

# Increasing Retail Sales *of* BC Plants

## Strategies for Retailers & Nursery Growers



*Funding provided by:*

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Canadian Nursery Landscape Association  
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### **Acknowledgements**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is pleased to participate in the development of this strategy to increase sales of BC-grown plants, at retail. AAFC is committed to working with our industry partners and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC to increase public awareness of the agriculture and agri-food industry to Canada.

Opinions expressed in this document are those of the BCLNA and CNLA, and not necessarily AAFC's.

# Introduction

The domestic market for ornamental plants remains flat in spite of increased interest in gardening and landscaping in recent years.

This is not a uniquely BC or Canadian situation, but a world-wide phenomenon tied in no small measure to the current economic climate. Garden perennials, annuals, trees and shrubs, and related purchases, compete with other so-called 'luxury' items for the consumer dollar.

Along with decreased consumer spending, the industry is coping with higher energy and labour input costs, as well as ongoing competition from imported plant material.

Working with the Canadian Landscape & Nursery Association (CNLA), the BC Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA) led the development of this project, **Increasing Retail Sales of BC Plants**, outlining strategies and specific actions that can be undertaken by and on behalf of BC's Garden Retailers and Nursery Growers.

It should be pointed out that the project is designed to promote the sale of BC-grown plant material *which may or may not include native species grown in BC and which may or may not be organic*.

Funding was obtained from the Agriculture Environmental Partnership Initiative—Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Investment Agriculture Foundation, BCLNA's Industry Development Council and the CNLA.

The survey instruments and draft versions of this document were reviewed by an active industry steering group which provided input and oversight.

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# Executive Summary

This project is the second of two recent initiatives undertaken by the BCLNA on behalf of BC's Garden Retailers, both funded as outlined in the Introduction and both utilizing some of the same literature and other background research material. The first report was the **Environmental Checklist for Garden Centres & Retail Nurseries**, a comprehensive tool completed in July 2009 and made available to all BCLNA members along with a record keeping workbook.

The present report, **Increasing Retail Sales of BC Plants**, is intended to:

- increase retail nurseries' ability to sell more locally grown plants successfully by more effectively competing for consumers' leisure/lifestyle dollars
- enable growers to better understand their role in supporting their retail nursery customers in becoming more competitive in their marketing and merchandising
- improve the viability of retail nurseries and growers.

**The Case for Promoting BC Grown Plants** Definitions for 'locally grown' are provided, making it clear that a widely accepted definition is lacking. The current 100-mile phenomenon is presented as a potential 'wave' that can be taken advantage of and the consumer 'buy in' to such programs is explored. Key questions to be answered are listed, chief among these the need to determine triggers that can motivate consumers to preferentially purchase BC-grown plants.

**Situation Analysis** An up-to-date snapshot of the provincial economy and the horticulture industry in Canada, and within British Columbia, is presented. An overview of several 'buy local' initiatives from this region and from other jurisdictions is included.

**What Has Been Learned?** Online surveys were distributed to hundreds of BC and Canadian Growers and Retailers, as well as to more than 800 retailers from the US and around the world. A consumer survey was also put into the field—consumers being the ultimate linchpin in any initiative designed to increase retail sales. These are the key findings:

- **From Retailers**
  - While quality is the most important buying attribute, BC Growers do not achieve 'excellent' status in their view
  - The environmental, economic and quality advantages of buying local are marketable
  - Merchandising materials supporting BC-grown plants would be used
  - Participation in the BuyBC program is seen as desirable, in particular the ability to receive BC plants pre-labelled as such
  - Would support a BCLNA-sponsored consumer awareness program.
- **From Growers**
  - Growers' self-assessment for the most part matches that of their Retailer counterparts
  - Would be prepared to tag, price competitively, promote at wholesale level and grow according to consumer trends
  - BC Retailers could provide more and better BC plants-related training for their staff
  - Would support a BCLNA-sponsored consumer awareness program.
- **From Consumers**
  - There is wide understanding of the environmental and economic benefits of buying local, and an appetite to support related initiatives
  - There is frustration at not being able to easily identify the origin of plants
  - While BC-grown plants are a desirable option, they do not have a particular image.

One-to-one discussions took place with BC Retailers and Growers at the Canwest 2009 Horticulture Show in Vancouver where advantage was also taken of several retail seminars.

Current Print Measurement Bureau data on gardening as a leisure activity in Canada was made available to the researcher and indicates that gardening is alive and well in Canada and in BC.

The BCLNA had previously held workshops with garden retailers, landscapers, nursery growers and educators and the selling of local plants was explored within a broader agenda.

An extensive web and literature review was undertaken as part of the earlier Environmental Checklist project and selling more BC-grown plants to BC consumers was one recommendation.

**Objectives and Outcomes** This section outlines the desired outcomes of the project as they relate to the three key audiences:

- BC Retailers see value in selling BC-grown material and can obtain it easily
- BC Growers achieve production capacity without a corresponding decrease in export sales
- BC consumers develop a preference for BC-grown plants, can find them easily and satisfy thereby most of their plant purchase needs.

**Positioning** Every communication that goes out promoting BC-grown plant material should reflect a consistent stance as to its benefits. One reason the previous Thumbs Up program did not succeed was the lack of a consumer communications component. A statement positioning 'brand BC-grown plants' has been developed to serve as a filter for such communications.

**Key Messaging** The more often industry and consumer audiences see and hear consistent statements about BC-grown plants, the more likely they are to embrace that messaging and to act. This section outlines the perceptions that recommended strategies and related communications should strive to generate for BC Retailers, BC Growers and for consumers.

**Strategies and Recommendations** Understanding that the BC plants retail sales initiative will be successful if BC Growers, BC Retailers and the BCLNA work together, this section outlines strategies for consideration by these two commodity groups and by the BCLNA on their behalf.

- **For the BCLNA**
  - Embrace BuyBC and participate fully in the program
  - Provide merchandising, promotional and copy materials for retail use
  - Execute consumer awareness campaign
  - Facilitate working relationship between BC Retailers and Growers.
- **For BC Retailers**
  - Obtain and utilize merchandising materials developed by the BCLNA
  - Execute joint retail-grower consumer events, at retail locations
  - Employee training.
- **For BC Growers**
  - Use BuyBC labels/stickers on shipments going to BC Retailers
  - Participate in joint retail-grower events at retail locations
  - Top 10 BC plants list, and related promotion
  - Provide pro-active customer service
  - Promote BC plants to landscape customers as well.

The need for BC Growers and BC Retailers to collaborate in the motivation and winning over of BC consumers is clear.

# The Case for Promoting BC Grown Plants

The 'locally grown' label is part of food and other retailers' push to tap into consumer desires for fresh safe products that support small, local farmers and, because they're not trucked so far, have the least detrimental effect on the environment. Consumers are often more interested in the fact that vegetables or plants are locally grown than whether they are 'organic'. While it is likely that food or plant material is fresher if it's not trucked great distances, there's no evidence that such products are necessarily 'safer' in terms of the use of pesticides or other materials.

## ***What Does Locally Grown Mean?***

'Local' is one of the hottest quality cues right now, particularly in the world of food. It is quickly overtaking 'organic' for many consumers, whether interested in health or food experiences.

Retailers of fresh product—produce or ornamental plants—may have a broader definition of 'local' than do consumers. Some retailers consider anything grown in the same politically defined province or state as it's sold to be 'local', regardless of the geographic expanse or the size of the growing operation that might be involved. The consumer might define 'local' as 5-ha field and greenhouse operation just down the road. Other retailers consider that anything grown within a certain number of hours or kilometres of the store to be local; still others consider anything grown in the general region as local.

For regulatory purposes, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency defines 'country of origin' as one growing season for annuals and perennials and one year for shrubs and trees, in the stated country.

What does BC-grown mean? For purposes of the BuyBC program, the BC Agricultural Council defines BC-grown as "food, fish, beverages or agricultural products which are 100% grown, caught or raised in British Columbia."

## ***100-Mile Food/100-Mile Plants***

Certainly the 100-mile concept is more compelling and marketable for food—once an apple is picked it immediately starts to deteriorate whereas a potted plant continues to grow (although temperature extremes, poor handling and lack of water can cause damage). Food production also carries a bigger environmental and economic footprint—and therefore opportunity for positive impact thereon—by simple virtue of the size of the industry.

Ornamental plants actually provide multiple benefits to society in and of themselves and regardless of their growing distance from market—economically, environmentally and in terms of human lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> These benefits are not necessarily understood by the general population and, along with aspects of the 100-mile concept, constitute an opportunity to promote locally grown plants.

Consumers are the key, for BC's Retailers and for Growers, and ultimately that's where the appeal has to be made. Retailers have to respond to consumer needs and wants and Growers, in turn, have to meet BC Retailer requirements.

However, this is also true. A wander around many (but by no means all) BC garden centres, large or small, reveals that much of what is on the bench is imported, from the US first and foremost, from other Canadian provinces and even from other world locations.

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<sup>1</sup> A more in-depth discussion of the benefits of plants can be found in Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Literature Review of the Documented Health and Environmental Benefits Derived from Ornamental Horticulture Products, George Morris Centre, 2007.

## ***What Motivates Consumers?***

What motivates some consumers to purchase locally produced goods? There are many societal and cultural factors at play and one is a shift toward companies, products, brands and services that embrace certain lifestyles or values—environmental consciousness, families, wholesomeness, fair trade etc. ‘All things local’ can be termed a lifestyle—something demographics alone cannot define.

Many consumers want to buy into products and brands that support the lifestyle-oriented communities they value and of which they feel a part. Buying local gives them the direct link into those communities, and provides a sense of belonging, of knowing the producers and even of ‘doing the right thing’.

But not all consumers are so motivated. Some have only a mild interest in buying ‘local’ and may depend on friends, family and others for recommendations as to their purchase decisions. Others will always be motivated by price or factors other than origin and no amount of persuasion will shift them from that point of view.

## ***Some Questions that Need to be Answered***

The BCLNA’s ‘Increasing Retail Sales of BC Plants’ initiative seeks to answer the following questions, and recommend strategies whereby BC Growers can confidently supply more product to BC Retailers, *both groups having confidence that consumer awareness and preference is going to be there.*

- What are the triggers that will encourage more BC consumers to buy more BC-grown plants? Will they buy BC plants just because they’re marketed as such? At what point does price override other product features such as quality and origin?
- Which among these triggers can be provided by BC Retailers? BC Growers? The BCLNA?
- What retail buying, merchandising, display, promotion and other techniques will encourage more BC consumers to buy more plants, generally?
- Do BC Growers whose business is primarily export have the desire and the capacity to fully serve the domestic market as well?
- Do consumers really care whether or not a garden annual or perennial is locally grown or imported? Or do they just not know how to tell the difference? If they say they prefer to buy local, do they really do it?
- Is there a clear value proposition for the consumer in favour of buying a BC-grown product?
- Is US pricing so advantageous that it doesn’t make sense for BC Retailers to buy locally?
- What is being done in other jurisdictions, Canadian and otherwise, to encourage the sales of locally grown plants and other products?

This project does not suggest that BC Growers replace successful export trade with domestic; nor does it suggest that BC Retailers should replace all imported product with locally grown. What it seeks to do is increase the sale of BC plants as a distinct category of purchase, but also within the context of increasing plant sales overall.

Clearly this is a goal that can be embraced by BC Retailers and Growers, together. For that reason the project provides strategies for both groups, as well as recommending some actions to be taken by the BCLNA on their behalf.

# Situation Analysis

## ***Provincial Economic Outlook***

After the pounding British Columbia's economy took during the first half of 2009, it might look like a stretch to be considering a return to growth in the period ahead. However, signs are emerging to suggest the bottom will be reached in 2009 and that conditions will improve thereafter.<sup>2</sup>

Retail sales and housing starts have stabilized (even trending slightly higher) since spring, both breaking from rapid declines during the fall and winter. Housing sales and re-sales, the classic recruiting ground for new gardeners and pull-through for ornamentals, are widely reported to be rebounding. These are clear signals that BC's economy is moving into the late stages of recession and poised to expand next year, and that consumer confidence is beginning to return. That said, the downturn in activity has been extensive and will result in 2009 entering the history books as the toughest year since 1982. In fact, the impact of the recession on virtually all parts of our economy (including manufacturing, natural resources, construction, services, capital spending, government revenues and the labour market) has prompted RBC to revise the rate of decline in real GDP to -2.6% from a -1.9% decline in their Provincial Outlook report for June 2009.

The expected recovery in 2010 will reflect improvements in both domestic and external markets. A strengthening global economy is expected to boost demand for commodities and reinvigorate the province's export sector, although the rising Canadian dollar remains a concern.<sup>3</sup> Spending on capital investment projects—including by governments—will continue, supplemented by rising consumer expenditures and a pick-up in new housing construction. Retail sales will enter positive territory, unemployment will begin to drop and real GDP is expected to return to 2007 pre-recession levels.

Performance next year will also be brightened by a bump in tourism spending associated with the 2010 Winter Games. Real GDP in the province is forecast to rebound to 3.1% in 2010, up marginally from RBC's earlier projection of 2.9%.

## ***Industry Snapshot—November 2009***

### **Canada**

The ornamental horticulture sector continues to be a significant component of Canadian agriculture overall. Consumers spent nearly \$6.3 billion at the retail level in 2007, with average household expenditure on ornamentals at \$650.<sup>4</sup>

Ornamental horticulture is the largest horticulture sub-segment with \$2.3 billion in farm gate receipts, nationally. Ontario accounts for 50%, BC is at 24% and Quebec 14%. 24.4% of all gross farm receipts were generated by growing operations located within Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA). This proximity of production to major urban centres shortens shipping distances, providing a competitive advantage when it comes to the potential to be recognized as 'locally grown'.

The total economic contribution of the ornamental horticulture sector to the Canadian economy is \$14.48 billion, with \$4.49 billion of that accounted for by production.

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<sup>2</sup> Source of data in this section: RBC Provincial Outlook, September 2009 (most recent data available as of November 15, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> As of November 15, 2009 the Canadian dollar is at .95.

