

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript
Episode #9: Bee Friendly and Eco-practices Complete

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Announcer: Welcome to the Marketing Munchies 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: Hi and welcome back to the Marketing Munchie Podcast. This is your host Dr. Bridget Behe and I want to welcome you to episode 9. We're going to continue to talk a little bit about bee-friendly insect management practices and how they relate to other eco-friendly practices in terms of plant production. I hope you've been enjoying the podcast series and if you have, I would enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to leave me a comment about what you're enjoying and maybe some topics that you'd like to have me discuss in future podcast episodes.

As I said, this week I'd like to continue on the topic of bee-friendly insect management practices and try to give you some understanding of consumer perceptions of how they relate to other eco-friendly practices. Sustainable containers made from recycled materials have been in the industry for over a decade or so and there is increasing concern about sourcing of potting mixes or components for potting mixes. We also know that some producers are recycling, recapturing, and recycling water. A study that Dr. Kristen Getter and Heidi Wollaeger and I did back in 2015 took the bee-friendly insect management practices a step further and put it in the context of some of these other eco-friendly practices. You can find the full results of this study in a publication that we had in *Hort Technology* in February of 2016 entitled "Comparative Consumer Perspectives on Eco-Friendly and Insect Management Practices on Floriculture Crops".

In Spring of 2015, we conducted another online survey to investigate this topic of the combination of eco-friendly practices. We collected responses from just over 1,500 consumer subjects dispersed throughout the United States. What we first did was to show them images of four different types of bedding plants: Marigolds, Portulaca, Salvia, and Verbena. These four inch containers were priced at four different price points that range from \$1.99 to \$3.49. We gave them four different insect management scenarios: that the plants were grown using traditional insect management practices, that they were grown using bee-friendly insect management practices, that they were grown using the best insect management practices to protect pollinators, and grown using protective neonicotinoid insecticides.

In addition to the insect management strategy, we also combined that with another eco-friendly practice. There were four of them which included: that the plant was grown in a container made from recycled materials, grown in a sustainably produced potting mix or potting soil, grown using recycled or recaptured water, and lastly grown using traditional plant production methods.

From this part of the study we found that the type of plant, the species, accounted for the biggest part of the purchase decision which is consistent with prior work that we have done. The next most important dimension in their decision to buy that plant or not was price. That was about 25% of the decision. Now price ranked a little bit higher in this study than it has in some of the other work that I've published but I think that is indicative of having all these plants in the same size container and having a pretty widespread in price.

The two pieces that were most interesting in this particular study were the importance of the insect management strategy and the other eco-friendly practices. We were surprised to see that insect management ranked a little bit higher than the other eco-friendly practices. We can only conclude that that probably is due to the amount of information and the number of articles that people are seeing in the press about the use of neonicotinoids and the decline of the bee population, water, and lastly grown using traditional plant production methods.

If you think about it, things like containers made from recycled materials or using sustainably-sourced potting media or recapturing, recycling irrigation water, those topics have been in the news or been in the press I think a lot more. Particularly, earlier than the pollinator issue. It was surprising to us to see that the eco-friendly practices ranked slightly lower than the insect management strategies did.

In terms of those insect management strategies, what was most preferred was the term bee-friendly. The second most preferred term was in insect management strategies that protect pollinators. We actually found a negative or a detracting from the perceived value when we reported that the plant was grown using protective neonicotinoids. I think in terms of what should be put on a label, bee-friendly or protecting pollinators, those positive terms certainly resonate more and have greater perceived value than a negative term neonicotinoid free or the use of protective neonicotinoids.

When we look at the other eco-friendly practices, we found a positive value or a slight uptick in terms of the perceived value when the plant was grown using recycled containers or containers made from recycled materials and sustainable.

In terms of the other eco-friendly practices, what we saw was an uptick when the production method used a sustainable potting mix or recycled or recaptured water. We had a slightly negative perceived value when the container was made from recycled material but that was much, much less than the detraction that we observed when we told the consumers that the plant was grown using traditional production practices. What we can conclude from this part of the study is that it is important for businesses, wholesalers, producers, retailers, to be communicating the environmentally-friendly practices that they are doing, that they have embraced. Including the use of potting mix, recapturing or recycling irrigation water, decreased use of insecticides,

and talking about it in a positive manner, perhaps that these plants were grown in a bee-friendly or a pollinator friendly manner.

We also asked consumers about what factors were important in terms of their plant purchases. What we saw to the greatest extent was that consumers didn't want to have any pesticide residue on their landscape plants. Even though they are not eating them, they wanted to have that very low impact. Now even though they are not eating them, they just didn't want to have the residue on the landscape plant. What was also interesting was slightly behind that was highly rated that they would tolerate some pesticide residue on flowering plants if the pesticides controlled invasive pests, like Japanese beetles.

Here is an area where neonicotinoid use is not as negative. We didn't connect those dots for consumers but controlling an invasive pest was important to them. Furthermore, they wanted flowering plants that had little to no damage. They absolutely did not want to have insects on them. In the area of future study we're going to investigate the use of biocontrols and what happens when consumers see an insect, especially if we can prime them that the insect is a beneficial one. Following that the plant had little to no damage or no insects was that the flowering plant had no pesticide residue in or on the leaves. Then ranked slightly below that was that the plant was produced using bee-friendly practices. Then our lowest rated term was that no neonicotinoids were used during the production of the plant.

When consumers are thinking about their choices and buying flowering plants, they really want perfection. They want little to no damage. They don't want insects on them, beneficial or otherwise, and they don't want residue. It is a challenge for growers, for retailers to give consumers everything they want but I think it's clear that the use of the term bee-friendly or pollinator-friendly is going to garner a higher premium than telling consumers that no neonicotinoids were used or that the production was neonicotinoid free.

In summary, it's interesting to note that the insect management strategy has taken a slight higher level of importance in consumers' minds compared to some of that eco-friendly practices that businesses have been doing, some of them even for decades. The bottom line is we need to be more transparent about how the plants that we grow and market have been grown because there is perceived value in using more contemporary insect management strategies and more environmentally friendly practices.

That's it for this week. Hope you'll join us next week!

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Announcer: Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchies Podcast. For more information or to download the 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.