

A sustainable e-newsletter brought to you by *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*

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Welcome to the very first issue of *GreenTalks*!

I'm Jennifer Duffield White, your personal reporter on all things green and sustainable in the horticulture industry.

"Just what is *GreenTalks*? And why subscribe?" you ask.

If you hadn't guessed by the name, *GreenTalks* is aimed at both of Ball Publishing's magazine audiences: retailers (***Green Profit* magazine**) and growers (***GrowerTalks* magazine**). The goal? To be an information source on sustainability as it relates to plants, growing, marketing, and retailing.

I'll keep you informed on what's happening in other industries, tell you what your fellow business owners are up to, snag some brilliant "green" ideas you can adopt in your own business, and provide the tools you need to both understand and pursue sustainability.

For some of you, this "sustainability" concept may be confusing, and indeed, it is not a black-and-white term, nor is there a formula to follow. *GreenTalks* is here to guide you along and keep you informed.

In fact, as I did some research travel for this newsletter, I was advised that if I wanted a definition of "sustainable" to "Google" it and be prepared to spend the next three hours reading. That's how diverse and how many interpretations there are. But let's get you started with one, simple definition:

Word of the Week

Sustainable agriculture, as defined by the **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**, breaks it down into three guiding principles:

1. Environmental stewardship: Produce your products without depleting the earth's resources or polluting its environment.







2. Farm profitability: Achieve No. 1 and No. 3 while still being a profitable business.

3. A prosperous farming community: Ensure that your employees and your community are prosperous and benefit from your existence.

You'll find a lot of gray matter in our discussions here. There will be ideas you'll jump to implement and some that may not fit your particular business. I would urge you, as a reader, to think of this newsletter as a book. With each installment, or chapter, you'll gain a greater understanding of the big picture. Be patient. Keep an open mind.

This is, indeed, a fitting week to launch *GreenTalks*, as we have a news item sitting here whose importance cannot be overstated. In fact, it's a little strange for me to be writing this, urging you to think of sustainability as a gray area, while sitting on my desk is a 127-page draft for national standards for sustainability in agriculture—and yes, floriculture crops fall under that.

National Sustainable Agriculture Standards

What's unusual about the news of a national sustainable agriculture standard being developed is that not only is floriculture included, but a sustainable certification for flowers called Veriflora was the basis for the first draft of the standards.

If plans go accordingly, a national sustainable agriculture standard will be approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as early as 2010. It's important to point out that this will be a standard, not an actual certification program. Thus, it's possible we could have multiple certification programs or "labels" (**CLICK HERE** to see a *GrowerTalks* article on the types of labels available) that tout sustainable floriculture, but those would all have to adhere to the ANSI standard for sustainable agriculture.



While certification programs are always voluntary, in the last year, we've started to see retailers pressure their suppliers to become certified, thus many growers may indeed have to meet these sustainability standards to continue doing business with their customers.

OFA—An Association of Floriculture Professionals—has set up a web page, **http://www.ofa.org/standards/** where you can access all the important info, including a draft of the standards. John Holmes, executive director of OFA, urges you to read the draft standards. (Don't miss the last 8 pages, which are the additional requirements for floriculture potted crops—under their definition, this includes anything grown and sold in a pot including herbs, veggies, perennials, shrubs, bedding, foliage, liners, and plugs.)

I spent most of this week reading the standards and talking to parties involved in the draft standards, including Veriflora and SCS, the certification company that wrote the draft standards and put up the seed money to start this standard process. **CLICK HERE** to read the details.

Consumer Buzz

We only have to look to the shelves of major chain store to know that catering to an environmentally conscious consumer is "in." But how interested are consumers in the environment? These numbers are from an April 2007 **Cone Consumer** Environmental Survey:

- 93% of Americans believe that companies have an obligation to help preserve the environment.
- 91% say they have a more positive image of a company when it's environmentally responsible.
- 71% identify reducing pollution through office and manufacturing operations as being a meaningful corporate action.
- 32% of Americans said they have a heightened interest in the environment compared to a year ago.
- 47% have purchased environmentally friendly products.
- 21% have donated to an environmental organization in the last year.



One of my favorite new companies that's putting sustainability, corporate image, and "giving back" together is Nau, an outdoor clothing company that uses recycled and environmentally friendly fibers. (They also let you choose which charity to donate a portion of each sale to.) Like many manufacturers, they've found sourcing "sustainable" materials difficult in some instances. **CLICK HERE** to see how they communicate this to their customers. Their marketing is top notch.

Ideas You Can Steal: Word of Mouth

When I rode the New York City Metro system last spring, I don't believe I saw a single flower. Last Thursday, though, some 80,000 flower stems were weaving through the streets and public transit routes of the Big Apple. Add those live flowers to the 80,000 images of flowers drawn on decals by children and stuck to the roofs of taxi cabs. The artwork is part of a community art project called Garden In Transit, run by the public art nonprofit, **Portraits of Hope**, as part of a celebration of 100 years of taxi cabs in New York.

Portraits of Hope and the **VeriFlora Sustainability Council** (a new non profit just formed to promote sustainability in floriculture—and yes, they're made up of folks from VeriFlora, the certified label, and volunteers who are VeriFlora certified growers) teamed up for a

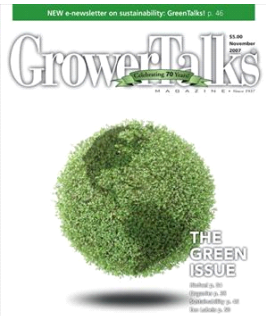
special event last week. VeriFlora growers donated 80,000 cut flower stems, and Portraits of Hope coordinated lessons for 3,000 NYC schoolchildren to learn how to properly care for cut flowers. In a PR effort for the art project, those same children then took to the streets, handing out stems of certified sustainably grown flowers with the message attached: "Move this flower along." Recipients were asked to pass the flower on to another person. An estimated quarter million New Yorkers should have had a flower gifted to them during the course of the day. Annie Gardner, executive director of the Veriflora Sustainability Council, noted, "When people heard that it was an environmentally and socially responsibly produced flower, that mattered to them."



Their expressions say it all. New York City schoolchildren hand out tulips from Sun Valley to strangers passing by in Union Square.

Recommended Reading

While this section will usually feature a great book or website for further reading, this time I have to direct you to the November issue of *GrowerTalks*, our GREEN ISSUE.



CLICK HERE to go to GrowerTalks.com. All of the green-themed articles are readable by clicking on the title. Feature stories include:

- **Where Green and Sustainable Meet**
- **The Eco Label Scene**
- **Organic Growing**
- **Filling the Grass Tank**
- **Inside Look**

This section brought to you by

Ask a question get an answer

It's a motto at Ball Publishing to keep the "Talk" (i.e. your opinions and experiences) in our content. So I'll be signing off each issue of *GreenTalks* with a question. Please, don't hesitate. Fill my inbox with responses!! I'll share some of your responses next week.

Q. Is your business actively pursuing sustainability? Why or why not? Click **HERE** to respond.

Finally, just a final note to say say how thrilled I am to send out this first issue of *GreenTalks*. It seems so fitting after a childhood in my family's greenhouse, an education in writing and environmental studies, and eight years at Ball Publishing to have it all come together in the form of *GreenTalks*.

And please, e-mail me anytime you'd like with your comments and questions. This is meant to be a dialogue within the industry.

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