

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

4/1/2021

USDA Funds New Boxwood Research

Matthew Chappell

USDA NIFA (National Institute for Food & Agriculture) awarded a confederation of researchers a multi-year grant to help understand the mysteries of boxwood blight and its management.

The Boxwood Blight Insight Group, or BBIG, has several key areas of focus over the next four years, including the following:

- Conducting impact analysis to generate data that better resonate with state and federal policy makers, such as disease loss estimates and model economic analysis of best management practices.
- Identify critical control points in nursery production to help pinpoint best sampling points and develop site-specific best management practices.
- Assist landscape managers to better manage the disease by looking at potential biological control agents, agents that activate boxwood plant defenses, fungicide optimization and mulch optimization.
- Build boxwood resilience through identifying resistant cultivars, understanding the soil microbiome and breeding efforts utilizing modern technologies.
- Develop an extensive outreach network, including materials such as a pictorial guide of symptoms under certain environmental conditions, videos to help scouting efforts, and materials to help train industry, research, and extension personnel.

The Green Industry has much to gain from this research. Bennett Saunders, General Manager of Saunders Genetics and former President of the American Boxwood Society, commented, “When boxwood blight hit the United States, we were deeply concerned that this might be the end for boxwood. In Europe, there was very little research and there were very few answers. However, the research community in the United States was up to the challenge. They embraced the dire situation and began giving us answers very quickly.

“This most recent grant will continue to give boxwood growers practical, understandable and effective tools to combat boxwood blight. We look forward to seeing their work and their results!”

The Horticulture Research Institute has joined BBIG in their efforts as a collaborator on the outreach team. HRI’s role includes hosting the materials generated on its website, distributing newsletters and working closely with the researchers on presentation of information. The new website is accessible through hriresearch.org and boxwoodhealth.org. There will also be a series of boxwood research webinars that launched in March. **GT**