<sup>4</sup> Source of data in this section: The Impact of Ornamental Horticulture on Canada's Economy, Deloitte & Touche LLP, 2009.

There are 110,750 direct full time positions in the sector rising to 132,776 when indirect employment is factored in (season workers are not included). 30,541 of these positions are in nursery and greenhouse production and 48,724 in retail. For every two jobs in the ornamental horticulture sector, another job is generated elsewhere in the economy.

The sector generates \$3.8 billion in employment income and \$850 million in end-user taxes.<sup>5</sup>

For seven of the past ten years Canada has had a positive balance of trade in ornamental horticulture. In the last three years the balance has shifted with an increase in the total value of imported cut flowers, live plants, branches, foliage and bulbs. The majority of our \$313 million in exports and \$375 million in imports are with the US, but imports also come in from historic trading partners like the Netherlands and emerging low-cost cut-flower producers like Ecuador, Columbia and Guatemala. The value of Canada's total exports in 2007 was 15% lower than the previous five-year average.

## British Columbia

The horticulture industry is also a significant component of British Columbia's agricultural sector. The latest figures<sup>6</sup> show that BC has the third highest sector output in Canada at \$1.05 billion—\$531.2 million in production and \$302.2 million in retail sales—with 16,282 people directly employed. The total economic impact in BC is \$2.03 billion and 25,065 jobs. The BC ornamental horticulture industry enjoys Canada's second highest growth rate cited as 2.5% from 2002-2007.

In 2002 the Canadian dollar began to increase in value against the US dollar and by November 2007 it reached its highest point, remaining at or close to par for the following year. After dipping as low as 77 cents in March 2009, as of November 2009 it is once again approaching par and impacting BC's cost competitiveness. While total floriculture and nursery exports declined nationally only 3% between 2006 and 2007, BC suffered a larger year-over-year decline of 11%.<sup>7</sup>

Including both BCLNA members and non-members, it is estimated<sup>8</sup> that there are:

- 650 - 750 BC Retailers
- 1150 BC Growers serving those retailers as well as exporting product out of province and into the US; some with retail operations as well.

## Buying Local—A Look Around the World

There are literally dozens of fully-fledged 'buy local food' campaigns throughout Canada, the US, Europe and the UK, and Australia. Some such as [California Grown](#); [Buy Local, Buy Vermont](#); and [Australian Made, Australian Grown](#) are quite sophisticated and well-funded.



More familiar to Canadians and British Columbians in particular are the Foodland Ontario, Heart of Washington and our own BuyBC program.

<sup>5</sup> Ornamentals are the only sector of agriculture that attracts GST at the first transfer step in the value chain.

<sup>6</sup> Source of data in this section: The Impact of Ornamental Horticulture on Canada's Economy, Deloitte & Touche LLP, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Canadian Horticulture Sector, 2007 Crop Year Performance Overview <http://www4.agr.gc.ca/AAFC-AAC/display-afficher.do?id=1220460148416&lang=eng>

<sup>8</sup> Figures provided by the BCLNA and are 'educated guesses' and based on multiple data sources.

[Foodland Ontario](#) is the long-established consumer promotion program of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. This user-pay program partners with producers to achieve maximum consumer purchase of Ontario-produced fresh and processed agricultural products by communicating the benefits, coordinating promotion and research activities with producer organizations and industry stakeholders, and promoting the Ontario 'brand'.

In 1986, the slogan "Good things grow in Ontario" gave way to the more competitive slogan "Ontario, there's no taste like home". Consumer communications have involved a two-pronged promotion approach, focusing on 'taste' through commodity-specific messages and a 'buy local/buy from home' message.



[From the Heart of Washington](#) is a public awareness campaign designed to increase consumer demand for Washington state food and agricultural products. It is facilitated by the Washington State Department of Agriculture and advised by a diverse board consisting of government, food industry, and small farm interests. By partnering with local growers, retailers, consumers, and allied industries, From the Heart of Washington promotes hundreds of locally-grown and made products.



The program has gained recognition and support since inception in 2001, heightening awareness of and increasing dependence on the Washington agricultural industry, and positively impacting the state economy, the environment and quality of life.

The program also helps retailers promote Washington grown products to consumers through signage and branding programs, all of which make Washington products easier for consumers to identify at the point of purchase.

Launched in 1993, the user-pay [BuyBC](#) program has been the most successful food and beverage initiative ever jointly undertaken by the provincial government and private industry.



There are now over 1,200 companies and associations using the Buy BC logo in advertising and promotional materials and over 5,000 Buy BC products identified at major grocery retailers throughout the province.

The Buy BC program has been tremendously successful at increasing consumer awareness of BC products and helping consumers identify them in store—consumer recognition of the Buy BC logo is now over 75%.

Initiated by the BC Restaurant and Food Services Association, [Eat & Drink BC!](#) is designed to promote the consumption of locally grown and prepared foods and has as its foundation the relationship between food growers, distributors and restaurants. An October 2009 promotion featured two fixed menu options featuring foods grown, raised or substantively processed in BC, partnered with BC wines and beers.



The Lower Mainland Vegetable Producers established [BCfresh](#) to ensure the orderly marketing of root crop vegetables produced in the Fraser Valley based on freshness and economic benefit of buying local.



*"Eating 'local' also helps families and communities grow. Every dollar earned by a BCfresh vegetable grower generates \$6 to \$7 in income for other British Columbians. And the BCfresh vegetable industry helps support over 6,000 families throughout the province who earn their livelihood on farms or in the agri-business community."*

The root crop industry represents more than \$100 million in retail value to our province.

There are many other 'buy local' initiatives, often small, grassroots programs, running on zeal as much as anything. We estimate that 99% of 'buy local' programs are in support of food and wine—the familiar '100-mile' concept—as only a very few campaigns were found, anywhere, promoting locally grown ornamental plant material.

[Pick Ontario](#) is an integrated marketing and communications campaign developed by Flowers Canada (Ontario) to raise awareness, interest and demand for Ontario-grown cut flowers and potted plants. It received funding from the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, the Agricultural Adaptation Council and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and its overall design was based on Foodland Ontario.



*"Freshness. Quality. Local. Variety. The reasons are clear why Ontario-grown cut flowers and potted plants are the preferred choice. From the greenhouse to the store in no time at all, when you support our province's farmers and Pick Ontario, you are assured the freshest product available."*

Pick Ontario has been promoted with transit advertising, billboards, huge displays at Canada Blooms and giant grower truck logos. Growers, wholesalers and retailers, including grocery stores, sign up to participate and report that they have seen sales gains. The website includes a forum however there has been no traffic since April 2009. That said:

*"The major grocery retailers all endorse our campaign and logo and have been starting to integrate its use in seasonal promotions," said marketing director Gary Gander. "Anecdotally, I can tell you that the reaction from consumers and florists and growers is positive. Those that know about floriculture in Ontario typically say 'it's about time', and those that don't (consumers) are thrilled to learn just what's available locally."*

[Plant Publicity Holland](#) (PPH) is a trade (as opposed to consumer) initiative has as its principal goal the collective promotion and sale of Dutch hardy nursery stock, organizing a wide range of activities designed to do so in the Netherlands, North America, Japan and other European countries and in both consumer and the landscape market.



PPH uses television, radio, trade shows, print and trade publications to promote the benefits of plant material grown in Holland, with 'right plant, right place' as the core message to consumers, to landscapers and to local authorities responsible to the maintenance of public green space.

It also engages in publicity outside the Netherlands under the line "Beautiful plants, all year round". PPH was cited several times in our surveys, unprompted, as an excellent example of what can be done to promote plants from a particular region.

In 2007, the Horticultural Development Council in the UK commissioned a market research project which demonstrated that the use of the [Home Grown](#) symbol on ornamental plants and herbs resulted in an overall increase in plant sales compared to non-labelled plants, by approximately 91%. Research showed that consumers were receptive to information on the



origin of ornamental plants and wish to support British nurseries on the bases of lower risk of infection, environmental friendliness and support for the local economy, once they were made aware that at plant was indeed UK-grown. A consumer brochure template and store signage was made available to retailers and plant tags were developed for growers.

In the early 90's the BCLNA launched a program titled 'Thumbs Up'<sup>9</sup>, designed to do much of what Pick Ontario was designed to do and including a logo. It was short-lived and is deemed to have been unsuccessful by BC Growers and Retailers alike, not because the idea itself was misguided, but because it lacked a consumer engagement strategy. The surveys conducted for this report asked why that might have been the case and input from both BC Growers and Retailers is summarized here.

- It was abandoned too early.
- Now may be a more 'greener' time to reintroduce the Thumbs Up.
- No follow-up after the initial introduction. Program has to run for several years to have an impact.
- Only the growers knew about it and it was competing with the buy BC program that was well funded at the time.
- It had no reason to be (successful). Is it not a little strange that BC wants to export but also expects to be the source of most of the materials in local gardens centres? What is it, A or B? Now with Eat Local and carbon footprint maybe such a program can be of use. Keep in mind that our sand box is little and if we appear to only want our own nurseries in our sand box we could limit our future exports to other sand boxes.
- It was driven by growers, not demanded by consumers. We focused on the wrong end of the chain. You need to get the public to become aware of the product before introducing a new program.
- Lack of buy-in from retailers and growers and not enough consumer education.
- It was not promoted enough to general public.

It is not the intent of this project to resuscitate or reinvent the Thumbs Up program but rather to take whatever may have been learned from the experience, and with relevant input from BC Retailers, Growers and the all important consumer, develop strategies that are more fundamental and strategic in nature.

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<sup>9</sup> Thumbs Up has no presence on the Web.

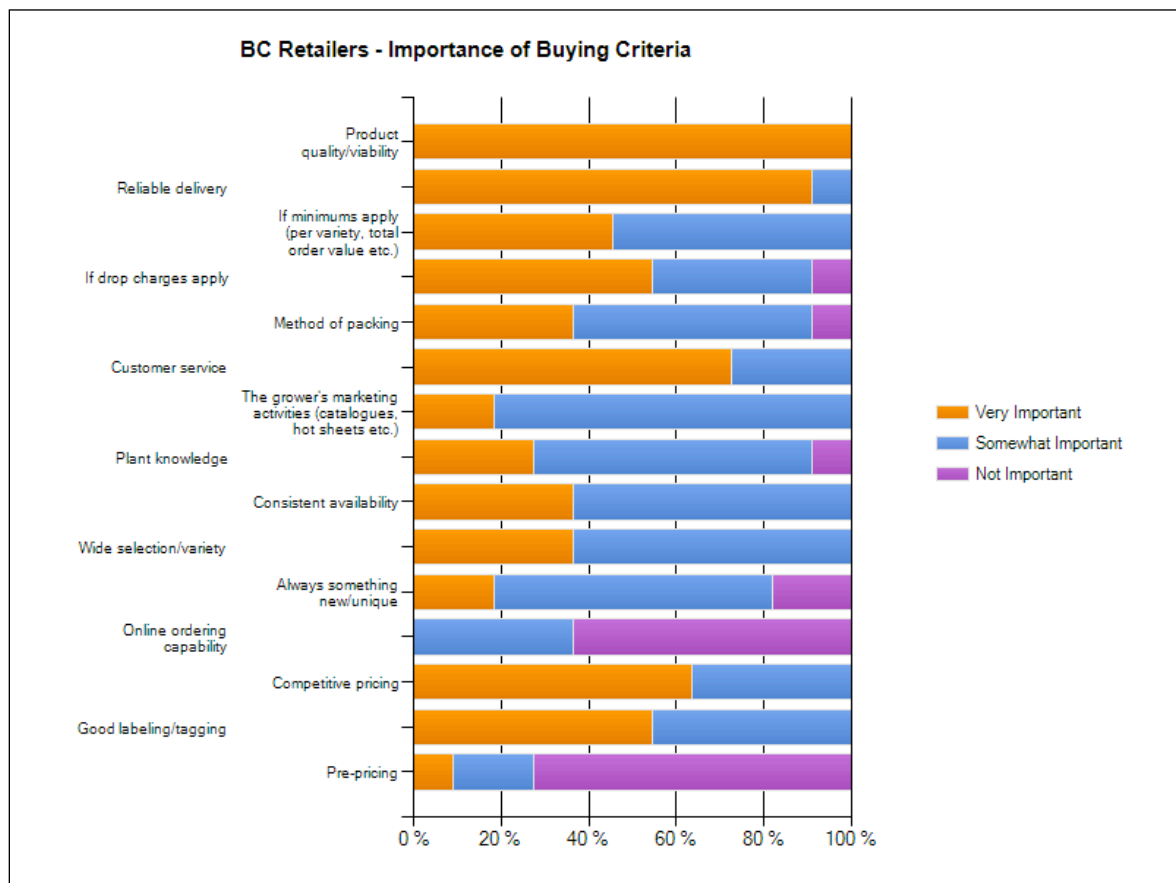
## What Has Been Learned?

A comprehensive suite of online surveys was drafted, circulated to an industry steering group for comment and ultimately put into the field in August 2009. BC, other Canadian and international retailers were contacted, as were BC and other Canadian Growers. BC consumers were also surveyed. The surveys provided opportunity for qualitative commentary and 'additional thoughts' as well as core 'yes/no' and ranking responses. Survey responses were submitted anonymously, although several respondents chose to include their names on specific comments. Information was obtained on the subject of the appeal and marketability of BC/locally grown plants from these three critical points of view—Retailer, Grower and the consumer. Salient results are presented here; these and other survey results will be referenced throughout this document.

### From Retailers

#### British Columbia

The survey link was sent to all 103 BCLNA retail members and 11 responses were received. While this is a low absolute number, it is considered typical in BCLNA's experience and about 20% of the responses were from multi-location garden centres which can be considered more widely representative. More than half of the responses were from independents and all were from owner/operators or senior staff. Retailers on Vancouver Island, various Okanagan locations, the Fraser Valley and the Lower Mainland participated. All buy primarily from BC growers, with US growers their second choice. BC Retailers were asked to assess the importance of various criteria when selecting plant suppliers.

