

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Is Horticulture Withering?

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Horticulture, as a career field, has a lot of competition today with higher tech, sexier fields.

In fact, in May 2013, the Royal Horticultural Society decried “an alarming shortage of skilled professionals” in horticulture jobs, posing “a threat to Britain’s economy, environment and food security.”

Now, in the U.S., a three-page letter penned by six of the country’s most prominent plant people and titled, “Horticulture is under siege,” was sent in December 2013 to 800 schools and universities, government agencies, industry associations and growers. The purpose of the letter is to call for a four-year remedial campaign to boost the rankings of plant scientists, breeders, students and others in the horticulture field so that it doesn’t become a forgotten science.

Outlined in the campaign are the following tactics:

- A scientific study of the problem.
- An education plan outlining how horticulture can be integrated into K through 12 curriculums and promoted on college campuses.
- An advocacy and marketing strategy to raise public awareness of horticulture’s importance and career options.

Horticulturists in both the U.S. and the UK say the crisis has been building for decades, greatly influenced by the globalization of the food and flower trades, the population shift from farm to city, and the loss of a personal connection to the land.

“Think of all the careers horticulture is competing against. We need to make it sexier and more relevant in a highly competitive market,” says Paul Redman, director of Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, and a strong supporter of the campaign.

In addition to a lack of funding, the campaign faces another challenge: a true understanding of the term “horticulture” and what a horticulture career can entail, industry experts say. But supporters remain passionate in the long-term commitment to keep the horticulture field alive.

As Douglas Needman, education department head at Longwood Gardens, says, "I don't want to see the art, science and the craft of horticulture die out." **GT**