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## NETWORKING WITH PRIVATE ENTERPRISES TO SHOWCASE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE PROGRAMS

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**Abstract.** The 1990's have deemed the decade of the environment; a time when public awareness, research and regulatory agencies consolidate efforts to protect the environment. Educators in the field of environmental sciences have tried a number of innovative approaches to address environmental concerns. The University of Florida has attempted to meet this challenge through a state-wide effort to educate Floridians regarding outdoor conservation practices including: water conservation, pesticide and fertilizer management, recycling of yard waste and the benefits of designing low maintenance areas in the landscape. This program became known as Environmental Landscape Management (ELM). In an attempt to promote, market and educate residents on concepts of ELM and enhance the image of the University of Florida, efforts were made to extend outreach programs into recreation and leisure time, shopping and through the mass media utilized in the home.

The Cooperative Extension System has long been recognized as one of the most effective educational organizations in the world. The extension system has been a leader in disseminating practical research-based knowledge and leadership skill to millions of Americans for more than 80 years. These successes have been widely acknowledged and have resulted in the extension model being replicated world wide in more than 60 countries. To remain effective over time, extension educational programs have been amended to meet the educational demand of rural, suburban and urban America. Likewise, the Extension Service will need to continue to mod-

ify its strategy for marketing and promotion of educational programs into the new millennium.

Promotional and marketing programs which improved educational outreach efforts, enhanced the image of Extension, and communicated results to decision makers were non-existent in the Extension System during the 1970's. Numerous states developed a marketing program during the mid and late 1980's with these efforts regarded as important but not necessarily critical. The 1990's have been a period of local and state budget cutbacks were prevalent making marketing essential to the survival and continuing success of the Extension System. According to Boldt, (1992), if extension professionals, volunteers and clientele do not strategically market Extension to private and public funding agencies, this national treasure may not exist in the next century. Boldt states that a new paradigm involving strategic marketing must be created for the Extension System. Extension must create private and public funding partnerships to augment and enhance the Extension educational dissemination base.

The 1990's have been deemed the decade of the environment; a time when public awareness, research and regulatory agencies consolidate efforts to protect the environment. Educators in the field of environmental sciences have tried a number of innovative approaches to address environmental concerns. While this may be the case, data suggests only the behaviors of a few have changed in some ways. Overall most Americans have failed to make the dramatic changes in their environment deemed necessary by many environmental educators.

According to President Bill Clinton, the use of environmentally beneficial landscaping practice is one area which educators have focused on in an effort to benefit the environment and generate long-term cost savings for homeowners, businesses and the government. "Environmentally beneficial landscaping entails utilizing techniques that complement and enhance the local environment and seek to minimize that adverse effect that the landscaping will have on it" (Clinton, 1994).

In 1993, the University of Florida made a state-wide effort to educate Floridians regarding outdoor conservation prac-

tices including: water conservation, pesticide and fertilizer management, recycling of yard waste and the benefits of designing low maintenance areas in the landscape. This program became known as Environmental Landscape Management (ELM). More than 1,000 Floridians participated in the program and in June of 1997 a social marketing study was carried out to determine the effectiveness of this effort on residents environmental landscape practices. These data suggest that education and promotions directed at changing behaviors should be focused on an individual's commitment and sense of responsibility toward the environment. While most respondents had taken into consideration, the economic impact on their behavior, it did not deter them from performing ELM practices. Additional meta analysis studies by Hines et al. (1987) indicate there is a positive correlation between knowledge and environmental behavior, indicating that "individuals with greatest knowledge of environmental issue and/or knowledge of how to take action on these issue were more likely to have reported engaging in responsible environmental behavior than those who did not possess this knowledge." This being the case, the greater the exposure that citizens have to environmental information, the greater the citizens' knowledge base with the potentials for greater environmental impact. In an attempt to educate residents on concepts of ELM, efforts were made to extend outreach programs into recreation and leisure time, shopping and through the mass media utilized in the home. Likewise, such efforts result in communications with decision makers and funding sources while ultimately enhancing the image of the University of Florida.