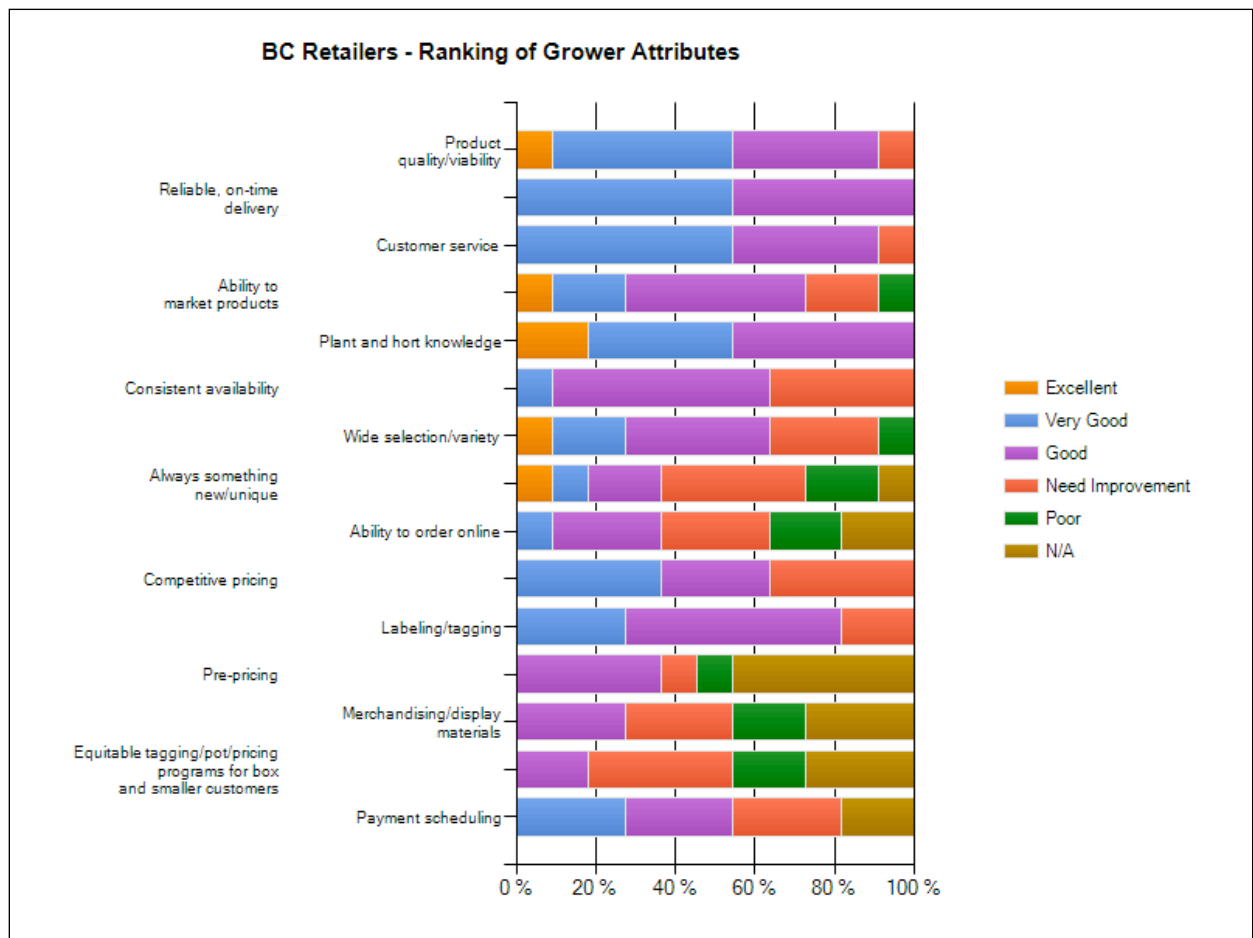


*Observations:* It is probably not surprising that quality, reliable delivery, customer service, pricing and labelling were the top five criteria—orange bars. In fact, all respondents indicated that quality was ‘very important’ and a drop in quality, spotty delivery and incorrect labeling/tagging were seen later in the survey as key reasons to drop a supplier.

BC Growers’ marketing activities and catalogues, their plant knowledge and selection/availability were judged ‘somewhat important’ by most

Note that online ordering capability was not judged important as a buying criterion, nor was it seen as grounds for changing suppliers, although it will figure later in this document as a desirable service. Pre-pricing does not appear to be a significant factor for most BC Retailers when choosing plant suppliers.

BC Retailers were next asked to rank BC Growers on a number of attributes.



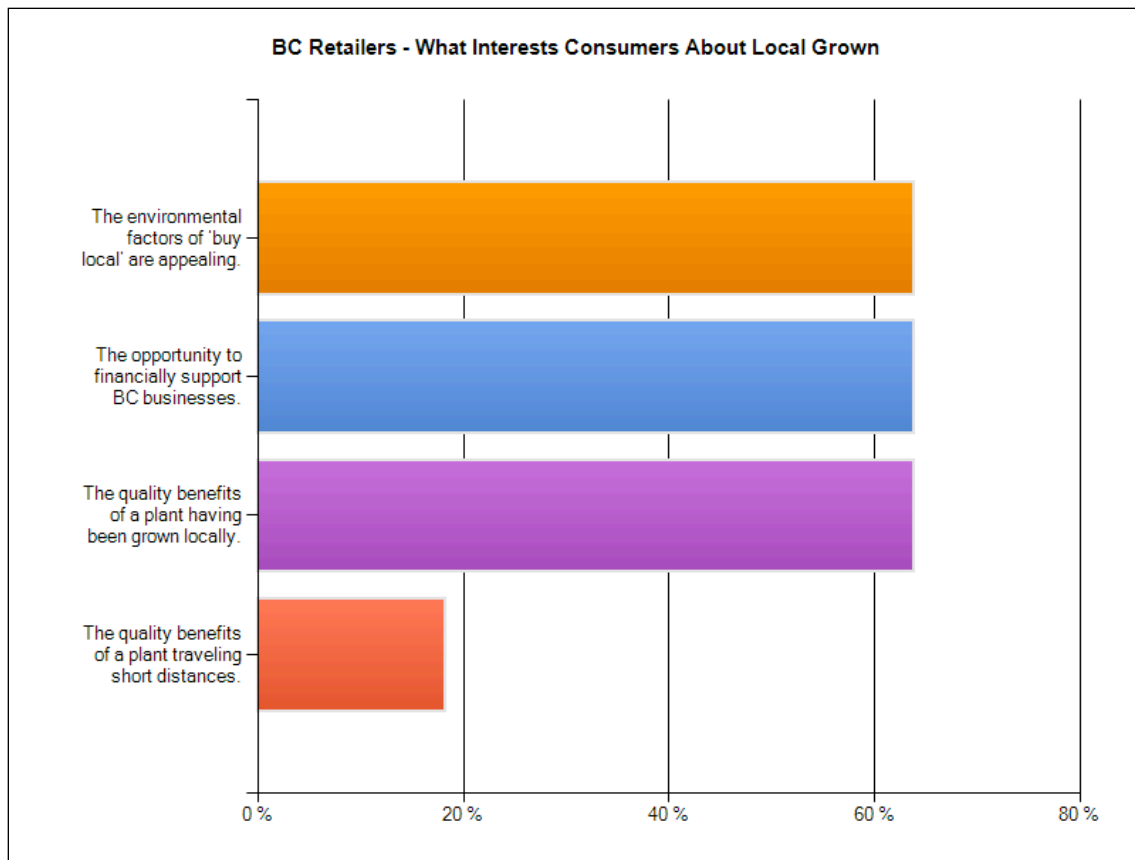
*Observations:* While BC’s Growers ranked ‘Excellent’ on only one or two criteria, they were seen as solidly ‘Very Good’ or ‘Good’ by the majority of respondents—blue and purple bars. The correlation between what BC Retailers want, and how they perceive BC Growers to be delivering, is strong. Note that a number of respondents checked the ‘N/A’ column which was defined in the question as a means of indicating that they did not buy from BC Growers; in the writer’s opinion this was likely misinterpreted as meaning ‘not available’, e.g. pre-pricing, payment scheduling and online ordering is ‘not available’ from the respondent’s regular suppliers.

BC Retailers were also asked to rate US and other Canadian growers on the same attributes. US grower rankings were similar to BC's; the responses indicate that most BC Retailers are not currently buying from other, that is non-BC, Canadian growers.

BC Retailers were asked whether they believe there is a solid business case for merchandising BC-grown plants separately from other plant material, that is, as its own category. The response was close to a 50/50 split—54.5% believe that separate merchandising of BC-grown plants makes business sense and 45.5% believe it does not. Supporting comments were varied:

- *90% (of consumers) don't care where a plant comes from. Quality and price are priorities.*
- *I don't have enough room or time to setup and display BC-grown plants separately. The information on the plant's tag should indicate this.*
- *Buying local nursery products is an extension of buying local food which is hot right now. But I don't think the public understands ornamental plants in this way yet—that some are grown locally and some far away, that quality can vary between source regions and due to shipping, and that some have larger carbon footprints.*
- *Customers prefer to purchase plant material that is grown locally rather than imported from the US. The biggest advantage is that they are acclimatized.*
- *I think it (buying local) is just an added 'feel good' touch when the customer walks out the door. If they're looking for a juniper, they buy a juniper.*

82% of BC Retailers felt that their customers were interested that they stock BC-grown plant material, for these reasons.

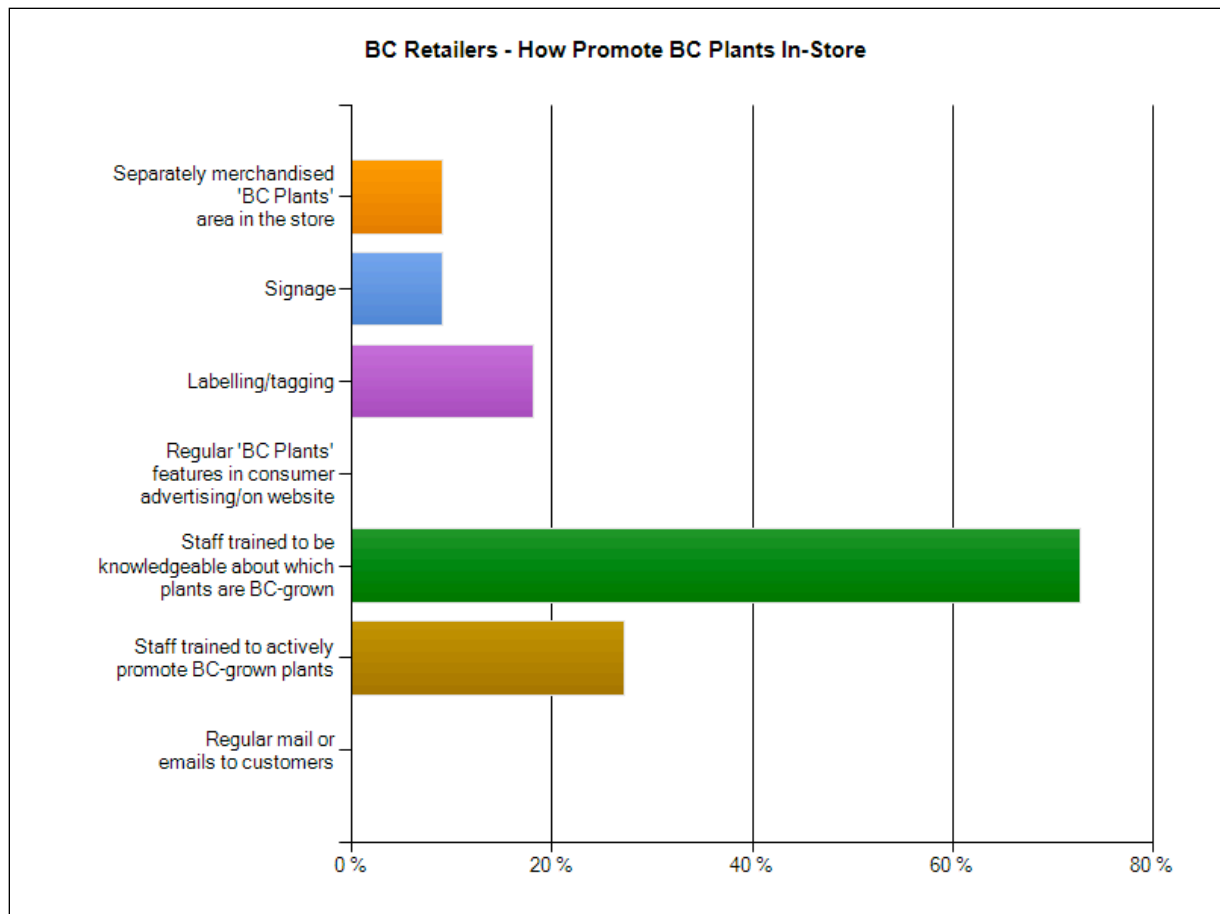


*Observation:* Consumers who are not interested in the origin of a plant they might be considering buying are believed to be more concerned with quality and price and not likely to look at the small print on a plant tag.

