Garden centers investigated, LEDs, and Farm Bill pros and cons

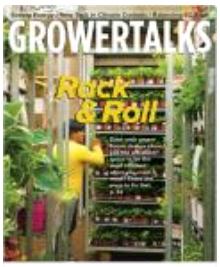


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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Vertical Harvest
Farm Bill Cons
LED Webinar
Canadian Retailers Investigated
No Stock Messages



Vertical Harvest GAP Certified

Vertical Harvest has been pushing boundaries since the day they started designing their greenhouse—a three-story vertical greenhouse on the side of a parking garage in downtown Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This month, they became the first Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified vertical farm in the U.S.

The GAP certification follows the Food and Drug Administration's recommendations for food safety for fresh fruits and vegetables and is required by many large-scale distributors.

I visited this greenhouse in November 2015, just as they were getting ready to go into production, and they've since made their mark growing local vegetables (mainly lettuce, tomatoes and microgreens) that they sell to restaurants, grocery stores and via their own on-site retail shop for the public. But more importantly for the founders of this business, they employ adults with developmental disabilities.

Check out the original article I wrote about them for *Inside Grower* or visit www.verticalharvestjackson.com.



2018 Farm Bill — Pros and Cons

The House Agriculture Committee just released their version of the 2018 Farm Bill. Now, this needs to be voted on by the House and hit the Senate, too. (And some even wonder if it will see a vote in the House before elections.)

The news? The general public is focused on changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that call for work requirements for low-income recipients. But for agriculture, the Farm Bill is key to providing mandatory funding for a long list of programs for the next five years. Some funding remains in place for specialty crops and horticulture, but programs associated with sustainability and organics may be on the chopping block or no longer receiving mandatory funding.

Here's a quick overview of the current proposal:

Specialty Crop Research Initiative and **Specialty Crop Block Grants** would be funded, as well as the **Plant Pest Disease Management Program** and **National Clean Plant Network**.

Several conservation programs have proposed changes, including rolling the **Conservation Stewardship Program** into the **Environmental Quality Incentives** program.

The bill provides no mandatory funding for the **Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program**, **Value-Added Producer Grants**, and **Rural Energy for America (REAP)**. Instead, if these programs are to get funding, the Appropriations Committees would need to pass discretionary funding for each program each year. The house bill also caps REAP to $45 million annually for grants and loans for renewable energy and energy efficiency improvements. (The current law provides $50 million in mandatory funding, plus $20 million in discretionary funding.)

The **Organic Certification Cost Share Program**, which helped reduce the cost of getting certified for new growers, would not be reauthorized.

Of course, this could all change. We'll keep you posted.



LED Webinar

Don't miss out on the May 1 webinar on how to use sole-source lighting and LEDs for propagation. Chris Beytes will host Abhay Thosar, Ph.D., senior plant specialist, Philips Lighting; and Blake Lange, business development manager–City Farming, Philips Lighting. They'll cover why you might want to consider propagating in a sole-source environment, including research results and how to set up and get started.

Date: Tuesday, May 1, 2018
Time: 1:00 PM Eastern/12:00 PM Central

Register at https://www.growertalks.com/Webinars/.



Canadian Retailers Investigated for Pesticide Residue on Plants

Things you don't want to hear: We tested the plants in your garden center and they have banned pesticides.

That's what happened to RONA (Lowe's), Canadian Tire and Home Depot in Ontario, Canada. But guess who did the testing? Friends of the Earth (FOE) Canada collected their own plant samples at the retailers and sent them to the University of Guelph for testing, wondering if stores were remaining truthful about phasing out neonicotinoids from the aisles. Some samples tested positive for neonicotinoid residues.

However, FOE also made a big production out of the other residues found, supposedly from pesticides that have been banned under Ontario's Cosmetic Pesticide Ban. Yet, they do not mention that the cosmetic ban applies only to lawns, gardens, patios, parks, and school yards. Agriculture gets an exception (as do several other scenarios). To make it even stickier, they list spinosad in their complaint—a "natural" pesticide that's both organic (in some products) *and* on the Cosmetic Pesticide Ban list. FOE reported their findings to the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

I'm not a lawyer, but if you read their long-winded complaint, it seems they want to hold a retailer responsible for "permitting" a grower's application of the pesticide AND they're trying to say that those plants ending up in a garden with residue on them means the retailer permitted the discharge of a pesticide in the landscape.

Might be a bit of a stretch. We'll see if it goes anywhere other than the press.

But, nonetheless, it brings the pollinator and pesticide residue issue front and center just in time for spring. Best to know what you're growing and spraying (or what you're buying into the garden center) and communicate clearly and honestly with your customers. I'd say it's the perfect time to think about how you want your business portrayed.

No Stock Messages

If that last item has you thinking you should just shut up and say nothing, here's an article I really love: "Just say 'no' to stock messages: Here are 10 principles for sustainability that sells."

It’s basic, but hey, sometimes we need to be reminded to talk about things that people care about in their everyday lives. It doesn’t have to be an environmental missive.

With that, I hope you all have a beautiful weekend to make up for some of the not-so-good (okay, sometimes horrible) starts to spring. It’s looking up!

Until next time,



Jennifer Duffield White
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