Promoting Horticulture in the United States

The Issue

Today our world is highly dependent on horticultural expertise to provide the technology and people necessary to meet the rapidly increasing global demand for fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs and ornamentals in the face of the changing global environment and limited natural and financial resources. Horticultural science is critical in improving the nutritional content of food, enhancing the safety of our produce supply, and increasing the supply of healthy, local and sustainably-produced foods. Expertise in environmental horticulture is necessary to address the global issues of climate change; water quality, availability, storm water runoff, and retention; and energy production through biofuels. Additionally, the role that horticulture plays in promoting positive mental well-being, on a large scale from public botanic gardens, parks, and sports fields, to small scale individual home gardens is critical to our life today.

Unfortunately, horticulture is under siege. We are concerned that, for those aware of horticulture, the perception is increasingly negative, while much of the general public, especially young people, appear to have little or no awareness of the importance and value of horticulture[i], [ii]. This has resulted in a loss of influence among governmental agencies at various levels and a reduction in students considering horticulture as a career. These changes have occurred despite the increasing value of commercial horticulture crops and services. Interesting, challenging, and impactful careers are available in horticulture at all levels, and there is an increasing need for well-trained and educated students.

One solution to these problems is to **increase public awareness** of the positive attributes of horticulture, especially in regards to educators, public service workers, students with an aptitude for plant science or for artistic expression through plant materials, and the general public. This task will require a concerted and coordinated effort on the part of all those with a direct effort in horticulture, including industry, associations, public botanic gardens, elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities and governmental agencies.

We propose a first step of assessing the breadth and depth of public awareness of horticulture and horticulture education through a national study that would determine:

- Perceptions of horticulture
- Perceptions of horticulture education, specifically:
    - High school and youth horticulture programs, *e.g.* NJHA, JMG, 4H, and FFA
    - University horticulture programs

Each of the following groups would be included in the studies:

- Youth (K-12) in the general public
- Adults in the general public
- Industry and industry associations
- Public gardens
- Governmental agencies

Educators

This national analysis would develop recommendations and implementation steps such as:

- Marketing plan for universities and colleges to reach potential students, specifically providing an index of imagery, words and phrases needed to attract students into 2- and 4-year university horticulture programs. (phase 1)
- Marketing plan to promote horticulture to the general public (youth and adults). (phase 2a)
- Education plan to recommend the processes by which horticulture is integrated into STEM/STEAM learning initiatives, Next Generation Science Standards, and the Common Core and the venues through which educators will access curriculum and training. (phase 2b)

Anticipated Outcomes from a national study and its implementation:

- Improve public perceptions of horticulture
- Develop tactics to ensure that horticulture is part of the national education curriculum
- Increase youth participation in NJHA, JMG, 4-H, and FFA
- Increase number of high school students in horticulture and plant sciences programs
- Increase number of horticulture students in 2-year and 4-year college and university programs
- Increase number of well-trained horticulture employees

Timeline

October 2013 – Complete summary and overview of project.

November 2013 – Contact potential endorsing partners asking for support of the project.

December 2013 - Finalize a request for proposals (RFP) to be sent to appropriate marketing/research companies. Proposal should have specific phases to allow funding and implementation over time.

January 2014 – Send out RFP.

March 2014 – Receive proposals for review; work with ASHS and Longwood to select vendor.

April 2014 – Contact potential sponsoring partners for funding; revise timeline for completion of phase 1 and phase 2, if needed.

Summer/Fall 2014 – Conduct phase 1 study of college/university sector.

Winter/Spring 2015 – Receive report with college/university actions.

Summer/Fall 2015 – Conduct phase 2 study of public sector and government.

Winter/Spring 2016 – Receive report with public sector and government actions.

Summer/Fall 2016 – Develop marketing plan, public service advocacy campaign, and education plan.

Winter/Spring 2017 – Launch marketing campaign and education plan.

[ii] ASHS September 2013 survey of members found the most important issue with student's selection of horticulture for a career was lack of knowledge and awareness of horticulture and horticultural careers. Meyer, M.H. 2013. Horticulture Career Survey: What You Said. ASHS Newsletter Vol. 29(9):3-4.

[ii] A study of 203 prospective college students found respondents have a limited knowledge of the wide range of options available to them for study beyond "agriculture." Morehouse, B. and D. Nelson. 2007. Study of Prospective Students Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo: Horticulture and Crop Science Department. Stamats, Inc.