Asked to characterize the quality of BC-grown plants 50% of responding BC Retailers felt they were 'high quality' and 50% checked 'pretty good quality'; none checked 'very high quality'. Comments expanding on this included:

- *There is a range from very high quality to poor quality. On the average they are pretty good.*
- *The quality of shrubs and perennials is very good; annuals are not as reliable.*
- *Although this tends to change from year to year, the prices seem to be higher and the size of the plant material seems to be smaller.*
- *It depends on the grower as there is a wide range. Some growers I have decided not to buy from this year due to consistent lack of quality. Some are always my first choice when looking for product. I buy local because plants arrive in better shape off the grower's own truck.*
- *Every grower is very good at some things, but not all things.*

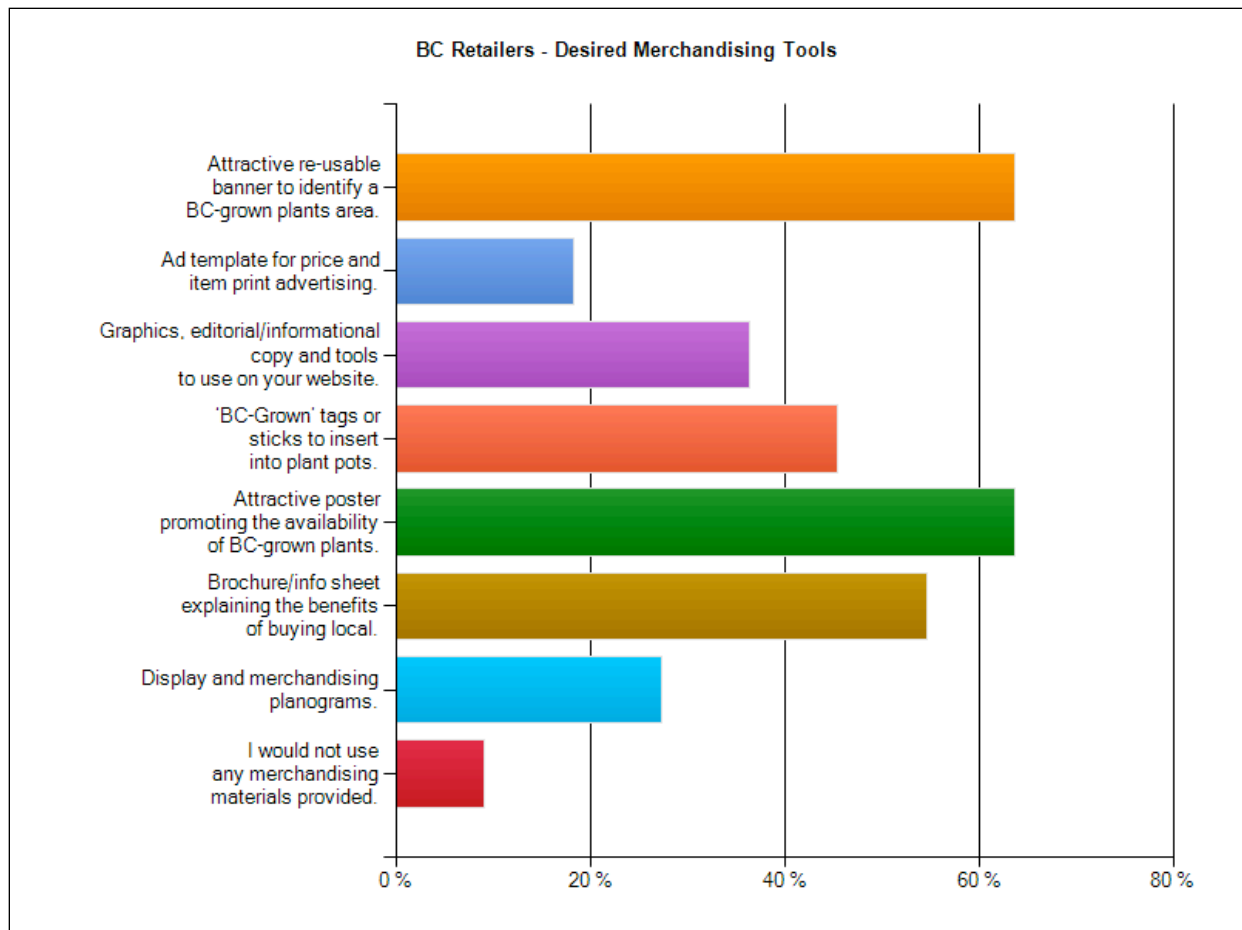
BC Retailers were asked what they are currently doing in-store to help promote the sale of BC-grown plants. Educating staff was far and away the most common activity.



*Observations:* One respondent indicated that while native plants were promoted in-store, other BC-grown plant material was not given special attention. Another queried the definition of BC-grown. “How long does it have to reside/grow in BC before it is considered a BC citizen? One year? Two years? Five years?” See page six for some definitions of locally grown.

It should be noted that there is very little BC-specific merchandising being done in spite of the 54.5% who see a good business case for promoting BC-grown plants separately from other plant material.

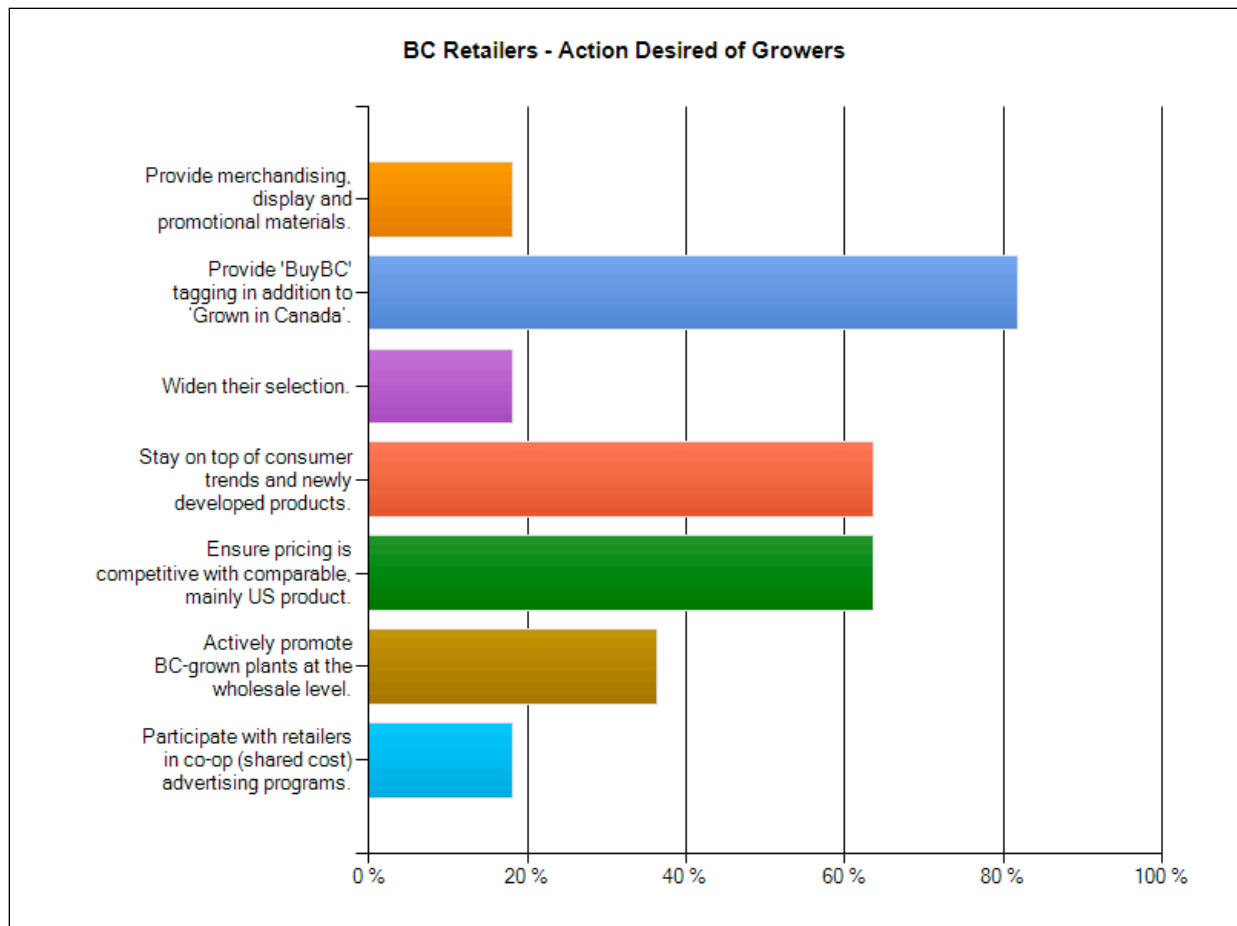
BC Retailers were then asked which merchandising tools they would be likely to use for the promotion of BC-grown plants, were they to be supplied at little or no cost.



*Observations:* While BC Retailers do not seem to be merchandising BC-grown plants as a separate product category, there would seem to be willingness to do so if the tools were to be provided.

BC-grown tags were seen as valuable—several retailers commented that these would have to be applied by the grower as they do not have the time at retail. One respondent indicated that their operation is merchandised by plant classification only, not origin, and another sells virtually all BC-grown product as it is and sees no need to promote this more than is already done. A third respondent would find a BC-grown plants photo library valuable for advertising, web use etc.

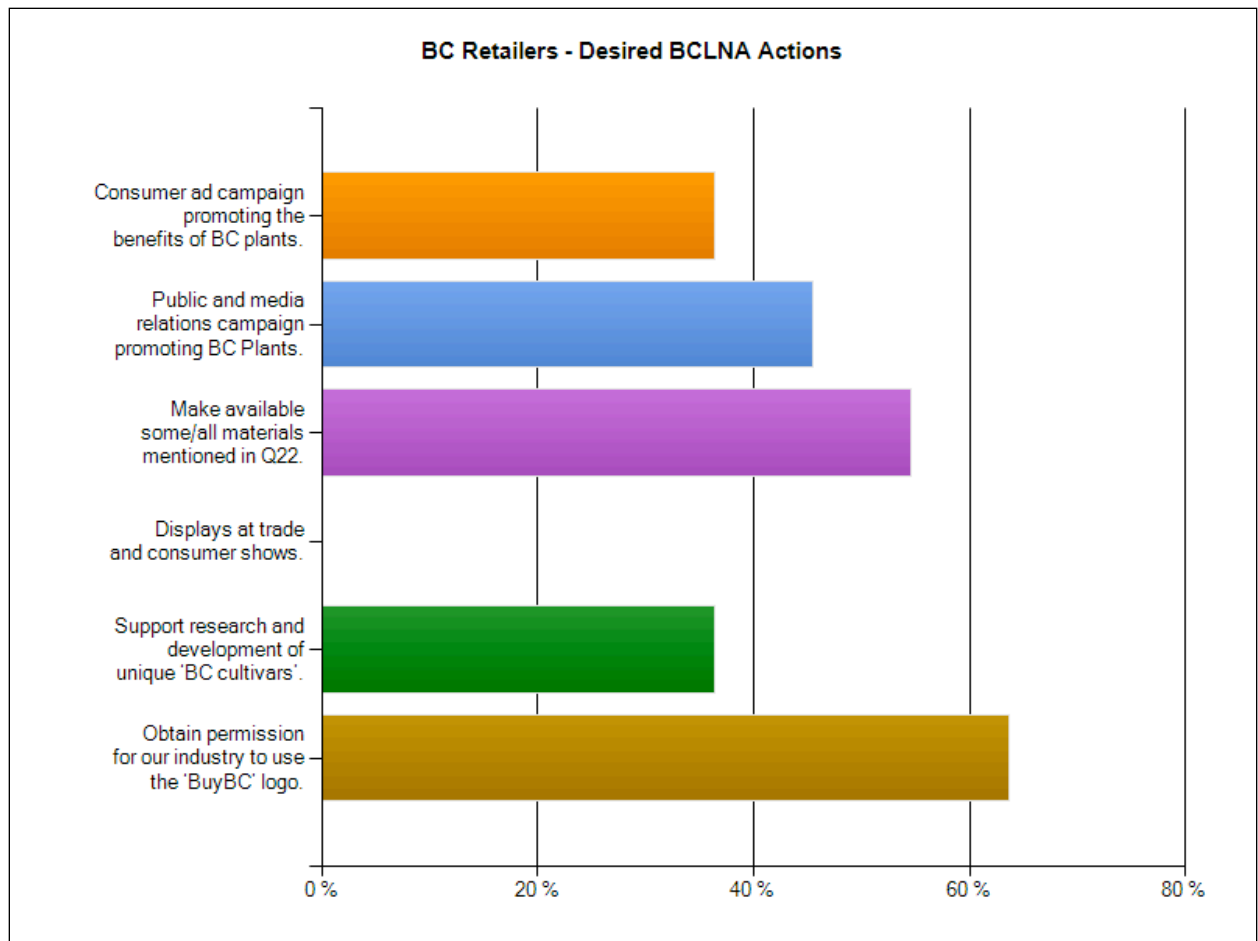
Asked what they would like to see BC Growers do to help generate more BC-grown plant sales, BC Retailers overwhelmingly checked 'tagging', such as BuyBC or similar. Additional suggestions for BC Growers included staying on top of consumer trends and growing accordingly, and ensuring that pricing is competitive with US pricing.



*Observations:* Maintaining competitive pricing was seen as important. Several retailers pointed out that a lower price will send them south of the border, regardless of most other buying criteria. Note that when asked this specific question (see page 13) BC Retailers ranked quality, reliable delivery and customer service higher than price.

Asked what they would like to see the BCLNA do to promote BC-grown plants, BC Retailers most checked option was to obtain the ability to use the BuyBC logo, followed closely by making available the items listed on the Desirable Merchandising Tools chart, above page 18.

There is, as well, a significant appetite for a consumer campaign to create pull—almost 82% indicated that an advertising/publicity campaign promoting the benefits of BC-grown plants would be valuable, in light of the current 100-mile momentum on the food side and the opportunity to ride the wave.



*Observation:* Of course there are costs involved should any or all of the noted BCLNA actions be executed.

## Canadian Retailers

A survey link tailored to retailers outside of BC was sent out to CNLA's retail members, excluding those in BC. Not surprisingly, given the time of year and a possibly lower interest level as it was a BC project, just three replies were received. For that reason we can't draw any solid conclusions but we do note that responses largely mirrored those obtained from BC Retailers.

Pricing, rather than quality, was the most important grower selection criterion, with poor or incorrect tagging most likely to cause them to drop a supplier. BC Growers were seen nationally as providing good to excellent quality with tagging, customer service and plant knowledge possibly needing some improvement.

One key disparity—Canadian retailers did not see a business reason to merchandise locally grown plants separately from other plant material and did not believe their customers were interested in the subject, pricing being their main interest. It should be noted that no replies to this survey were received from Ontario or other key growing regions however a number of Canadian retailers, some from Ontario, received and responded to the international version.

