

Diane Dulmage

From: newsletters@ballpublishing.com
Sent: Monday, May 11, 2009 12:18 PM
To: Diane Dulmage
Subject: Green Talks May 11, 2009: incentive money, consumer habits, plants for farming, UGA trials

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greenTalks

sustainability e-news

A sustainable e-newsletter brought to you by *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*

Monday, May 11, 2009

Dear Diane Dulmage

In this issue:

Get \$ for going organic
A surge in lawnmower sales?
Is green buying stable?
Find your best customers through social media ...
Do traditional farmers want your perennials?
New York's first VeriFlora certification ... and
How the University of Georgia's trial gardens got greener

EQIP Grants for Organics

If you have organic production or are just beginning to transition over to organic production, you may be eligible for some of the \$50 million made available through the 2009 Organic Initiative, administered by the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

However, don't dawdle. *You have only a three-week sign-up window, beginning today (May 11) through Friday, May 29.* This particular money, which comes from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), is specifically for farms converting to organic production, farms expanding their organic production, or those who want to improve their environmental conservation performance. (Think cover crops, integrated pest management, nutrient management, and so on.)

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Each state will be allocated a certain portion of the funds, so you'll need to apply through your local conservation office. (To locate the nearest office, [CLICK HERE](#).) The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service has an excellent resource page on how to submit a competitive application [HERE](#) or you can call their hotline at (800) 346-9140.

A Surge in Green Lawnmower Sales?

If proposed legislation gets finalized, you might be able to offer lawn and garden customers a little extra incentive for buying energy-efficient lawn equipment. Vermont's representatives in Washington teamed up to introduce the [Greener Gardens Act](#), which would offer taxpayers a 25% tax credit (up to \$1,000) if they purchase fuel-efficient, alternative-energy lawn and garden equipment.

Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders and Representative Peter Welch introduced the bill last week. As it stands, qualifying equipment would include those with motors that run on solar, electric, rechargeable/replaceable batteries; those that use alternative fuels (such as propane or compressed natural gas); and hybrid machines.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Association and the National Audubon Society have both endorsed the bill. In addition to encouraging a reduction in emissions, the bill's sponsors also pointed out that it would help boost the companies developing and selling the cleaner technologies (Vermont being home to at least one such company).

Green Buying: Up, Down or Stable?

If you dig around for news on how consumers "green" buying habits have changed in the last year ... well, you'll find as many answers as you will reports.

For instance, a 2009 consumer research [survey from Mintel](#) says 36% of Americans say they "almost always" or "regularly" buy green products. However, that number is stagnant in 2009. From 2007 to 2008, it had tripled, going from 12% to 36%.

A couple of quick facts from a 2009 survey from Green Seal and EnviroMedia Social Marketing.:

*Four out of five people say they still buy green products and services even in today's economy.

*One out of two people buy just as many green products now as they did before the economic downturn. A considerable 19% say they buy more green products, while 14% report that they buy fewer environmentally green products.

But most importantly, how are *your* customers buying this spring? Drop me a line and let me know what you're seeing: jwhite@ballpublishing.com.

Find Your Best Customers Through Social Media & Charities

The health-conscious, devoted green-buying consumers who fall into the Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability ([LOHAS](#)) segment are an attractive group for any marketer (i.e. lots of disposable income). Here's one quick tip from the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI):

The LOHAS consumers are more likely than any other group to be engaged in online communities such as Facebook, MySpace and others. Think about how you might use



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those tools to build a community that fosters their loyalty. Brands that align with consumers' lifestyles to provide entertainment, information, or discounts, or those that promote local events, are likely to be more successful, according to NMI.

Another interesting fact: **LOHAS consumers are most likely to be involved in charitable giving.** If you're reading your issues of *Green Profit*, you'll know that more and more garden centers are finding synergy partnering with local organizations for events and promotions.

I'd say those are two great reasons why building a community and strengthening relationships with your customers should be part of your business strategy.

Do Traditional Farmers Want Your Perennials?

Selling perennials to farmers? Providing the plants for buffers, native plant strips, bioswales and wetlands could be a growing market as ag producers look to improve their conservation efforts.

Landscape strategies emerged as a main focus when a team of Iowa State University researchers made the economic and environmental case for deploying a portfolio of conservation practices on the land. The goal of the group, supported by the Ecology Initiative at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, is to encourage the strategic use of trees, prairies and other perennials in key parts of the landscape in a way that will result in multiple environmental benefits while causing only a small change in overall agricultural production.

For instance, perennial buffers capture airborne particulates and reduce odor transport from livestock production facilities. Using vegetative cover and edge-of-field habitats/plantings can increase biodiversity and encourage beneficial insects and pollinators.

"We have a box full of great tools - conservation tillage, grass waterways, field borders, contour buffers, riparian buffers and filters," Schulte Moore says. "But we also need to adopt a landscape view, use more native plants, build wetlands at the end of tile lines, expand our use of cover crops and create new markets and policies that help landowners adopt these practices where they will do the most good."

Download *A Targeted Conservation Approach for Improving Environmental Quality* for free, [HERE](#).

Dickman Farms Awarded VeriFlora Certification

Dickman Farms is the latest greenhouse to receive **VeriFlora** certification for growing certified sustainable floral products in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. As a young plant propagator of vegetative annuals and perennials, they are an exclusive supplier to Ball Horticultural Co. They're also the largest grower of finished annuals and perennials in central New York, serving some 80 independent garden centers as well as their own retail space.

Dave Dickman, president of fourth-generation Dickman Farms, says, "Sustainability is taking a holistic approach to operating a business; it is a journey, not a destination. It is a tremendous honor to have Dickman Farms earn VeriFlora certification, and to be the first to receive this designation in New York State."

The Trials of Sustainability

The trial gardens at the University of Georgia (UGA) have always been an impressive sight and a proving ground for plants in the Southeast, but when you visit this year, there's a new

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twist. The folks at UGA have been working hard over the last few years to adopt a more sustainable approach.

During their open house on Wednesday, June 17 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., you'll not only get a look what is and isn't performing in the Georgia heat, but you'll also get to see how they've reduced inputs, managed irrigation, fertility and pest management while maintaining a national trialing site for perennials and annuals.

A few highlights:

- * Irrigation zones that highlight plants with similar water requirements
- * Terra-Sorb: superabsorbent hydrogel mixed into soils of containers and hanging baskets
- * Mulch to reduce water run-off and erosion
- * Daniels Plant Food: both the greenhouse and landscape formulations used as their organic liquid feed through out the season
- * Plant Growth Activator Plus used to inoculate soil
- * Cover crops in the fall as organic soil builders
- * Green manure: soft tissue plants tilled into soil before cover crop
- * Perimeter plantings of carrot, chervil, coriander, clovers, subclovers, nasturtium, parsley, alyssum and yarrow to encourage beneficial insect populations
- * Organic pesticides, fungicides, miticides and algaecides
- * Crop rotation, intercropping and companion planting
- * Introduction of pulverized shrimp shells to reduce root-knot nematode populations.

For more info, go to <http://ugatrial.hort.uga.edu/> or RSVP for the open house to ugatrialgardens@gmail.com. Open house includes a lunch provided by Ball Horticultural Co. and tours with Dr. Allan Armitage. However, if you can't make it on the 17th, the gardens are open year round for visiting.

That's all for now. Until next time,



Jennifer Duffield White
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