#### Outreach Efforts Extended To Citizens During Recreation

Opportunities to network with private enterprises to showcase the University of Florida's environmental horticulture program has provided an avenue to reach citizens during recreational activities. Walt Disney Company is a leading American entertainment enterprise operating theme parks, resorts, motion pictures and a cable television channel. Recognizing the educational outreach potential of working with a private enterprise which beckons millions of visitors to their operation, the Florida Cooperative Extension Service began hosting an annual exhibit at the International Flower and Garden Festival housed each year at the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) in Orlando, Florida. Beginning in the spring of 1994, EPCOT hosted what has become the Annual International Flower and Garden Festival with an attendance of more than 1.5 million guests. The University of Florida, Master Gardener Volunteers and agents hosted exhibits at EPCOT'S International Flower and Garden Festival Exhibits. In April 1997, EPCOT hosted a special 25th Anniversary celebration which was showcased via promotional efforts including: full color tri-fold promotional festival brochures, radio advertisements, state wide television advertisement campaigns, newspaper and magazine articles in national magazines, Web site location, horticultural tours, special celebrity guest and television personalities, cartoon characters, promotional buttons, stickers, special exhibits, interactive programs, special events, festival merchandise and partnerships with 18 organizations such as Goldsmith Seed Company, Monrovia Nursery, Rain Bird sprinkler manufacturers and World Bank.

Working in conjunction with Master Gardener volunteers from 15 counties, agents and volunteers staffed a Florida

Yards and Neighborhood Exhibit festival event. The Florida Yards and Neighborhood program is an environmental education and action program that promotes concepts of environmental landscape maintenance and pollution prevention. The goals of the program are to conserve water, protect bays and waterways from storm water runoff and encourage residents to adopt environmental landscape management practice in maintaining their yards. More than 180 agents and Master Gardener volunteers from fifteen counties staffed the University of Florida exhibit for the entire duration of the 45-day event. Those counties represented during the festival were: Lake, Seminole, Osceola, Brevard, Manatee, Hillsborough, Hernando, Lee, Orange, St. Lucie, Sarasota, Volusia, Highlands, Flagler, and Pinellas.

During the 1997 festival the University of Florida showcased "Florida Friendly" concepts of ELM and the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program. Florida residents as well as out-of-state visitors had an opportunity to learn more about the principles of environmental horticulture through the Florida Yards and Neighborhood program's themes to include:

Table 1. Program themes.

Theme	Concepts
Right Plant - Right Spot	Plants suited to a location will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizers and pesticides.
Fertilizing	When over applied, fertilizers aggravate pest problems and make plants grow excessively.
Mulching	Mulch retains soil moisture, moderates soil temperature and help prevent weeds and erosion.
Recycling	Grass clippings, leaves and yard trimmings are recycled rather than be discarded.
Pest Management	Unwise use of pesticides results in pest resistance and can cause harm to people, pets, beneficial organisms and the environment.

Throughout the duration of the festival, volunteers recorded information related to types of horticulture questions asked according to nine categories: appropriate plant selection, water efficiency, fertilization practices, mulching and porous surfaces, pest management, general extension information, Disney information, Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program information, and others. Of the 1547 festival guests who requested information 41% were state of Florida residents and 59% represented others states or nations. Data indicated Florida residents predominately visited the exhibit on the weekends while out of state and international guests toured the University of Florida exhibit on week days. A total of 1,723 recorded requests for information was made with the public regarding the following topics.

Table 2.

Requested Information	Percent of Total
Right Plant - Right Spot	8%
Fertilizing the Landscape	10%
Mulching	6%
Recycling	5%
Pest Management	4%
Water Efficiency	30%
Cooperative Extension Information	7%
Florida Yards & Neighborhoods	3%
Disney Information	8%
Others	20%

### **Outreach Efforts Extended To Citizens During Shopping**

According to the National Gardening Association (1995), the largest group of home gardeners is between 30-49 years old, college graduates, married with an income of more than \$30,000 and living in the suburban homes in the south and the Midwest. By the 21st century, it is predicted that there will be more than 20 million gardeners with a trend toward integrating the concept of gardening as a lifestyle related to every aspect of life. Data also indicate that 72 million households spend more than \$22.2 billion each year on gardening and landscaping. Recognizing the potentials of extending educational information to consumers while they shop, the University of Florida has also created another private/public networking opportunity through a pilot project with Home Depot.

An evaluation of Environmental Landscape Management Practices revealed that most consumers obtain their information on landscape care from retail nurseries and garden center employees. The Home Depot pilot project was developed to assist the University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service in determining the effectiveness of establishing cooperative education ventures with the retail industry and extending the accessibility of the Cooperative Extension Service to residents. Point of purchase contacts are often viewed in marketing as vital to influencing the customers purchase decision.