There was a belief that tagging to indicate local origin, at the grower level, was a good merchandising tool as were point of sale banners, posters etc.

## International Retailers

Using a list supplied by the CNLA, a survey link was sent out to about 800 retailers from the UK, US, France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe. A number of the email addresses supplied were, in fact, Canadian and therefore some input from Ontario was also obtained on this version of the survey<sup>10</sup>. Nine responses were received in total, from as far afield as New Zealand.

Most purchased trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, herbs and veggies from their local growers. The reasons for selecting those growers were clear—quality and delivery factors were far and away the primary criteria, with customer service second, and pricing and tagging the third considerations.

Online ordering capability and the availability of grower-supplied merchandising materials were not judged important. The quality of locally grown plant material was seen as high, however opinions on whether there is a business reason to merchandise local plant material separately were divided.

- *No. Confuses the consumer. Those who ask for origin are given it as we know it. Have not seen a single request for this.*
- *There really is not a yes/no answer here. Generally the customer really is not bothered. It's the quality of the plant itself they are looking for and if it happens that it was grown locally, then that's a bonus.*
- *In this age of carbon footprint miles, buying local is a good reason.*
- *Being a small isolated country we only have local plants. However I do a lot of work in Ireland where they identify Irish-grown plants with promotional labels/signs even though they may not necessarily be merchandised separately.*

The answer to the question regarding justification for a local plant being priced higher than the same plant from another region was a very definitive 'no', with these additional verbatim comments (emphasis is theirs):

- *Doesn't matter where it comes from. A better QUALITY rose is priced higher than one that is not.*
- *Our customers would expect the plants to be the same price or lower.*
- *Many growers in Canada start with plugs or whips purchased from outside of the country. There should be no surcharge for local grown plants. Shipping has been a huge cost in the last few years. Local growers have an advantage there to offset price differences.*
- *Possibly. But bear in mind in today's market, value is now more important than it used to be. The most successful garden centres are implementing a value strategy where they use price to drive volume on known value (KV) lines. Non-KV lines are probably priced up.*

International retailers saw the most marketable aspect of locally grown plants as 'hardiness', based on their having been grown in the same region as they will ultimately be planted. That said, they did not feel that locally grown material has any particular image with consumers, currently.

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<sup>10</sup> This information was factored into the Canadian Retailer responses.

- *We promote the best growers of the products we have found. Whether local or distant and our customers like what we have done. They do not want to settle for second best in order to support the local grower.*

When asked what local growers could do to increase sales in their own regions, almost 90% of retail respondents indicated that they should stay on top of consumer trends and grow accordingly, provide 'locally grown' tagging and maintain a competitive price list.

These additional comments were obtained.

- *Provide top quality stock.*
- *Do not grow items that others grow better. Stick to what you grow the best.*

Finally, international retailers were in favour of their local green association mounting a publicity campaign to promote the benefits of locally grown plants, and to support research into unique local cultivars.

## ***From Growers***

### **British Columbia**

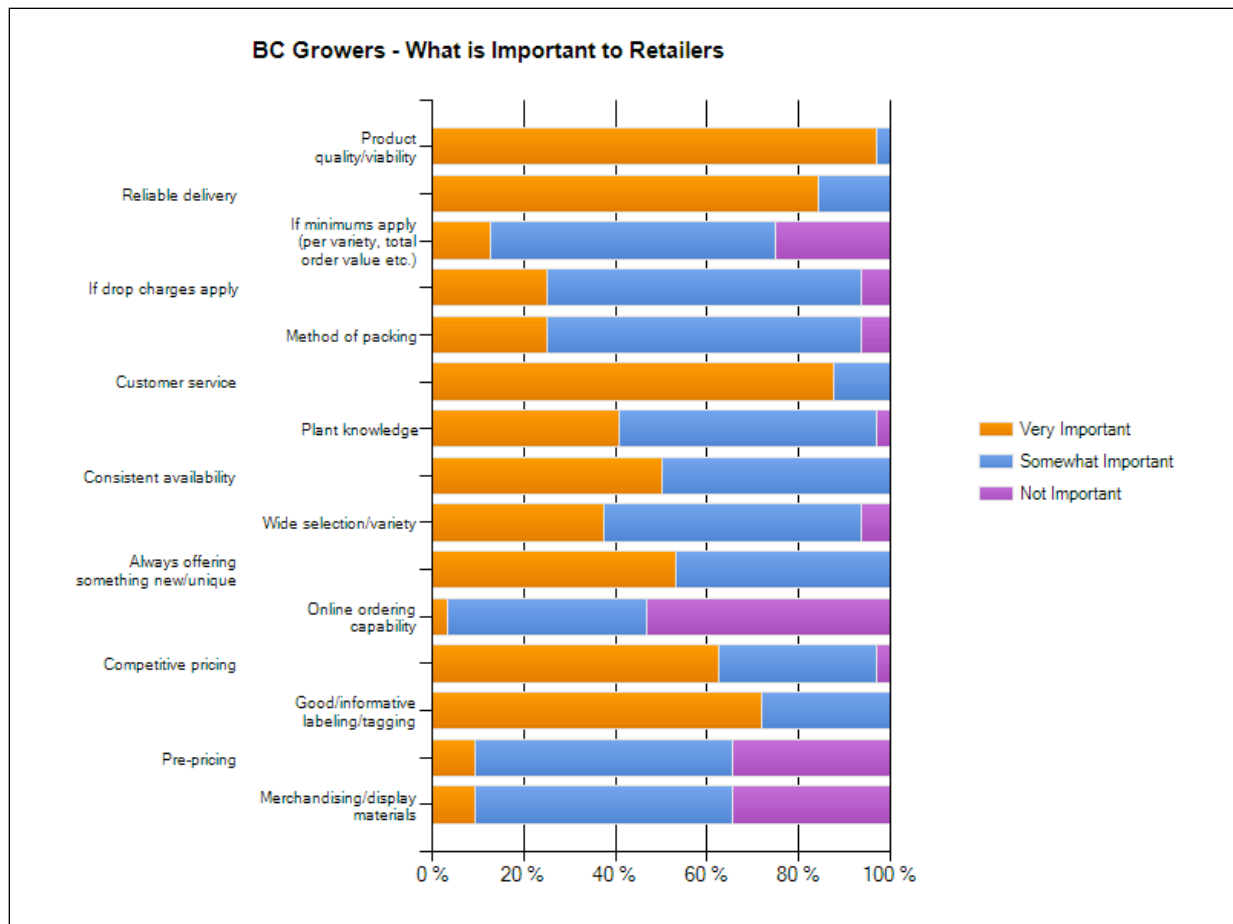
Thirty-two of the 374 BC Growers who received the link completed the survey, also a typical response rate for BCLNA. Most (60% +) were producers of perennials, and trees and shrubs for wholesale. About 9% were combination grower/retailer operations, and close to 20% were also in the businesses of floriculture, vegetable production, tissue culture etc. Close to 80% were owner/operators and another 12% had supervisory roles.

Representation from all regions of Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland, the Fraser Valley and north into the Okanagan and Kamloops area was obtained. All sell into BC, as well as elsewhere in Canada and the US, and one respondent sells internationally.

BC Growers were asked what they believe BC Retailers feel is important in their choice of nursery suppliers.

Results match up well with BC Retailers' response to the corresponding question. Quality is believed to be the primary consideration, followed by delivery, customer service, pricing and the existence of drop charges, and the equitable treatment of box stores and independents were the 5<sup>th</sup> attribute noted.

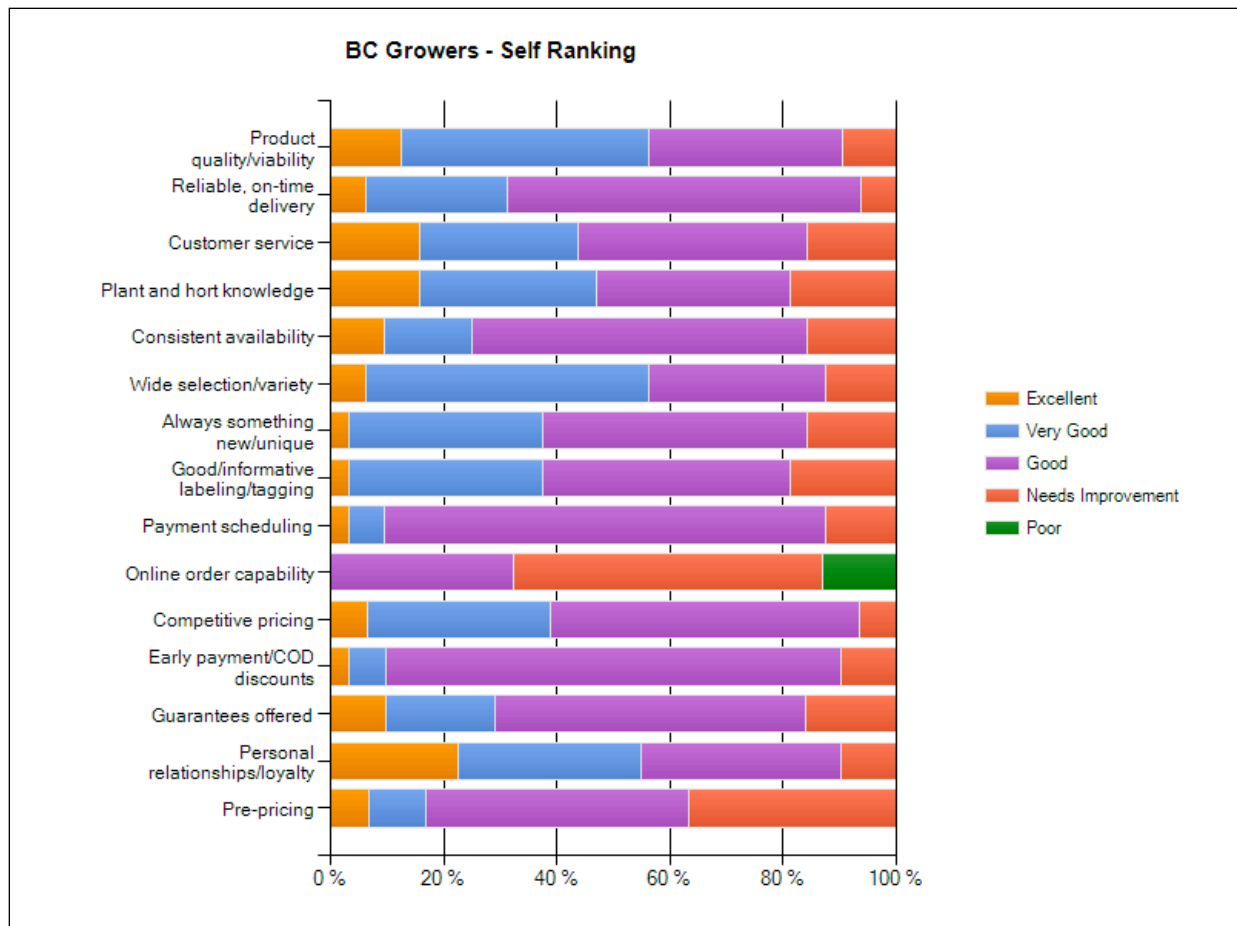
Early payment discounts were noted as 'somewhat important' and the availability of online ordering was not considered to be of concern to BC Retailers.



BC Growers were then asked to rank themselves on a number of attributes. This is interesting with particular regard to how BC Retailers ranked them and also to the criteria important to Retailers—page 13.

Both BC Growers and Retailers believe that BC quality is 'very good' and that plant availability is consistent and that tagging/labeling is informative. Growers have a slightly better perception of their delivery and general customer service than Retailers are prepared to acknowledge.

Growers ranked themselves slightly higher in the areas of variety, having new unique products and offering the same deals to independents as to box stores. Rankings in the area of online capability were low, however this particular attribute has already been shown as not of critical importance to BC Retailers.



A very significant finding in this survey is that 62.5% of BC Growers believe there is a real business opportunity to be had in selling within BC, with 37.5% checking 'no'. This does not discount the importance of the export market, which is critical to many of them, but it means that the additional domestic opportunity would be welcomed.

These additional comments were submitted in support of selling domestically:

- *Shipping costs are lower and no customs paperwork.*
  - *There are opportunities for niche products which have not been oversaturated by the volume materials offered at big box stores.*
  - *A lot of plant material comes from Oregon and California. Most can be grown here.*
- There is a huge market in BC—retailers, landscapers and wholesalers—to tap into. All of the above bring in plants from plug to caliper size from the US. We need to encourage all to buy local, or BC-grown plants before going south of the border.*
- *Over supply due to downturn in US. Prices are soft and with nurseries unable to make money in US they are selling cheap in BC. This is not a complaint, rather a reality.*

Respondents not seeing a particularly big opportunity also commented:

- *We are already doing a very good job. We sense that the per capita purchase of our product by BC customers is already well above the rest of the country or North America for that matter.*
- *Our product mix is geared for export.*
- *There is an opportunity within BC, but not any more significant than outside BC.*

BC Growers were then asked which type of retailer is more likely to be interested in the specifically BC origin of the plants they buy—box or independents. Not surprisingly, more than half of respondents (56.3%) selected independents. However, 40% indicated that there is no difference in the level of interest.

