

**CalIPC Symposium in Ventura**  
**Nurseries Working Group: Working with horticultural professionals on invasive plant issues**  
**October 7, 2004**

**Facilitator:** Mona Robison  
**Notetaker:** Bree Richardson

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*This first section is Bree's notes about the meeting:*

**Two approaches:**

- ◆ Top-down: working directly with growers and sellers
- ◆ Bottom-up: working to change consumer demand, 'Don't Plant a Pest'

Cal-IPC has taken both approaches over the past few years.

**Bottom up:**

- ◆ Don't Plant has been very successful
- ◆ Tree version out by spring
- ◆ Alison Stanton did a Master Gardeners training this year, for the Bay Area MGs

- ◆ We've gotten numerous requests to address garden clubs around the state
- ◆ Had a booth at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show, attendance of 20,000

### Top-down:

- ◆ **Collaborated with a number of nurseries**, Monrovia, Sloat, Berkeley Horticultural nursery, on the Don't Plant a Pest brochure
  - This has been a way to open avenues of discussion about invasive plants
  - One limitation to this is that most of the nursery representatives that worked on this project were already of a like-mind with Cal-IPC
- ◆ Collaborating with **Sustainable Conservation** on creating a working group that includes representatives from several larger nurseries and producers, including Monrovia, Hines, and Mitsuwa
  - Had one meeting with a number of stakeholders, the results of which are that we will form a steering committee which will produce a mission statement and a list of objectives

### Perspective I've developed as all of this has taken place:

- ◆ Nursery professionals like plants, they are our kind of people
- ◆ The issue of invasive plants is gaining recognition and understanding within the horticultural trade
- ◆ **The nursery trade is very willing to work with Cal-IPC** and other like-minded groups because they believe that self-regulation is both better for them and more effective at solving the problem, than government regulation, which is a view shared by Cal-IPC
- ◆ There are **obstacles for the trade in working on this issue**:
  - Professionals in the trade are often beset by much more pressing problems, sudden oak death, glassy winged sharpshooter, so it's often difficult for them to find the time and resources to really delve into the invasive plant issue
  - In many cases there is no clear answer on what is safe to sell and what isn't, particularly with regard to cultivars, varieties, sterile hybrids, etc. but also regionally
  - The California nursery and growing trade is not neatly contained within California. Many growers grow things to be shipped elsewhere. As one grower put it: we grow pampasgrass that's put in a truck and shipped to Wisconsin to die.
- ◆ **Cal-IPC also faces obstacles** when trying to articulate what we would like from the nursery trade.
  - We don't have the science to determine which cultivars, hybrids, varieties are safe or unsafe: for us, English ivy is English ivy and that's an oversimplification
  - We don't have a working risk assessment model for screening new introductions. Several have been developed, others are under development, but none have yet proved accurate enough to really ask the trade to use them.

So that's a little background.

A couple of questions that I'd love to have the group address are:

What ideas do we have for additional bottom-up projects? We've done the brochure...now what?

As Cal-IPC continues to work with professionals in the nursery trade, what should our goals be? In short, what do we want from them, and how do we provide them with the tools they need to fulfill our requests?

### Group Discussion

There was a lot of **interest in the Southern California regional "Don't Plant a Pest" brochure**. We might find help from the group in distributing it through their organizations.

**Big Box retailers:** Carolyn Martus had luck with Wal-Mart, but no luck with Home Depot despite their being affiliated with the National Fish and Wildlife Federation at the national level. NFWF isn't aware of regional issues like invasive plants. On the whole, however, most nurseries are amenable to reducing sale of invasive plants when it's brought to their attention. Carolyn is also working with landscape architecture groups to educate them about invasive plants.

Having a corporate impact will require a lot of work. The profit margin is incredibly slim, and we must supply viable alternatives. The only negative impact for nurseries selling invasives is the potential for bad press. It helps to have someone on the inside, who can direct people away from the invasive plants.

