

Seeking consumers who already value environmentally friendly products will help capture a market interested in sustainably grown plants.

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# How to market sustainability to consumers

CONSUMERS ARE CONSCIOUS about their shopping choices and are increasingly asking for “green” products that provide benefits to their families, lifestyles and communities. In the past few years, mainstream consumers have shown an interest in environmentally friendly products and are suggesting that manufacturers and retailers follow suit with more of these products.

Gardening is one of the top 10 leisure activities behind reading, watching television, spending time with family and going to the movies. As consumers begin to inquire more about production practices for food items, their interest will expand to other “lifestyle” products that have an effect on the environment. Those industries and companies that are proactive and show consumers how they are addressing their environmental concerns will gain a strategy that differentiates their businesses. The horticulture industry has an opportunity to show consumers that

its flowers and plants are great lifestyle choices and the industry is a leader in environmental stewardship.

## MARKETING PLANTS

Good marketing starts with understanding there is an exchange process between the buyer and seller. In the case of horticulture, we are exchanging sustainably-grown plants for a profit and repeat business. In order to help consumers see the value of both the tangible product (sustainable plants) and the intangible product (sustainable production methods), we should begin to understand the core values that consumers place on sustainable practices and the environment.

Consider the basic benefits that sustainable plants can provide. Clean air and water, fewer waste products and pesticides, and reduced energy use are a few things that are important to consumers. Another benefit that sustainably grown plants provide is the opportunity to explain our industry’s

connection with the environment, including the fact that greenhouse gases aren’t produced by greenhouses.

## MARKETING YOUR COMPANY

Good marketing is also about creating a well-executed plan to show consumers the value of your products. One marketing strategy is to add a personal element to your company through social responsibility.

Many companies have used the concept of social responsibility to show consumers they care about the local community. Growers who show how they are reducing pollution and providing a cleaner environment through their production practices will have an advantage with sustainably grown plants when they find consumers who place value on this process. Those who take the lead in recycling programs, reduce the disposal of plastics and other waste, and save on water usage, will gain the attention of consumers who value this stewardship.

One marketing strategy is to aim your message at consumers who find environmental stewardship important. Your customers are not all alike. However, they can be grouped into similar categories based on values, opinions, age, income, etc.

Customer segments allow you to identify a group of current or potential customers that are similar in one



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Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) consumers seek environmentally-friendly products and their loyalty crosses all product segments.

or more attributes. For example, if retailers want to determine how much consumers are willing to pay for sustainable products, they should search for customers who place the greatest value on purchasing "green" products, reducing carbon footprints and other environmentally friendly activities such as recycling.

This segmentation process can be achieved by asking consumers what they think about specific issues, listening to their reasons for buying certain products or conducting studies to gather their opinions. For example, food products have seen the biggest transformation in consumers actively seeking information about environmental packaging and carbon footprints through "food miles." Reading trade and news publications and local press objectively can help you to gain insight into what consumers are thinking. Many people theorize about why local rather than organically grown

products have become important and why tracking food miles are important.

Consumers use their values to guide their purchases. Good marketers use segmentation to help understand the question, "What does your customer value most?"

### LIFESTYLES OF HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY CONSUMERS

There is one major group that emerges with a strong interest in environmentally friendly products — Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) consumers. Their loyalty crosses all product segments. In 2006, the LOHAS segment in the United States was 46 million households strong and continues to grow. In 2007, this segment was a \$200 billion market. LOHAS consumers look for environmentally friendly and biodegradable packaging and defy the traditional paradigm that brand-

ing and price are the most important considerations for purchasing products. Most research done on this segment is related to food purchases but can easily cross over into gardening products.

How do you identify LOHAS consumers in stores with your products? One way is to be aware of the products they ask for. Ask them how they feel about certain products. Are customers actively seeking information about recycling programs and/or organic gardening? Do they use recyclable shopping bags? A combination of talking and observation will help you identify the LOHAS consumers.

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