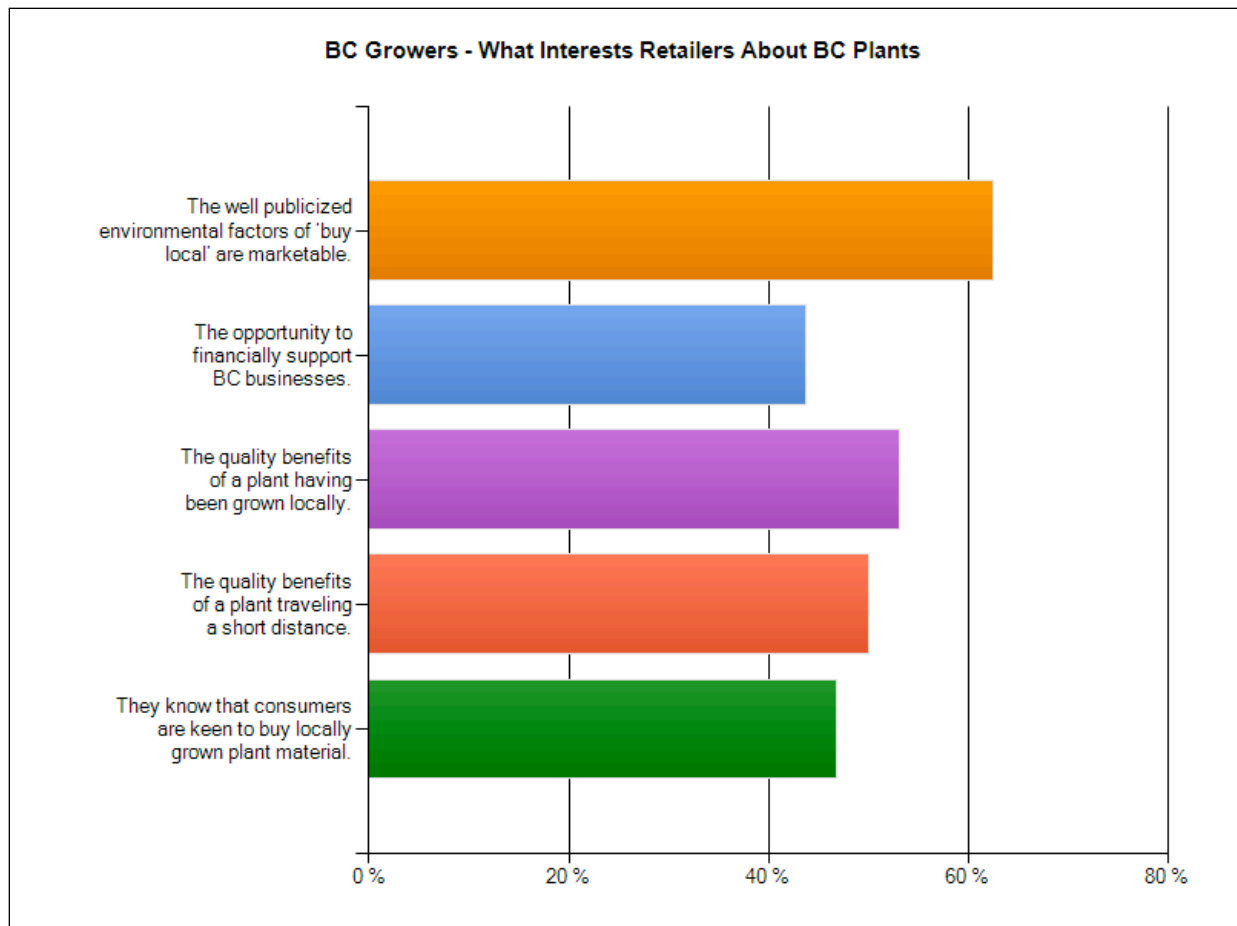
Comments included:

- *People have an expectation from big box stores that they don't care where their product comes from as long as it's cheap. The public feel more connected to local garden retailers and therefore the retailers have more of a community connection and probably more motivation to provide local product as public demand for local products increases.*
- *Box stores only care about price. Independent garden centres seem to care more about where plants come from and who the grower is.*

*Observation:* There is a need to appeal to both the retail customers of BC Growers, and the consumers buying from BC Retailers.

In a follow-up question, BC Growers were asked what they perceive the appeal of BC-grown plant material to be, from the standpoint of BC Retailers.

There is a clear perception on the part of BC Growers that the environmental benefits of 'buy local' are seen as appealing and, importantly, marketable by BC Retailers. The logic of a plant having a better chance of surviving in the same region in which it was grown coupled with the fact that it has not had to travel as far as an imported product are benefits perceived as important to retail buyers.



Other benefits seen as important to BC Retailers include:

- *Protection from viruses and plant diseases that originate in other areas.*
- *Freight will be cheaper buying local.*
- *Faster delivery.*
- *More and fresher material.*

Of those BC Retailers not judged by BC Growers to be particularly interested that some of their product was grown in BC, more than 87% were thought to value quality and price as more important consumer purchase factors. There were a number of emotional comments from BC Growers (emphasis is theirs):

- *BC Retailers are spoiled and have been for many, many years. They have the horticultural oyster at their fingertips. Because of their location (close) to the big US suppliers they are offered deals that we local growers cannot match. Combined with the fact that they have long-standing history with these companies, standing volume discounts, etc, why would they change? Trying to break their buying habits is like butting your head up against the wall. Only if you can offer something completely different will you get their attention. Only when new blood, or the next generation enters into the 'buyer' position will we growers that are trying to offer the 1 to 5 gallon plant of the same quality (sometimes much better) will make any headway.*

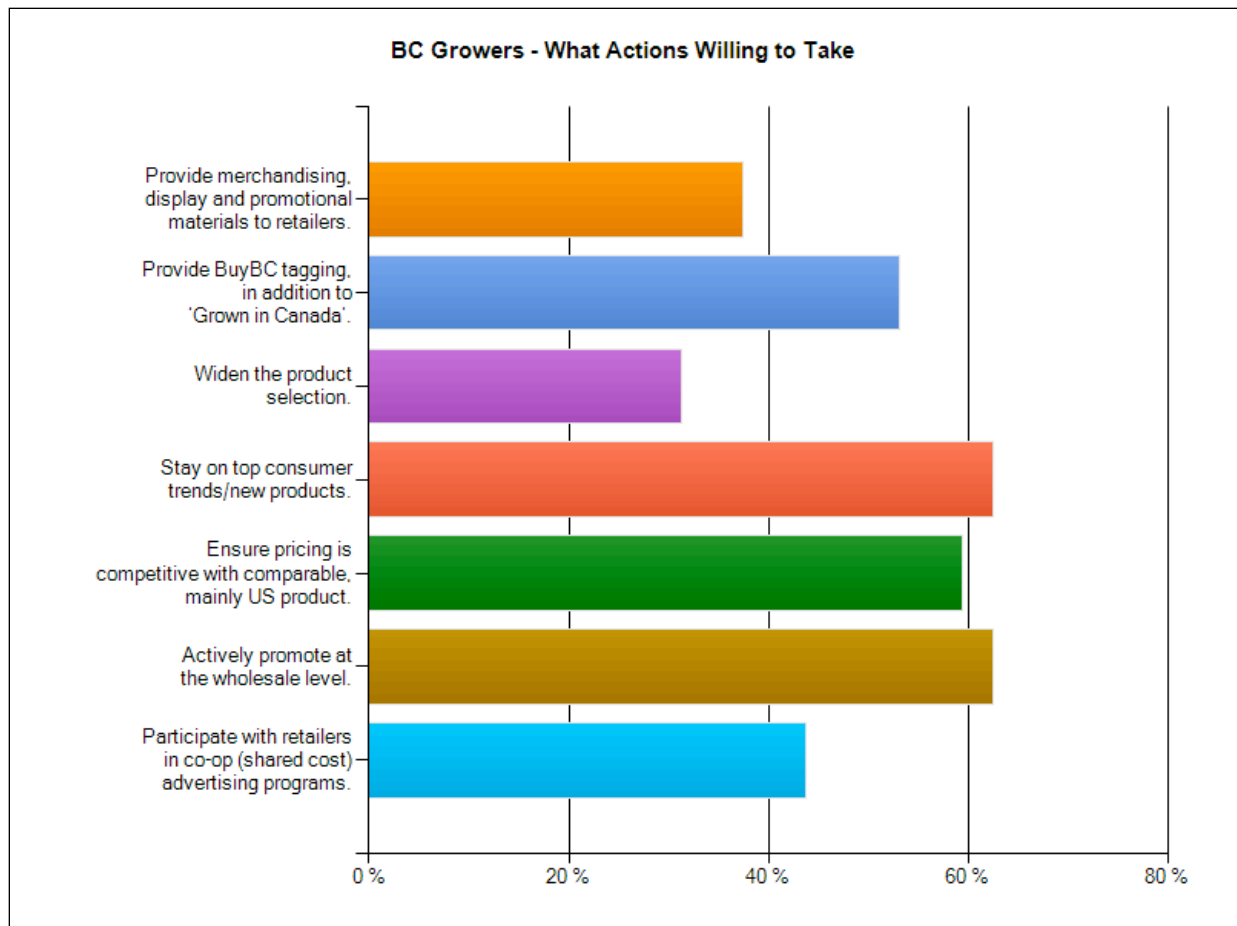
- *If they can buy the same products with the same quality and get them cheaper from the US, then they do. This (has been) the practice for a long time.*
- *The impact of the plant itself is and remains the highest factor in selecting a plant. Only when all else is equal will local grown become a factor.*
- *Some GCs just care about price, price, price. No worries about SOD or carbon footprint or grown local. MONEY, that's it.*

What are BC Growers currently doing to promote BC plants? Here is a representative selection of responses.

- *BCLNA membership and presence in Buyer's Guide.*
- *Give lectures and talk to the media. Do training days for buyers.*
- *We promote the fact that plants are locally grown. However we have to make sure the quality is as good or better than the import in order to be successful.*
- *Logo sticker with location on each pot.*
- *All of our tags say "Grown on Vancouver Island".*
- *We promote the fact that we are a local BC company to retailers. We also try to educate the retailers on the benefits of buying our BC product.*
- *Grow varieties suitable for the local market.*
- *Offer great service and quality plants.*
- *I buy all my plant material from BC growers with the exception of fruit trees because the company we deal with has the best customer service that I have come across in this whole industry, making the whole process completely painless with properly labeled and grown-on hardy root stock.*
- *Produce and ship only best quality to our retail buyers.*
- *Price competitively.*
- *Visit retailers.*
- *Supply only top quality material with informative picture tags.*
- *Branding, consumer advertising of our brands, co-op advertising programs, supply POP to retailers.*

Quite a number of BC Growers readily admitted that they do nothing at all to promote BC-grown plants as such.

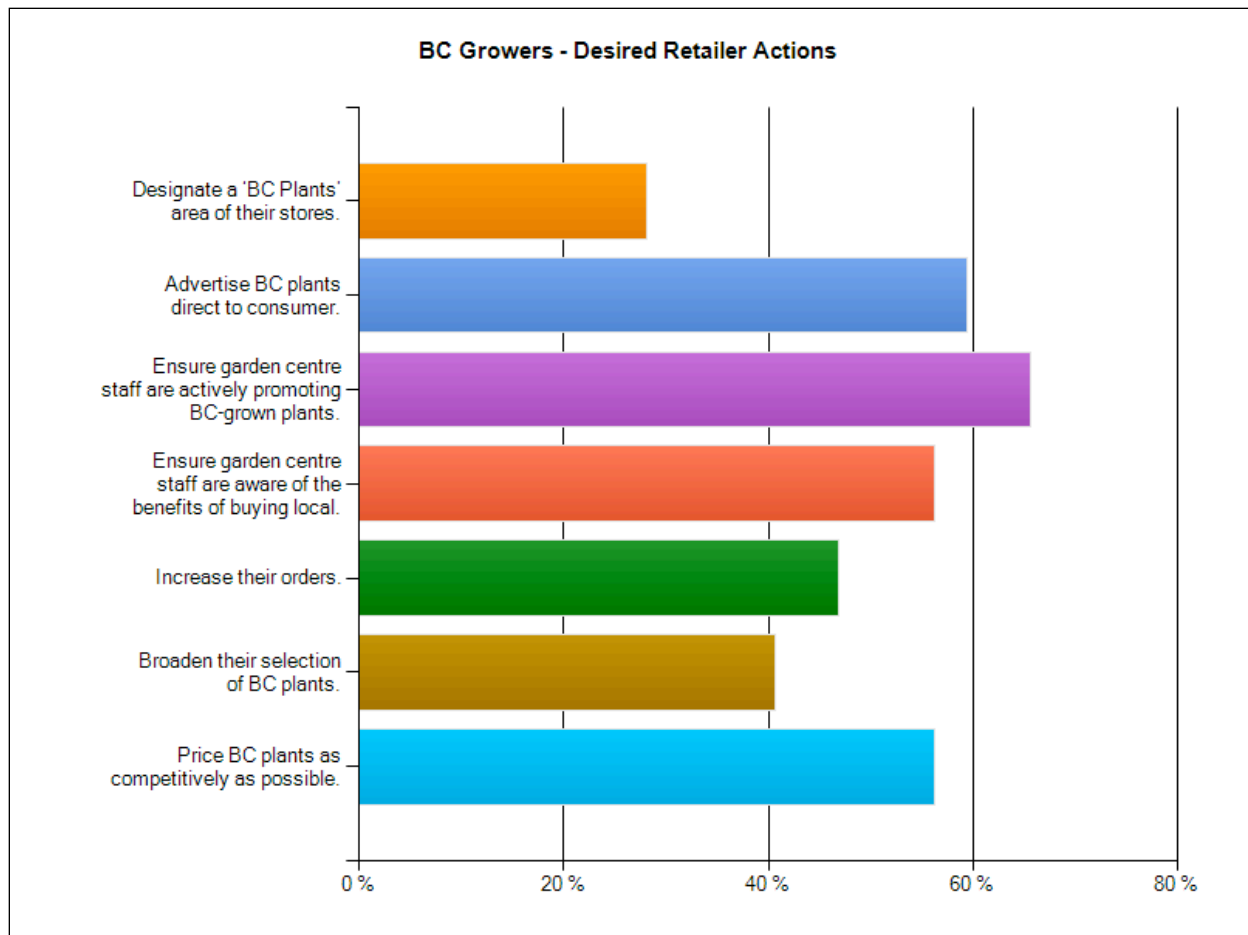
When asked what they *would* be prepared to do to promote sales of BC-grown plants, more than 60% of respondents indicated that staying on top of consumer trends so as to grow accordingly, and promoting at the wholesale level were two acceptable activities.



Competitive pricing and tagging with a BC-grown message before shipping to BC Retailers were activities viewed as acceptable by about half.

