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CHINA

Where is the country's floral mass-market today?

MARKETS

Trends in the world cut flower trade

PLANT HEALTH

In a healthy plant world borders are no barriers

GUATEMALA IN FOCUS

Growing ornamentals at the crossroads of world trade

SUSTAINABILITY PIONEERS

The AIPH International Conference: The Path to Sustainability in Ornamental Horticulture boasted an international line-up of 27 industry expert panellists from around the world. Each shared their unique insights on sustainability and provided actionable ways to address climate change practices.

AUTHORS: RON VAN DER PLOEG , SPENCE GUNN & RACHEL WAKEFIELD

The International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) organised the event in partnership with GreenTech Live & Online, Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI) and FloraCulture International (FCI). The online conference took place on 30 September 2021.

WHY SHOULD OUR INDUSTRY CHANGE?

Helping to set the scene for the day ahead was Dr David Bek, a Reader in Sustainable Economies at Coventry University (UK). He said that the pandemic had reminded people of their vulnerability (and has revealed supply chain vulnerability).

Covid-19 caused drastic changes concerning consumer needs with Fairtrade and locally grown and health products being in high demand. Bek said that a certain tranch of wealthier consumers put their money where their mouth is. Also, some middle-class consumers had more money in their pockets because they were not going on holidays.

However, post-Covid, life is starting to cost a lot more due to price hikes in all commodities, including energy. So Bek finds it challenging to predict whether the willingness to pay for sustainable products, including eco-certified cut flowers and plants, will stick.

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Bek went on to explain what climate change means for horticulture. Changes in temperature and rainfall regimes, exotic weather events, and rising sea levels threaten the viability of production areas across the globe. Whilst higher winter temperatures in Northern Europe may sound appealing, the impact of melting ice sheets and glaciers are not. The sub-Sahara is already struggling with temperature and rainfall changes, and projections for horticultural heartlands such as Kenya and Ethiopia do not look good. Another horticultural powerhouse, the Netherlands, will face severe problems with rising sea levels.

FUTUREPROOFING YOUR BUSINESS

The insurance industry has been ahead of the game in adjusting its risk rising policies whilst investors are also taking climate change very seriously. They are profiling potential investments carefully against climate change risk. Simply put: if you as a horticultural entrepreneur want insurance or investment, then be ready to demonstrate your climate change mitigation planning. Bek invited his audience to consider that horticultural activities contribute to climate change despite the products' green benefits.

Footprint tracking of carbon and water happens throughout the supply chain. "Researching these is complicated and time-consuming, but we have to acknowledge the consequences of some of the work that has been undertaken. For example, an evaluation of cut flower supply chains has produced sobering data. According to one widely cited study, the carbon footprint of a rose stem grown in Kenya is 2.407kg, whilst one grown in Holland is 2.437kg. Put this in context, a bunch of bananas is 0.5kg. And when we think of water, one study on water footprints indicated that an average Kenyan rose stem has a water footprint of nine litres which is a considerable amount."

LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS

At the same time, science is evolving to understand better where footprints are occurring within supply chains and the extent of the impacts. Life Cycle Analysis is a key tool for enabling this process. Bek said, "Different products generate problematic output at different stages of their production. Behind mapping these outputs is a process of quantifying these outputs which in turn enables hotspots such as production of greenhouse gases to be identified."

He said that it is vital that the industry engages in these types of analysis to reduce or even eradicate problem impacts.

PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS - NOT DEFENSIVE REASONING

The value to society of non-food and non-health

"It's not the cost of taking action. It's the cost of not taking action..."

Sven Hoping, Global Sales Director TEKU at Pöppelmann



products became very contentious during the pandemic. "Items that were considered non-essential by some governments and retailers were deprioritised or even banned from sale. And this included flowers and plants in some countries. "This perception of essentialness matters in the context of climate change. One of the world's leading carbon footprint experts told me a couple of years ago there is no justification to producing cut flowers in heated greenhouses or fly them halfway around the world."

Bek said that whatever our perspectives are, the sector must be mindful that policymakers and consumers will be making trade-offs in the coming years as the imperatives to confront the climate crisis.

On the positives side, Bek stressed how horticulture has a vital role to play in tackling the climate crisis. He said, "Plants in the right place, the right amount of time are essential for capturing carbon, improving water management, regulating temperature, and promoting biodiversity. Living green is an important contributor to the pathway of net zero. And it is not all about rainforests. These principles apply to urban parks, street design, and residential development Collectively all these spaces contribute to climate mitigation if managed correctly."

CROSS INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Horticulture has a considerable role in providing the tools to tackle the problem and in communication and lobbying. Bek referenced the surge in sustainability initiatives in recent years, with FSI leading the way and going from strength to strength.

Bek noted that science and research are critical in the process as we advance. He welcomed the increasing role research institutes are playing. An example is the programme of work happening at WUR University in the Netherlands to deliver life cycle analysis of products to produce horti-footprints.

Bek said, "The WUR programme is particularly important because it is developing a standardised approach for benchmarking environmental impacts of horticultural products throughout the entire supply chain, from soil to mouth, from farm to fork. Cross-industry collaboration is crucial in these processes. The information must be shared and not held back to benefit USP's or brand identities of a handful of stakeholders. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that the horticultural sector is not just reducing its negative impacts but is actively contributing to climate change mitigation.

Bek concluded by saying that during the pandemic, we all witnessed the ability of humans to adapt when the pressure was on. "This is a crucial learning in the context of climate crisis. *'We cannot change'* has been a repeated statement during recent decades in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emmisions. But we now have proof that as individuals, as a society and as businesses **we can change overnight** in terms of our behavour if we have to."

The recordings of the AIPH International Conference: the path to Sustainability in Ornamental Horticulture can be viewed online on-demand at www.aiph.org/events/sustainability-conference-2021-recordings/