

**Minutes: Florida Woody Ornamentals IPM Certification
Workgroup Meeting, 21 November 2002**

The meeting was attended by: Kevin Athearn, Jeff Bryan, Eileen Buss, Stephanie Dickerson, Ed Gilman, Tom Green, Don Harris, Norm Leppla, Mike Marshall, Wes Robbs, Timothee Sallin, Veronique Sallin, Bill Schall, Dan Sonke, Jack Shirley, and James Sterns. A complete list of current workgroup members is attached.

Dr. Norm Leppla led the meeting and opened with a power point presentation designed to familiarize everyone with the status and goals of the EPA-funded project (\$33,225), and the basic principles of IPM certification or eco-labeling (attached). He first gave a status report with a brief description of the events that led to this grower-initiated opportunity (attached). He also used slides modified from Dr. Jeff Dlott, keynote speaker at the recent international "Conference of Ecolabels and the Greening of the Food Market" held at Tufts University in Boston. Eco-labels involve standards set by growers, certification usually by a third party, a chain of custody for the product, and associated marketing. Education and outreach support the process. Healthy Grown Wisconsin Potatoes (Protected Harvest) was used as a model, since it has been very successful and is being investigated by crop consultants and UF, IFAS for Florida vegetables (www.protectedharvest.org). The first step for woody ornamental production would be pesticide risk reduction.

Stephanie Dickerson and Dr. Leppla described this opportunity for the industry to consider IPM certification from a cost and benefit perspective. The primary costs are for establishing standards and an evaluation process, educating growers and customers, training certifiers and managing the certification system, and maintaining the quality of IPM certified products. Based on other eco-labeling programs involving the IPM Institute of North America, Dr. Tom Green, President roughly estimated that the cost would be less than \$1,000 per year with a reasonable level of grower participation. The benefits would be savings on plant production, a greater value for the products, protection from false claims of pesticide misuse, and environmental stewardship with potential marketing advantages. It was emphasized that participation in this program would be completely voluntary for the growers interested in adopting reduced risk practices and possibly enhancing niche markets.

Dr. Green prepared, distributed and discussed a briefing book specifically for the Florida Woody Ornamentals IPM Certification Project. It contained a copy of the EPA grant proposal, initial meeting summary, current workgroup participant list, power point slides on the eco-label concept and other eco-labels (see Consumers Union Web site, www.eco-labels.org), IPM practice lists, the Florida Ornamentals Pest Management Profile (Larson and Nesheim, 2000), input lists of registered insecticides (Mizell, 2001) and toxicity (Buss, 2002), and a list of IPM references and resources. The workgroup decided that considerably more information was needed on pesticide use in the production of woody ornamental plants. Dr. Green established a section of the IPM Institute Web site for the Florida project (www.ipminstitute.org/flornamentals.htm). Possibilities were discussed for rating chemicals based on toxicity and for scoring IPM adoption using a point system, i.e., toxicity units (Benbrook et al., 2002). The University of Massachusetts, IPM Guidelines for Poinsettia were provided as an example (attached).

Dr. Green stimulated a lively discussion about IPM and pesticide use by describing eco-labeling successes over the past ten plus years. The Food Alliance incorporates individual growers and now includes more than 40 crops, while Protected Harvest only works with grower groups. The cost of certification can be a fee or percentage of sales. In one case, 11 pesticides were reduced to less than 2% of previous use levels, with great savings to growers. Organic farming has recently experienced about a 20% increase per year. The University of Massachusetts has an IPM program for golf courses (see more examples at www.ipminstitute.org/links.htm). The participants talked about the acute and residual effects of pesticides, noted that IPM can be cheaper particularly in the long term, indicated that premium products not cheaper ones is the goal, a "green" image is increasingly important for the industry, and good production practices should lead to good maintenance practices in the landscape. IPM labeling in forestry has protected growers from claims of environmental damage. An interesting question was "why aren't

IPM practices and associated labeling just happening?" Kevin Athearn, a graduate student in IFAS Food and Resource Economics, instructed that there are two requirements for the marketplace to proceed in this direction: 1) Producers must provide reliable information about the benefits to consumers and 2) Public good must be demonstrated for an entire community. The consensus was that communication is vital among all the project stakeholders.

Some very important points emerged from grower to grower dialogue. This will help align the project more closely with potential benefits to the industry. The major points are as follows:

- The market rules! Contractors can not find enough Florida Grades and Standards trees. Consumer demand for IPM certified plants already exist. New trees and cultivars could be marketed. More marketing information is needed.
- This project could be perceived as a threat to those who do not participate. Written documents must be prepared and widely circulated to prevent misunderstandings.
- Municipal regulations are already in place and expanding. IPM certification could be a deterrent to future regulations by providing exemptions.
- Everyone benefits by working together to raise the standards of the industry. Standards can be established at an easily achievable level and raised as appropriate.

The workgroup decided to focus on increasing communication, obtaining more grower input, and seeking guidance from the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association. It is important to reinforce that this project is a grower initiative and that is being conducted according to industry-driven marketing opportunities. Mike Marshall and Jeff Bryant emphasized that growers would not be interested in anything that could become mandatory. The feeling of the workgroup was that the eco-labeling program could possibly become regulatory and this should be avoided. Mike Marshall has communicated the following points to Ben Bolusky, FNBA Executive Vice President:

- The group has a grant for nearly \$35,000 for use in the woody industry.
- This program would help market woody ornamentals to a wider audience.
- Our industry would be voluntarily participating in a program that should reduce chemical use, which would give us numerous public relations opportunities and help us to influence public perception of our industry in our favor.
- Our industry would be voluntarily participating in a program that should reduce chemical use, which should equate to a reduced liability in the future.
- Our industry would be voluntarily participating in a program that should reduce chemical use which may equate to reduced (or no increases in) regulations in the future.
- Using IPM practices is already common in the industry due to the high cost of chemicals, why not translate that into a marketing opportunity.

The next meeting will most likely be held early March, following various FNBA board meetings.

Special thanks to Timothee and Veronique Sallin of Cherry Lake Tree farm for providing a comfortable meeting place and enjoyable picnic lunch.

Stephanie Dickerson & Norm Leppla