As for what BC Growers would like to see BC Retailers do to support BC-grown sales, there was some clear direction given.

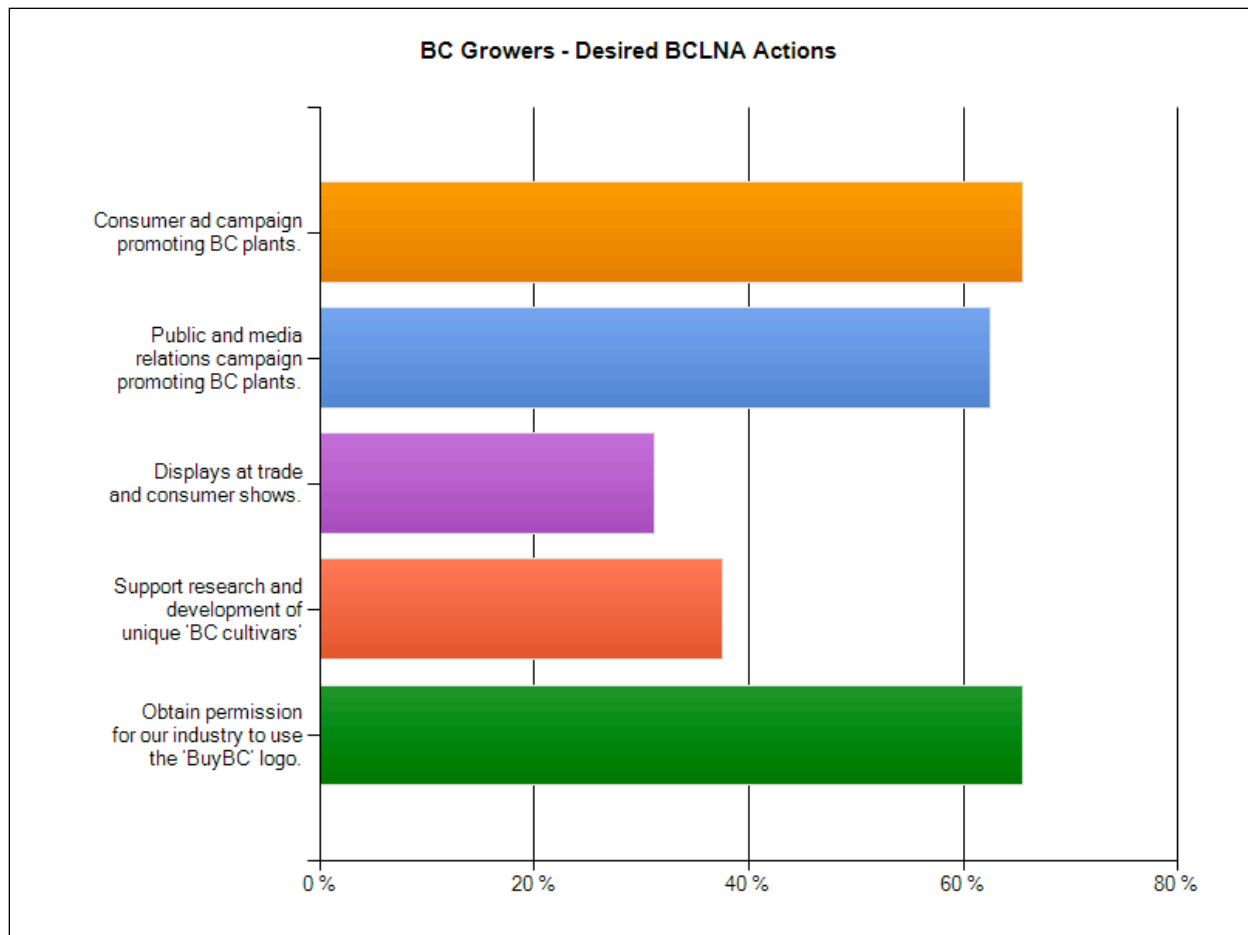
Almost 66% share the view that retail staff should be actively promoting BC product and the benefits of buying local. Sixty percent would like to see direct-to-consumer, specifically BC-grown product advertising and 56% want to be sure that retail pricing is as relatively competitive as wholesale pricing had to be to get the order.



One respondent noted the value of good relationships with retail buyers in order to sell more BC product in the first place. Another, understanding that the consumer is the ultimate driver, noted that BC Retailers will not go to extra lengths to promote BC product unless the public is demanding it.

Finally, BC Growers were asked what they would like the BCLNA to do to promote BC-grown plants.

Two-thirds of respondents were in favour of obtaining permission for the industry to use the BuyBC logo and an advertising and/or publicity campaign designed to promote the benefits of buying plants grown in our province.



**Observations:** BC Grower and Retailer input as to what they would like the BCLNA to do is comparable on the issues of the BuyBC logo, advertising and publicity targeting consumers and supporting research into BC cultivars.

Here are some additional respondent verbatims regarding this initiative as a whole, as well as some ideas.

- *Make a study of Plant Publicity Holland (PPH) and see what we can use. Start a website ASAP, have booths at trade shows, not only in BC but all over, promoting BC grown ornamentals.*
- *It sounds like a good idea, but I have my doubts whether this will work. I don't think that buying BC in plant materials is that close to consumers' hearts. Food items are different in this regard. We have promoted our BC-grown products within our total wholesale selection (includes many imports) for many years but quality and perceived value play the biggest role. I hate to see a large amount of money being thrown at a project for which I doubt there is enough support. Having said that we will always be open to supporting a project like this if it makes sense.*
- *I find it hypocritical that as an industry that sells a high percentage of product outside of BC, here we are promoting buying local product. We were all happy to ship all of our product to the US when the exchange rate was \$1.50. How many growers are putting their product (often an American plug) in a Chinese pot, filled with Manitoba peat and American perlite and using Mexican labour. We grow the product in a foreign-made greenhouse and deliver it in*

*an American truck. Perhaps as an industry (and an association) we should focus on getting more efficient and providing a product that compels the retailer to purchase local.*

- *Great idea!! I hope it produces good results.*
- *Food is being marketed using the 100-mile diet theme and is quite successful. Something along that idea could work with plants.*

## **Canadian Growers**

A survey link tailored to non-BC Canadian growers was distributed by the CNLA. Seven surveys were completed by owner/operators of perennial, tree and shrub producing nurseries, some with retail operations as well, and mostly from Ontario. There was one Alberta and one Quebec response. All sell within their own provinces, as well as to the rest of Canada and the US. As was the case with Canadian retailers, the response rate was low and the results cannot be used for quantitative purposes. However, a great deal of insight was obtained.

The expectation of this group of respondents was that Canadian retailers consider quality, reliable delivery, customer service, tagging and variety first and foremost when selecting nursery suppliers. Personal relations and reputation of the nursery were also seen as critical, as was plant knowledge. On a Canada-wide basis, the availability of online ordering was seen as slightly more important than it was within BC.

Canadian growers ranked themselves as 'very good' with improvement needed in online capability (most indicated that this was their preferred method of taking orders), and ensuring that independents and box store customers are treated equitably.

All respondents indicated that there is a significant business opportunity in selling within their own province or region. Some of the added commentary is interesting.

- *Because you can reduce the cost of growing by having hardy plants adapted to your climate and growing conditions. It reduces the refunds you give, you need to have less variety, your freight charges are lower and you can have fewer unhappy customers as they will not buy plants that have a low chance of survival in the area.*
- *Able to ship smaller quantities more often. Increased flexibility for both buyer and seller. Less pollution in trucking. Less packaging by use of (auction) wagons. Improved relationship between both parties. Better quality control.*
- *There are significant business opportunities within our province. However, at the moment US imports and their oversupply of nursery material make it more challenging to do business in Ontario.*

Canadian growers believed for the most part that the independent retailers are more interested in where their stock comes from, most because of the marketability of the environmental message, and the inherent quality in a plant having been grown in the same area as it is sold. These comments are representative:

- *Because they want to encourage local businesses, they want to develop a relationship with the grower. They will trust eventually a local more and maybe a local can be more flexible and more open to do some custom growing for the independent.*
- *Local growers can be more flexible to deal with. Independents like to establish relationships with the businesses they buy from. It may be easier to negotiate special terms or get special plant material.*

- *The local retail buyer should be made more aware of the benefits of growing local nursery stock, especially less chance of diseases like SOD.*

A few were of the opinion that price and quality override origin with one indicating that while people will often state a preference for the environmental option when asked, when it comes down to action they will go for price.

Canadian growers mentioned a number of things they do to promote locally grown plants—separate display areas with signage, using different coloured pots, special tagging programs, weekly deliveries and allowing small orders. They are optimistic about the 2010 selling season and are willing to provide tagging, promotion at wholesale and pricing that competes favourably with US pricing.

As to what they would like Canadian retailers to do, all respondents indicated that direct-to-consumer advertising and staff training were key. All respondents would also like to see their local green industry association undertake an advertising/promotional campaign to promote understanding of the benefits of buying local, and actually promoting the sale of locally grown plant material. This additional comment was submitted:

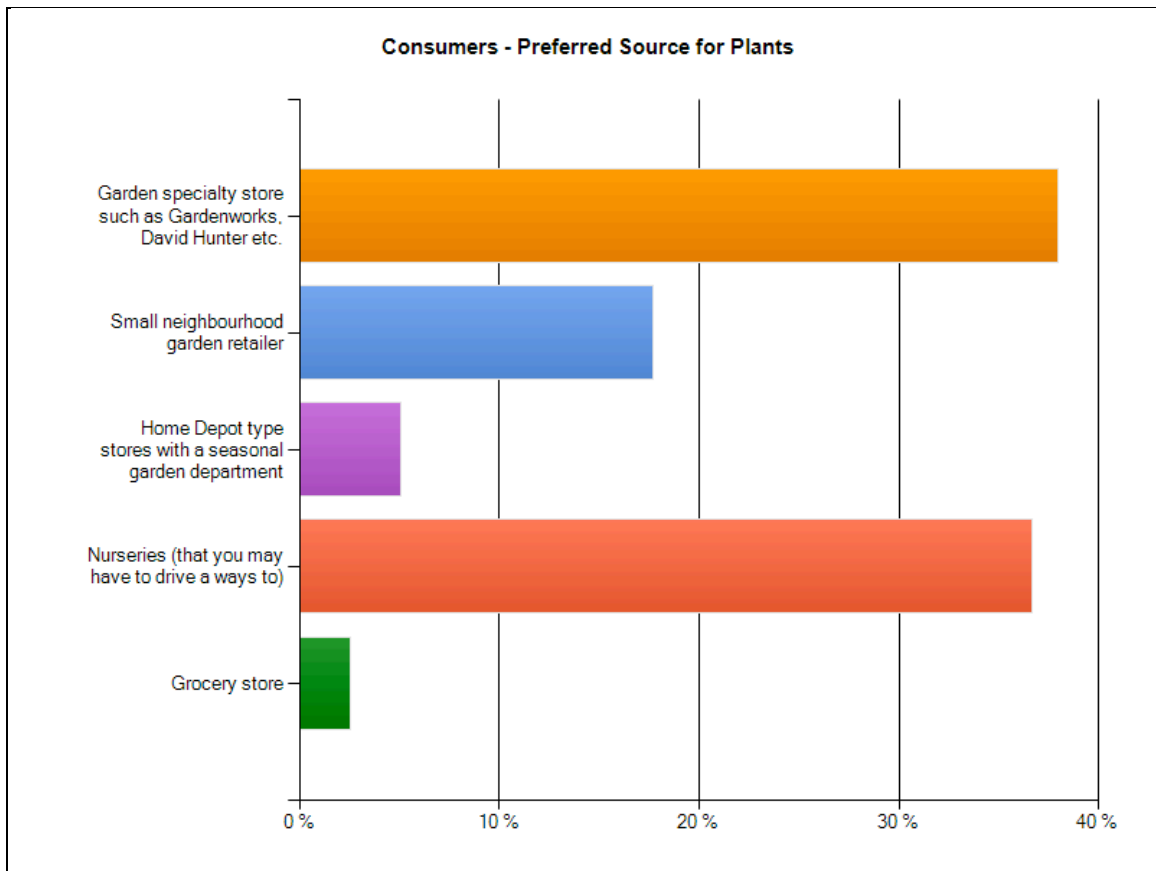
- *Show more interest in the local growers. Encourage retailers to step out of their comfort zone and be more willing to give a chance to local growers to sell to them.*

### ***From BC Consumers***

A sixth online survey was sent to 100 consumers in BC as well as to all subscribers to GardenWise Magazine's online newsletter, all known to be gardeners and patrons of garden centres/nursery retailers. This document recounts their input in some detail, given the predominantly retail focus of the project and the fact that consumers are the ultimate arbiters of what retailers sell and what nurseries grow.

Eighty-seven percent of the 79 respondents spend between \$100 and \$500, annually on outdoor ornamental plants with 13% spending well above that level; as such this group is viewed as a reliable representation of consumer shopping behaviour and opinion.

More than half of respondents chose independent garden retailers as their main source of outdoor plants with another 37% willing to drive some distance to buy from retail nursery operations in more rural locations.



Several respondents mentioned plant sales such as VanDusen's and various garden club sales. Two respondents mentioned grocery stores as their sole source.

Asked what factors are important in their selection of a garden plant retailer, these garden-oriented respondents chose quality, selection, service and informed staff, in that order, as 'very important'. Pricing and tagging/labeling was 'fairly important' and the availability of non-plant hardgoods was 'not important'. Additional comments will be useful for BC Retailers (emphasis is consumers'):

- *Parking close enough to load purchases without moving the car.*
- *I do like a garden center that is CLEAN!! and where it is easy to identify who the staff are—if there are any around!*
- *Whether or not we get a discount for our garden membership.*
- *I'm particularly interested in plant material that is unique and of high quality.*
- *I like to be able to walk rather than drive to the garden store.*

About 53% of respondents go to the garden centre or nursery retailer with a list in hand while 47% make their buying decisions based on what they see. It can be assumed that the 53% are likely the 'avid gardener' group while the impulse shoppers are perhaps less knowledgeable and more likely to be influenced by point of purchase signage, special offers and colour.

