sponsored conference featured classroom trainings as well as a field day full of demonstration plots at the N.C. State Center for Environmental Farming Systems. A wide range of farm scales and crop sizes were featured, and some exciting technology from across the region was on display. You can check out video of some equipment in action on the CCD Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/centerforcropdiversification.

For those interested in getting started in cover cropping (or taking your cover crops to the next level), Southern SARE has lots of free resources available online at http://www.southernsare.org/.

New IPM guide available for high tunnel and greenhouse vegetables

The University of Kentucky Vegetable Integrated Pest Management Team has developed a new publication, An IPM Scouting Guide for Common Problems of High Tunnel and Greenhouse Vegetable Crops in Kentucky (ID-235). The publication covers physiological disorders, diseases, insect and other arthropod pests, herbicide injury and weeds, and general IPM Best Management Practices. IPM uses biological, cultural, physical and chemical methods to reduce and/or manage pest populations.

The guide includes photos of the more common problems that occur on vegetable crops grown in high tunnels and greenhouses in Kentucky. ID-235 can be accessed online at http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID235/ID235.pdf.
Crop Quiz: Maple Syrup

How well do you know your maple syrup? Find out by taking our quiz below.

About how many gallons of maple sap (sweetness of 2-2.5 brix) is required to make 1 gallon of maple syrup (66-68.9 brix)?
A) 10 gallons
B) 40 gallons
C) 85 gallons
D) 110 gallons

How many gallons of maple syrup were produced in the U.S. in 2015?
A) 1.6 million
B) 3.4 million
C) 10.7 million
D) 18.4 million

True or false: More taps per tree yields more sap?

Which of the following is not a standard classification of maple syrup color?
A) Golden
B) Amber
C) Dark
D) Medium
E) Very Dark

New fact sheet offers summary of IPM and organic production

From eOrganic

Organic agriculture and integrated pest management (IPM) systems and proponents share many of the same goals to address environmental and human health concerns. However, key commonalities and differences between these systems are not always clearly understood. The Organic and IPM Working Group developed a fact sheet summarizing these two systems, including ways to tell if products were produced using organic and/or IPM practices. You can find and download the fact sheet on the working group’s website (organicpmwg.wordpress.com) or by clicking here.

The Organic and IPM Working Group includes more than 60 industry professionals, practitioners, researchers, Extension agents, educators and policy makers working together to synergize these two communities. Their work is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, North Central IPM Center. This summary was submitted to eOrganic by Jaime Pinero, Assistant Professor and IPM Specialist at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Check out these eOrganic webinars

The fourth in a series of six webinars on organic seed production – Seed Quality, Harvesting Techniques and Equipment – is coming up on September 20th. If you missed the earlier webinars in the series, brought to you by eOrganic, don’t worry - you can view the archived webinars at http://articles.extension.org/pages/73816/organic-seed-production-webinar-series.

Thanks for reading!

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