

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Benchmarking the Industry

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Want to help grow the industry? Take three minutes to complete a simple survey that's being conducted by the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) Economic Committee. We want your help in identifying how we move forward to help you make more ... more customers, more sales, more impact.

We seek to gain an understanding of the kinds of internal and external information, and data that you use to run your business. Which internal numbers are the ones you track to benchmark performance? What external information do you find helpful in developing sales and marketing plans, or in speaking before your City Council or County Commissioners about expanding your business?

Our committee's charge is that "Consumer Horticulture is Recognized as a Driver of the Agricultural Economy." To get there, we seek to document, measure and disseminate the economic impact and benefits of consumer and community horticulture. The economic health and profitability of the myriad of sectors involved in consumer horticulture is vitally important to the industry's long-term sustainability.

Your help in prioritizing our work will result in deliverables that we hope you can leverage to boost business.

If you've seen the NICH infographic #PlantsDoThat (<https://consumerhort.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PlantsDoThat.pdf>), you've seen the start of our work to help consumer horticulture shift the conversation to the benefits we provide to the economy, environment, human health and society.

By visualizing the concept of "Our Town," infographic developer committee member Jennifer Gray, AmericanHort and HRI, demonstrates how plants impact and improve our lives, from energy savings and higher resale value of our homes to improved life of shaded roadways and the direct economic impact of America's public and private gardens and parks. The NICH Economic Committee developed #PlantsDoThat from an industry economic evidence base developed by committee member Dr. Charlie Hall, Ellison Professor at Texas A&M University.

Did you know that homeowners manage more property in aggregate than all of the national parks combined? If all the turf grass grown in the U.S. were to be added together, it would cover an area about the size of Texas.

Consumer horticulture contributes \$196 billion to the U.S. economy. Our economic contributions are spread throughout just about every town and county, making us an economic workhorse.

The information we develop should be accessible and usable by the industry to meet your ends. Whether that's boosting your own sales through a better understanding of the market or boosting your productivity and/or profitability through better grasp of the economic drivers impacting business.

Our brief survey focuses on benchmarks and tools—those involved in the consumer horticulture sector—to manage their business, institution or non-profit program. Help us understand the internal and external economic and marketing sources that you currently employ.

We're greater than direct economic impact

The consumer horticulture story doesn't stop at direct economic impact. Consumer and society engagement through plants permeates all aspects of the American economy and society from providing the aesthetic backdrop of our lives, to directly impacting our health and well-being. The plants we grow and sell, the gardens we plant and open to the public, the retail stores we operate, and the landscapes we plant and manage directly and indirectly impact environmental quality and well-being.

You've probably heard the term "green infrastructure" used more and more by politicians, policy makers and businesses. It's an emerging, multi-faceted discipline that's beginning to address urban issues, like stormwater management, water quality, the urban heat island and air quality. Plants and the consumer horticulture industry are vitally important to how green infrastructure performs and to consumer acceptance of the approach.

The overall goal of NICH is to help consumer horticulture develop consistent messaging and overarching goals to better access federal, state, local and other resources for the purpose of growing the industry's impact. Through consistent messaging we seek to empower the industry. From the production/manufacturing to the service side, the tens of thousands of plant growers, landscapers and landscape architects/landscape designers, landscape technicians, public/private gardens, retail outlets, arboriculture companies, extension agents, allied suppliers and services, and garden communicators can leverage industry economic information to strengthen their positions.

NICH is helping to create a unified voice to promote the benefits and value of horticulture to targeted audiences. NICH brings together academia, government, industry and nonprofits to cultivate the growth and development of a healthy world through landscapes, gardens and plants—indoors and out. The mission of NICH is to grow a healthy world through plants, gardens and landscapes.

Join us. You can start by completing the Economic Committee Survey at https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_43gZpbu7oi9IRQ1.

Then sign up for regular updates at the NICH website: <https://signup.e2ma.net/signup/1854783/1400854/>.

Finally, download and use the #PlantsDoThat infographic. It's free for you to leverage for sales, marketing, social media or even in-store POS: <https://consumerhort.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PlantsDoThat.pdf>. **GT**

"We use industry data to target our marketing efforts and also to a large extent to target our growth efforts. One of the first things we look at [before investing] is the economic data of an area. It directs our marketing efforts." —Patrick Parker, Savatree

"Being able to accurately document the economic impact of the industry gives researchers the opportunity to justify the impact of grants." —Dr. Natalie Bumgarner, University of Tennessee

"We make decisions about products—where we are going to market, breed, distribute. We make decisions about sales territories and sales people—whether they are penetrating enough accounts, gaining market share. We live the data." —Dr. Marvin Miller, Ball Horticultural Company

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