



Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Consumer in Drought and their Perceptions about Plants and Water

Episode #27

[music]

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 Munchies Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Bridget Behe. Today, I have with me a wonderfully talented bright and up-coming doctoral student, Melinda Knuth. She is at Texas A&M in the doctoral program with Charly Hall. She and I have been working on a grant that has to do with consumer perceptions of water conservation. Welcome, Melinda!

Melinda Knuth: Thank you, I am happy to be here.

Dr. Bridget Behe: I am really excited for us to talk about some of the publications that you and me and Charlie Hall and Tom Fernandez and Pat Huddleston have been working on about what consumers are thinking about in terms of water use. Let's start with the first one: What was the title of the first article that we were able to publish from this SCRI grant?

Melinda Knuth: It is called, "Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes, and Purchase Behavior with Landscape Plants during Real and Perceived Drought Periods."

Dr. Bridget Behe: Wow. That's a mouthful! If you were going to boil that down to a simpler title, what might you call that?

Melinda Knuth: Understanding consumer behavior during real and perceived drought.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Excellent. I like that much better too. Really, what we want to talk about today is the implications of when consumers actually are in a drought, but whether they perceive it or not, we found that it influenced their water use.

Let's back up a little bit first. Do you want to talk about the survey, and how we did this?

Melinda Knuth: We conducted an online survey to assess, first of all, what area of the United States the participants were in, and also if they knew if they were in an actual drought or not. We surveyed approximately 1500 participants in September 2016.

Dr. Bridget Behe: How did you define whether they were actually in a drought or not in a drought?

Melinda Knuth: We use the National Drought Monitor which is out of the University of Nebraska to assess what time period they were in drought. We surveyed in September of 2016, and we used the Drought Monitor from that same time period to assess their actual drought.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Great. Let's first talk about their demographics, because sometimes we know that the characteristics of the people can influence their attitudes and behavior. These two groups, the ones who (now remember everyone was in a drought) but the ones who perceived it accurately and the ones who didn't accurately perceive it. Did we find any differences in their demographic characteristics?

Melinda Knuth: Demographically, no. They appeared to be similar. That would be similar in age, in their household size, in their income, and all areas that we generally try to categorize participants.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Okay, great. That makes the samples or the subsamples compatible.

Let's get right to the chase. What were some of the key findings? Were they different attitudinally? Were they different behaviorally? What was the big take-home message?

Melinda Knuth: It ended up that they were different behaviorally. If we look at some of their irrigation patterns they were different when it came to irrigating turf grass and landscape beds. The ones that were irrigating more were those who knew they were in a drought and correctly perceived it. Which is very interesting, because since they know they are in drought, we would think that they would potentially want to conserve water. It's a little bit different from what we anticipated.

Dr. Bridget Behe: So, the people who accurately knew they were in drought used more water than the people who didn't believe they were in drought?

Melinda Knuth: Correct.

Dr. Bridget Behe: What is the take-home message for the industry? How would you tell garden retailers or plant growers what we do with this?

Melinda Knuth: For the individuals who knew they were in drought and still continued to irrigate more, for them, it would be marketing low input and water conserving cultivars to that segment of consumers. For the not-correctly-perceiving, those who didn't know they were in drought but they were actually in drought, more education would be necessary so that they could understand that they were in drought because they were a segment that were actually using less water. Education could be useful there and then also again, giving them an option for a low-input cultivar.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yes, that's great. What we're going to do in light of the findings the results that you were able to generate from the survey data, we're going to begin testing some of those messages in the Garden Center—using some eye-tracking hardware to really understand who attends to that message. I think it's fascinating that both of these groups, even though they are not going to look different, they have different attitudes and behaviors, and maybe we can reach both of them with some signage that talks about plants that conserve water in the landscape. I

think there is a lot of opportunity for garden retailers/plant producers in the future to really incorporate some of the findings that we found and help to keep their businesses sustainable even during future periods of drought.

Melinda Knuth: Yes.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Well that was exciting, Mel! I really appreciate you coming on the podcast today, and we will talk about some other publications on another podcast. Thanks again!

Melinda Knuth: Yes, thank you!

[music]

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.org. 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.

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.