**Regulation is not set up to deal with this problem.** Regulatory system with California Department of Food and Agriculture does not regulate most of the plants we are concerned with. It takes a long time to update the list and then it is up to the County Agriculture Commissioner to enforce it. Regulation is not generally effective due to local issues. Eradication is the best, but providing alternatives is also important.

Marie J: We have to be sure we **don't imply that we are against all non-natives**. Sometimes non-natives are much better than natives from a different location that may influence the genetic makeup of the wild natives.

Nicholas S: Currently, nurseries don't know what to do about this issue. There are three big issues address by the **American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA)**: Labor, on which much work is being done; Water, on which work is being done; and Invasive plants, on which little is being done because the members don't yet know what to do.

One thing that would help is for the **industry to develop closer ties to research institutions** like UC Davis that can help determine what to grow and what not to grow. If researchers could look at the top 20 percent of sales and identify what is invasive and what are we just learning is invasive, that would be helpful. Also if they could help develop sterile varieties. There is funding going into research in the industry and some of that is aimed at the issue of invasive plants.

Selling plants that are regionally **labeled as non-invasive** or native is very desirable for the industry, since it's a way to add value. Currently, regional labeling is a huge challenge, when plants are grown and shipped all over the nation, but Monrovia is working on a system where individual retailers can customize their labels, which will allow some regional identification information to be included.

In many ways, Monrovia and other **growers are self-regulating**. They treat their neighbors' land for snails, anthills, weeds, because no one else will do it, so they spend their own money to do so.

Becky W.: Nurseries and seed growers could collaborate on **certification programs** which would identify non-invasives and certify that seed is weed-free.

There was a seed certification program at UCD but it has been closed. There are a lot of seed mixes labeled "Native" which are not appropriate for our area or contain known weeds.

Information on the **sterility of different plants/varieties** is not readily available. Much of it is in the minds of uncommunicative horticulturalists, and no database exists. Some information is easier to find, some harder. There is a need to document the development of new plants and varieties. Researchers at the UCs could work with growers to develop standard documentation methods.

Prices for native plant seed have been coming down steadily as more of them are grown commercially and the demand has heightened.

**Ways Cal-IPC can forward progress:**

- ◆ Have a short column in the Farm Bureau newsletter every month
- ◆ Continue work on **top-down education**
- ◆ **Work with agricultural commissioners** to try to reach small growers. Also help educate the people in the Agriculture Department who work on nursery issues about invasive plants. Currently the nursery folks and the weed folks are entirely unrelated.
- ◆ **Do outreach at the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers (CANGC) Western Expo**—they host talks and we could get one of our nursery professional partners to conduct a talk.
- ◆ Also do **articles** in: International Erosion Control Association Western Chapter newsletter, and Pacific Coast Nurseryman magazine, Sunset magazine (have to go directly to the writers to ever get through there)
- ◆ Get our **link onto other websites** and on producers' websites (ex. [www.bewaterwise.com](http://www.bewaterwise.com))
- ◆ Get **brochures into nurseries**—they will then pass them along to customers and each other—the Ag Depts. can help with distribution
- ◆ Coordinate with the Department of Conservation Watershed Coordinators (Drew Ready can be a contact for them)
- ◆ Get more regional 'Don't Plant a Pest' brochures developed and distributed.
- ◆ Act as a conduit between ANLA and related groups and researchers. Look into funding for research projects through the Horticultural Research Institute.  
**Note to group:** I looked on the website of ANLA ([www.anla.org](http://www.anla.org)) and they listed a project funded for \$15,500 in 2004 called Developing Improved, Non-Invasive Nursery Crops.
- ◆ Some other groups to coordinate with: Trees for Green LA, Mediterranean Garden Society, PG&E Safe Street Tree program in Bay Area. Look into coverage on the California Gold television show.
- ◆ CalIPC could develop a **speakers bureau**, Karen had a talk she could share
- ◆ CalIPC could develop a **weed and alternatives calendar** (Francisco's suggestion).