

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #7: Pollinator Friendly Plants

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Speaker 1: Welcome to the *Marketing Munchie* podcast series hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week Bridget and her guests will share information, insights, research-based findings, and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now let's join our host, Dr. Bridget Behe.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Welcome, Hayk Khachatryan. Hayk is my guest today on the Marketing Munchie Podcast. Hike is an assistant professor at the University of Florida. He's a good friend and colleague based at the Apopka research center. I invited Hayk on today to talk about one of our recent articles that has to do with visual attention to eco labels, especially for pollinator friendly plants. Welcome, Hayk!

Hayk Khachatryan: Good morning, Bridget. Good to be here.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Well, I really appreciate you coming on the podcast today. I wanted to talk about the article that got published in the journal *Sustainability* and I guess maybe the first question is, what kind of got you on this path with pollinator friendly plants and eco labels?

Hayk Khachatryan: Yes, so what we wanted to understand was how consumers respond to different types of eco labels. In this particular case, we looked at the pollinator friendly label. What pollinator friendly label has to do with recent potential regulation moving towards restricting or labeling certain types of insecticides, namely neonicotinoid insecticides. What we know today is that research is inconclusive about a potential harm that these insecticides cause to the pollinators. Nevertheless, there are indications for these stakeholders because it does affect consumer demand the way they read those labels, the way they perceive those labels does influence the way they chose that. We wanted to understand how this particular label, pollinator friendly, will influence their choice decisions. We also wanted to understand if visual attention to labels has anything to do with their decision making.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yes, so let's talk about that visual attention a little bit. You and I both have been using the eye tracking devices for a while to understand consumer behavior. What did you find in this article that got published in the journal *Sustainability*, what did you find about the consumer's perception, their visual attention to those eco-friendly labels?

Hayk Khachatryan: Yes, so first what we found was in situations where we would present plants that were labeled as pollinator friendly as opposed to those that did not have the label, so what we found that they were willing to, there was more probability for plants that were labeled

to be chosen by the participants than in the cases for the plants that were not labeled. Just having the sign there increased the likelihood that they would select those plants. However, the other question we had, and this was a little different with some industry stakeholders, whether or not the consumers would actually notice the label that says anything about pollinators on it. For that reason, we tried to use eye-tracking in our research because it's the most expressive measure as we were trying to understand if there was attention to those labels. What we found was that indeed the participants of the experiment did pay attention to the labels and those who fixated on the labels were more likely to select those plants than those who did not pay attention. This is an indication that not only having the label there helped them understand that there is increased likelihood for those plants to be selected but also that the visual attention to those was positively correlated with their choice decisions.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yes, and that's really good news for retailers who are posting signs in and around the garden center, you know that pollinator friendly message can attract some consumers. I guess the next question is what did you find about their willingness to pay? Was there any kind of a potential premium that garden centers might charge for these pollinator friendly plants?

Hayk Khachatryan: Yes, definitely. When we conducted this experiments with several landscape plants, the findings were that about 14-15%, there was about 14-15% premium for plants that were labeled as pollinator friendly. The importance of this finding is that regardless of the scientific findings about the effects of neonicotinoids on pollinator health, regardless of the debate, the consumers these days are going to look for those labels that indicate either pollinator friendly or bee friendly. We have some other messages that indicated such as pollinator safe or plants for pollinators. There's also this segment of shoppers, those who indicated that they were aware of the neonics, they indicated that they would like to see a label that indicates neonic free on it. What this means is that the consumers are going to look for those labels and as an industry we can be more explicit and guide them to show the labels in cases where plants are pollinator friendly. It would help to generate more revenue in this case about 50% per plant.

Dr. Bridget Behe: That's great. That's really great. Hayk, anything in this study that might apply to growers or what might be the take home message for individuals or companies that are producing pollinator friendly plants?

Hayk Khachatryan: Yes, most definitely. The implications are for the entire supply chain because we're living in a world where consumers kind of reach the growers directly. We're the case where a shopper could contact the grower and ask about the specific plant, whether or not the plant was treated with certain insecticides. The growers need to be ready to explain and educate the shoppers about the benefits of plants that they are growing, that the homeowners can use to contribute towards pollinator health.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yes, so growers, retailers, wholesalers, everybody can benefit by promoting that pollinator friendly message and I'll post a link to the publication that's in the journal of *Sustainability* that we just talked about the visual attention to eco labels and pollinator friendly plants. I do want to thank our colleagues who also collaborated on the article. Your post-doc Alicia Rihn, Charlie Hall, Ben Campbell, and Chengyen Yue were also co-authors with us on the publication. Thanks again, Hayk for taking time today to be on the Marketing Munchie Podcast and I hope to have you back again soon!

Hayk Khachatryan: Thank you for having me, Bridget.

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Speaker 1: Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchie Podcast. For more information or to download a transcript of this podcast, please visit connect-2-consumer.com. That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T dash the number two dash C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R dot c-o-m.

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