

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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HRI Sets New Strategic Research Focus

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Our industry generates one third of both all specialty crop revenue (over \$19 billion each year) and its workforce, yet our industry receives only 12% of federal funds earmarked for specialty crops from USDA Agricultural Research Service and USDA's Specialty Crop Research Initiative. The Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) recognized this disparity and sought a means to bring federal funding levels more in line with our economic contributions.

HRI realized the industry lacked a unified, strategic vision of research needs to provide a roadmap for future priorities that can be used to better leverage federal funds, while at the same time, guide its own research funding decisions.

With these goals in mind, HRI set to work. The result was a professionally moderated, two-day stakeholder meeting, where attendees shared their collective understanding of industry challenges, trends and opportunities. Delegates representing all segments of horticulture and regions of the country gathered for a face-to-face summit to listen, learn and share their insights with each other. Participants were encouraged to expand their reach by engaging in conversations with their peers in advance of the meeting to widen their perspectives. During the summit, the moderator led the group through a series of discussions that culminated in a consensus on four key research priorities.

Through these efforts, HRI identified research priorities to tackle the challenges, capitalize on the trends and opportunities, better direct its research investments and leverage federal funding:

- **Quantifying Plant Benefits**—Research that quantifies and validates the benefits of plants on ecosystems, on human health and on society creates value propositions that boosts sales of horticultural products and services, and increases interest in horticultural careers. New research regarding plant benefits needs to be aligned with industry priorities to maintain environmental horticulture at the forefront of providing sustainable green solutions for the world.
- **Creating Innovative Solutions**—Research that creates or adapts biological, mechanical and technological systems making practices and processes more efficient and productive assists horticultural businesses of all segments and sizes to increase profits. This would include (but not be limited to) advances in plant breeding, crop production and protection, software, automation, mechanization and logistics. Recognizing and addressing barriers to adoption will be crucial.
- **Gathering Consumer Insights**—Research that evaluates consumer behavior, consumer preferences and consumer trends empowers horticultural businesses to optimize products and services and leads to industry-wide profitability and growth. Research on consumer attitudes, needs, motivations and purchasing behaviors for our industry's products and services will help companies make better business decisions by capturing what consumers

want.

• **Producing Practical and Actionable Solutions**—Research that tackles ongoing and emergent industry challenges in production, resource management, or pest and disease management provides practical and actionable advice for horticultural businesses to improve sustainability and profitability. Disruptive, ongoing, emergent issues that challenge short-term profitability and success of environmental horticulture will continue to rise. Therefore, providing solutions to these challenges must remain a research priority for funding agencies.

HRI has adopted these four key research priorities and will use them to guide future HRI funding and leveraging decisions. For more information, look for the Research Roadmap Executive Summary at www.hriresearch.org. **GT**