

Responsible Consumerism in Horticulture

The world is an ever changing place. If you don't believe it take a simple look at how far humans have come in the last hundred years alone. Look at transportation for example. We've gone from riding horses to driving cars. Even flying was thought to be impossible a little more than a hundred years ago, but now we're sending humans into outer space. Every day new discoveries are being made and the list of impossibilities is becoming shorter and shorter. Despite all these changes and advancements some things never change. For example we as human beings still have the basic needs such as food, shelter, water, and the desire to be loved. No matter how you slice it, ultimately we are in this consistent dynamic of change. And this is something that affects everyone and everything.

The world of horticulture is not excluded from this contradictory truth. From the time humans grasped the idea of cultivating the land until now there have been many changes in the way of horticulture. Plants have gone from being propagated by seed to being propagated by tissue culture. Irrigation methods have changed drastically. From using flood waters from rivers to using actual pumps and electricity, irrigation has come a long way. Thanks to modern irrigation methods and other technological advancements, such as GMO's, we are now able to grow plants in what used to be considered wastelands. A prime example of this is in southern California. Due to modern irrigation techniques that harvest the power of the Colorado River southern California can crank out an incredible amount of produce. For example in the winter, southern California can produce enough lettuce to feed the entire nation. Not only can it feed the nation, but it does feed the entire nation. If you buy a head of lettuce in the winter you can be guaranteed that it came from California. But as previously stated this feat would not have been

possible a hundred years ago. If this wasn't possible one hundred years ago, this begs the question, what changed? What made this possible? Was it new technology? Was it genetically improved crops? While growing lettuce in southern California wouldn't be possible without both of those things, there is something else. What created the drive for new technology or genetically improved crops? The one, and almost exclusive, answer to this question is the consumer.

Without consumers there would be no need for new technology or any sort of advancements.

Consumers, though often fickle and so dynamic they are hard to keep track of, decide the market and ultimately to an extent producers are at the mercy of the consumers. Without the consumer the producers are out of a job. Producers would also be out of the job if they produced things that consumers were not interested in buying, and this is why it's important to understand consumer trends. Consumer trends give the producer a signpost for where the market is headed and an idea of what goods or services they need to provide in the future in order to make a profit and have a sustainable business. Consumer trends also drive innovation and competitiveness in and among companies. If say for example, consumers trends indicate that consumers are beginning to buy blue cars instead of red cars, producers would try to produce more blue cars and figure out how to do so in a way that competed with other companies that sold blue cars. So one company might try to sell blue cars with white stripes in order to be different from other companies. If this is well received by the consumers other companies would have to come up with another sales tactic to get customers. Even though that was a simplified example, it still illustrates how consumers drive innovation in companies.

Even though consumers drive companies, they can be hard to predict. Although they are dynamic there is a clear direction that they always seem to go. They typically want a product that will somehow make their life easier and ultimately help them save time. Whether that product is a washing machine, a microwave, or even a refrigerator, consumers want products that make their lives easier. Even though consumers want what makes their lives more convenient, recently there are a group of consumers who not only want to buy products that benefit themselves, but the environment as well. This group of consumers who are trying to live sustainably or live a “green” lifestyle are labeled by economists as Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability consumers or LOHAS consumers for short.

LOHAS consumers are a relatively new consumer group. This is because the idea of shopping for sustainable products has only been around for the last thirty or so years. Even though sustainable products and consumers have been around for the past couple of decades, sustainable consumers didn't make much of a dent in the market until more recently. For example, according to the 2008 Market Report for LOHAS Consumers, 2007 was the magic year for the green market. This was in part because the topic of climate change got more attention and publicity. Although the report never says why the topic of climate change became pivotal that year specifically, some might speculate that it was because of the upcoming election for the new president the following year. Not only were consumers more aware, but companies started going green not only because it was saving the companies money, but because they could also turn it into a selling point, and thus make the companies money. Also around the same time green products were becoming more widely available at nationally known retailers. At about the same time the price of green products also went down. With the increase in availability and decrease in

price, green products were suddenly a more realistic possibility for consumers despite socioeconomic class.

LOHAS consumerism works because people are aware of the reality that we are running out of natural resources and what a threat that actually is to society. For example, they are aware that we are running out of freshwater, and that global warming is an actual real threat that can change the world as we know it not only for posterity but during our lifetime as well. These consumers want to help minimize the impact they have on the environment and choose to do so by consuming products that have a minimal impact on the environment. Some people think that the LOHAS consumer market is a fad, but for this reason it's not. The truth is that the state of the environment isn't going to improve any time soon, and it certainly won't improve at all if we don't don't change, so it's safe to say that LOHAS consumers are here to stay and will only increase in size as a consumer group.

LOHAS consumers make up about 16% of horticulture industry consumers and that number is growing every year; but even though LOHAS consumers are here to stay and are increasing in size each year, there are still other challenges ahead for producers in the horticulture industry. Despite their desire for a change in the global environment and in company attitudes towards the environment, consumers don't trust companies to go green. This is because some companies are doing what is called greenwashing. Greenwashing is a term used to describe companies that claim to be green, but actually are not. These companies just use the right advertising language or packaging to convince consumers that they are a green company that's doing more for the environment. Because of a few companies who are trying to make a quick profit, all companies are affected. Unfortunately there really isn't a way for companies to combat

this stereotype. Trust is not something that can be created overnight. Just as one day doesn't compose an entire year, one right move doesn't make a company trustworthy. A year is built of three hundred sixty-five days and trust is built by numerous honest actions. Ultimately companies just need integrity and time to earn the trust of consumers. Another issue that producers are facing is the fact that consumers who are not yet considered LOHAS consumers that want to save the environment by make the switch to green products, but they also don't want to have to change the way their living. This contradiction can be frustrating to say the least, but it also makes sense. We all want to see the world become a better place, but many of us are not willing to do what is necessary. There really isn't a way companies can convince consumers to make the switch to green products, unless it's through rigorous advertising efforts that convince consumers that green products are not only equal to their non-green counterparts, but superior. And the advertising will need to be backed with more than green product lingo or packaging. The green products actually will have to be superior to their non-green counterparts.

It is also important to note that this issue of wanting change without changing isn't exclusive to consumers either. We all want to be healthy and have a fit body, but few are willing to put in the necessary effort to achieve this goal. We want to be promoted in our job, but aren't willing to go the extra mile that it takes for a promotion. We want to get all A's in school, but aren't willing to put the extra time into school work. Ultimately if we want to see results and see a change we have to put in the time and effort. Change can only happen when we realize that we have the power to make a difference. No one individual can make a difference, but collectively we can. After all a forest isn't made up of one tree, and one tree does not make a forest. It's when we all come together and have the same vision and beat to the rhythm of the same drum, we can

make our dream into a reality and make our noises into one loud sound that can be heard far and wide. A dream and a sound that will change the course of our future and echo into prosperity.

Even though we face an uncertain future, the one thing we can hang our hats on at the end of the day is the fact that , for better or worse, the only thing that stays the same is everything changes; and because of that truth we can have hope for a brighter future.