In 1996, the Cooperative Extension Service began a pilot project in an effort to market concepts of environmental landscape management and the Florida Yards and Neighborhood Program in 17 west coast Home Depot stores located between Tampa and Naples, Florida. The initial goals of this project were to reach the consumers at the critical point of purchase stage and to provide training for garden center staff.

University of Florida Faculty have conducted two training session for garden staff, providing reference materials and background on ELM recommendations. In turn, Home Depot published two pages of information on Florida Friendly Landscaping in their September and October 1996 catalogs. More than three million catalogs featuring information on fertilization, plant selection and mulching were distributed to residents of southwest Florida. Home Depot is utilizing several marketing strategies to get the information to the public. Some of these promotional efforts include promoting Florida Yards and Neighborhood (FYN) in its sales catalogue, placing FYN banners in the stores, using 12 small "shelf talkers" with Florida friendly landscaping tips in product stocking areas. Garden staff is also using FYN materials during their plant clinics and is setting up special displays promoting Florida-Friendly practices and related products. University of Florida publications are also for sales in the stores. This project has proven to be extremely valuable insight on ways to extend FYN educational information through mass merchandising operations.

### **Outreach Efforts Extended To Citizens In The Home**

Television ranks as one of the major influences on American life and affect the way people spend their time, as well as what and how they learn. Approximately 98% of the homes in the United States have at least one television set equating to approximately 200 million sets. On average, televisions are watched in the home approximately seven hours every day. A

typical adult spends more time watching television than doing anything else except sleeping, and working. Watching television ranks as the most time-consuming leisure activity among adults. Because of this widespread popularity, television has an important influence on today's culture including how people spend their time and money as well as what they see and learn (World Book, 1996).

The television, sometimes referred to as "the device that brings the world into the home," the Florida Cooperative Extension Service has recognized television as an *ideal tool* for bringing horticulture education into the living rooms of the citizens of Florida. Central Florida Extension agents have been working in conjunction with local television stations in the process of dissemination information via hosting garden segments. To receive maximum public exposure horticulture programs are presented in conjunctions with the news and weather broadcast. Horticulture segments broadcasted before business hours the during and noon news and weather broadcasts results in more than 100,000 viewers per airing. Central Florida Extension agents also host a half hour garden program which has the potentials of reaching 10,000 viewers per episode. Within the state of Florida, horticulture extension agents in 14 counties appeared on 279 television broadcast providing citizens with timely information on environmental landscape management.

Radio is another form of the mass media which has long been recognized as one of the most important means of communications for millions of listeners throughout the world. A major reason for the widespread use of radios is their portability providing citizens with the ability to listen to radios almost anywhere in home and outdoors. This being the case, Extension agents in Central Florida have utilized radio as a means of extending horticultural information to the public. For the past 10 years, Extension agents in Orange county have hosted the Better Lawns and Gardens program featuring a two-hour garden "call in" show. This broadcast has a listening audience of with 44,000 listeners every fifteen minutes. State annual reports indicate that horticulture agents in 17 counties participated in 582 radio presentation on environmental horticulture topics during 1996-1997.

Ranked amongst the highest utilized communication tool for public information, the newspaper is a publication devoted chiefly to presenting and commenting on the news. Newspapers have the advantage over other major media being able to cover more news and more details as well as providing a hard copy which can serve as a reference source which can be retained and referred to at a later date. Within Florida, statewide reports indicate Extension agents in 24 counties have published 1398 newspaper articles for features stories, question and answer, timely garden tips, and program announcement. In the Orlando area alone, over 125,000 residents obtain needed gardening information through the Saturday paper.

### **Summary**

The ultimate end to all educational efforts has been to extend the mission of the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences to protect and sustain natural resources and environmental systems; enhance the development of human resources; and improve the quality of human life through the development of knowledge in agricultural, human and natural resources. It would appear evident that

the key to public awareness of critical environmental issues and modification of residential landscape practices is to make relevant information and knowledge conveniently accessible to the greatest number of citizens. Working in conjunction with agencies who provide resident with recreational opportunities, provide good and services as well as delivery of information within the home, ultimately providing an ideal avenue to extend environmental education to the citizen of Florida. Networking with private enterprises provides an opportunity to showcase environmental horticulture programs and the University of Florida and has the added benefit of communicating results to decision makers while enhancing the image of the University of Florida.

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