81% of consumer respondents are interested in the origin of the plant material they buy—66% assuming that what they see in a BC garden centre must have been grown in BC—and many of those took the time to further explain their answer:

- *I like plants that are grown in the region so they are suitable and adapted to our climate.*
- *I pay more attention now because of concern about carbon footprint. Also I am somewhat concerned about native species and invasive species.*
- *I prefer plants cultivated and grown in BC or Canada and if ecological consideration goes into the plant, I like that too, such as recyclable pots. It also matters to me how the employees are treated.*
- *I support local production. I want to know plants will survive here. Native plants do better in our climate.*
- *I do my best to buy from local growers but a special plant, I buy anyway. Many of the tags don't tell you where it was grown.*
- *Small nurseries often sell varieties not available elsewhere and will specialize. If we don't support them they will have to resort to selling what all the big stores sell.*

Not everyone is as informed as the consumers quoted above:

- *(Origin) never crossed my mind as a factor. Not anywhere near a good gardener. Just put stuff in—flowers and veggies—and hope they grow.*
- *Never really considered it. Never crossed my mind as a factor.*

Clearly there is opportunity to educate and sell.

BC consumers were asked what the meaning of 'BC-grown' is. Seventy-two percent believe it means 'grown from scratch' in BC with 28% of the opinion it could mean the plant was started elsewhere, grown on here and shipped to the retail location.

- *This is what I hope it means but I know a lot of plants come from the US.*
- *I doubt that all the plants sold here can be grown here profitably.*
- *There is the legal definition (of grown in BC) and then there is the definition that we think should be. Some plants don't start well in BC and have to be started by a specialist who might not exist in BC.*

The recent exposé that BC wine is not necessarily made from BC-grown grapes coloured some of the comments

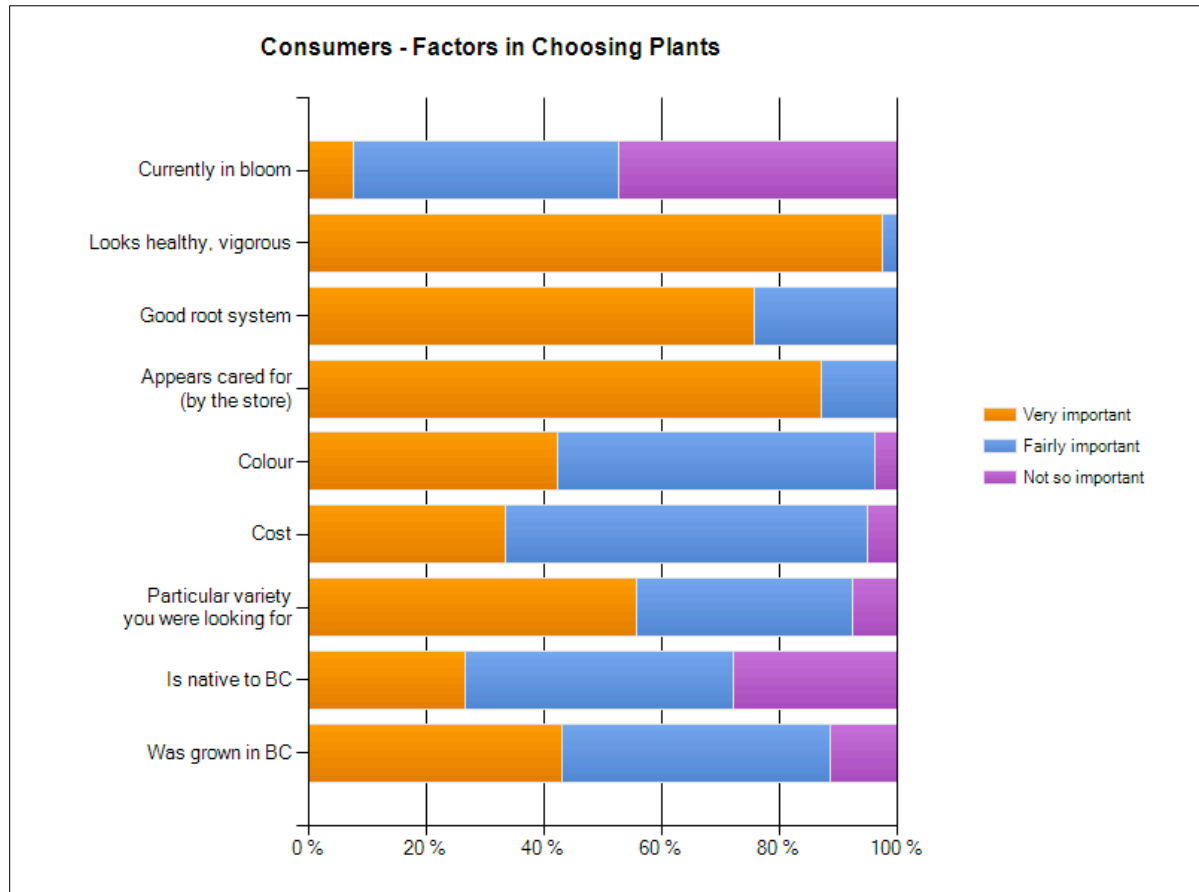
- *Labelling in Canada is a complete joke. Made in Canada means nothing...it's likely just packaged here. Like Made in Canada wine with imported grapes.*

There was a clear indication that signage as to the origin of plant material would be welcomed and grocery store produce departments were cited as a model—bananas grown in Ecuador etc.

- *It would be good if the garden specialty stores did the same and really promoted BC Grown.*

Consumers were then asked to rank the criteria they use when selecting plants for their own gardens. Appearance was the primary consideration—including looking healthy and cared for by the store, having a good visible root system and colour.

About 90% consider a plant's BC origin as 'very' or 'fairly' important as a buying criterion with another 11% not concerned about origin at all. Again, this is indicative of an opportunity to educate and inform.



Additional comments:

- *(I look for the) ability to withstand the climate and soil of where we live, North Vancouver. Would be interested in seeing more plant information for non-experts mapped to local geographies.*
- *The unique nature of the plant is important to me.*
- *I often look for plants that will look good year-round, and for slightly unusual plants.*
- *I look for plants in bud so I can get the entire bloom life.*
- *Like to see smaller pot size versions so if I'm on a budget I can still afford a certain plant.*

The results of this question are mirrored in a series of focus groups conducted in fall 2008, with BC gardeners. Pricing and plant origin were not viewed as particularly important in the selection

of plant material; participants assumed that what they buy in their local garden centre was grown close by.

Quality/appearance and ease of maintenance were the two leading factors in purchasing decisions. The definition of quality can be subjective and inconsistent, ranging from size and colour, to general appearance, evidence of having been cared for by the store, uprightness and ratio of plant size to container size.

Almost 50% of these respondents felt the quality of BC-grown plants was good, overall however, another 24% felt that BC plant material had no particular image at all.

- *There is an 'image'? - huh - didn't know!*
- *It is not easy to know where a plant came from, so they need to make the labelling clearer in that regard.*
- *Overall the image is a non-image as it is entirely invisible to me.*
- *My actual opinion is more vague - somewhere between "none in particular" and "good overall".*
- *I am not sure I would recognize grown-in-BC plants as I have not seen any labelled this way.*

The responses to this survey clearly show both an appetite for knowing about and actually purchasing BC-grown plants and a corresponding lack of helpful signage and possibly BC-grown product on the bench. Given the opportunity to purchase a BC-grown plant versus a comparable imported product, almost 99% would choose the local plant (emphasis is theirs):

- *I try to always support local over imported or shipped from far away.*
- *I prefer to keep the economic loop as close to home as possible.*
- *I want to support our provincial growers.*
- *I choose local over imported, especially edibles.*
- *I am equating 'BC-grown' to mean that the plant will thrive in BC, that is, in MY garden!*
- *The whole movement to eating locally and buying locally made items—saving the environment from excessive fuel consumption.*

Further, almost 66% would not be swayed by the BC-grown plant potentially being more costly than the import, particularly if the difference was minimal. There is an understanding that inputs such as labour and a 'green' approach to growing could add cost to a locally grown plant; there is a corresponding appreciation that the local plant is more likely to thrive in BC. This comment essentially requests that an educational campaign for consumers be initiated:

- *There would have to be a convincing argument about the value of buying a local plant: product, jobs, quality, return, and some sort of win for the consumer - especially in times when I have a lot less money. And this would have to be real, not just a pitch with no substance.*
- *Price doesn't matter especially if you plan to keep the plant for a number of years.*
- *If the BC plant cost a lot more, I would either buy the imported plant or look around for a different BC plant.*

## ***From Other Sources***

### **Print Measurement Bureau 2009**

The Print Measurement Bureau (PMB) is Canada's leading syndicated study for data on product usage, lifestyles and print media exposure. Its reputation is based on over 35 years of accurate, in-depth measurement of Canadian consumer behaviour.

The first national PMB study was conducted in 1973 and it now takes an annual sample of 24,000 to measure consumer behaviour and product usage in hundreds of categories and extrapolates the data to the total population. Gardening activity is measured as part of the 'leisure' category, along with pursuits such as camping, cooking, photography, dining out etc. and respondents are separated into light, medium and heavy users of the particular leisure activity being measured. This data is typically available only to subscribing marketing agencies and advertisers.

The largely demographic points below are taken from the current, that is 2009 PMB study and are included here just as an indication of the enduring popularity of gardening and the purchasing of gardening related items—plants and supplies.

- **3.8 million Canadians 18+ can be considered heavy gardeners<sup>11</sup>; in other words, almost 15% of the 18+ population**
- **15.67% of Canadians 35-49 can be considered heavy gardeners**
- **21.28% of Canadians 50-64 can be considered heavy gardeners**
- **19.26 of Canadians 65+ can be considered heavy gardeners**
- **64.09% of Canadian heavy gardeners are female**
- **35.94% of Canadian heavy gardeners are male**
- **90.21% of Canadian heavy gardeners visited a garden centre/nursery retailer; 35.93% spent \$750+**

While most of the data made available is national in scope, PMB 2009 does point out that 19.6% of British Columbians 18+ can be considered heavy gardeners. BC indexes at 131 for heavy gardeners, the second highest in the country, second only to PEI—remember these are percentages, not absolute numbers of gardeners. 15.5% of Vancouverites can also be considered heavy gardeners. PMB data is not available for other urban regions within BC.

As PMB points out, the baby boomers are making the biggest impact on the ornamental horticulture business. There are currently 10 million boomers in Canada, just retiring or soon to retire, and they will have more time—estimated at 8 hours per day—and disposable income available to them than any prior generation. By 2031, seniors will account for about 25% of the total Canadian population; currently they account for 13%. This is not a short-term trend. It will take about 20 years for this group to cycle through their prime gardening years. To get an idea of order of magnitude, it is estimated that between 2011 and 2021 there will be between 3.3 million and 6 million retired Canadians who will spend between \$7.8 billion and \$14.4 billion per year on gardening and related activities (compared to \$6.3 billion currently).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A 'heavy gardener' is defined by PMB as someone gardening more than 10 times in the past 12 months.

<sup>12</sup> Source of information: The Impact of Ornamental Horticulture on Canada's Economy, Deloitte & Touche LLP, 2009.

The PMB data cited above concerns 'heavy gardeners'. It is reported elsewhere that gardening continues to grow as a leisure pursuit among adults, with 49% reporting gardening and yard work as a free-time activity.<sup>13</sup> The Wall Street Journal reports gardening as the fourth most popular leisure activity amongst baby boomers, after traveling, family activities and other hobbies, and significantly more popular than golf!

Clearly the consuming gardening public is alive and well!

## **Canwest Retail Seminars**

Well-known garden centre consultant Ian Baldwin gave four, well-attended retailing seminars at Canwest 2009. While the material presented was not specifically concerned with the merchandising and selling of *locally* grown plant material, there were a number of 'nuggets' of value to retailers and nursery growers alike, keen to sell more plant product overall.

He encourages garden centres to think like consumers, acknowledging that garden retailers are not early adopters but rather fairly conservative and slow to change. The idea of selling to a consumer 'lifestyle'<sup>14</sup> was never thought of 8-10 years ago, with the example of pottery sales cited—container gardening was a rising category with more and more people living in smaller space condos, however the average garden retailer did not stock decorative pots. He mentioned several times the sales potential of a centrally located 'we pot it up for you' station.

He went on to say that consumers want selection, prices, convenience, quality and service. This is not unlike the findings in our own research, above page 35. They do not like to stand in line, to have promises broken, to encounter staff who are not knowledgeable about what's on the floor, who have a 'that's not my department' attitude, or who talk down to them. He characterizes staff as 'consultants' or 'garden coaches', who get to know the customers, help them learn what they need to learn and ultimately succeed, both emotionally and actually, in their gardening endeavours. He makes the point, as well, that "people buy from people they like".

On the subject of locally grown product, Baldwin used the term "plant miles" and indicated that as long as the product is "on", by which he meant the right product at the right price, promoting the benefits of buying from one's own region should be quite simple with straightforward and 'to the point' merchandising and signage.

He agreed with the researchers that 'green consciousness' is a wave that garden retailers can ride, citing many of the environmental strategies outlined in "Environmental Checklist for Garden Centres & Retail Nurseries"<sup>15</sup>, to selling locally grown plant material and merchandising it (loudly and often) as such. Interviewed after one session, Baldwin indicated he had not seen a great deal of 'buy local' campaigning or merchandising in his travels but reinforced his note that the environmental, so-called '100-mile' aspects are very marketable in our industry.

Baldwin noted that garden centres not offering landscape design and installation services, or at least with a partnership with a local landscape firm, are missing a big sales opportunity.

Finally, he indicated that 70% of consumer spending in the garden centre is impulse-based, and that impulse can be created through visually compelling and, most importantly, 'shop-able' displays.

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<sup>13</sup> Source of information: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

<sup>14</sup> The concept of designing products and merchandising them to correspond to consumers' lifestyle or life stages is one that the advertising industry has used for 20+ years now, applying it to every category from automotive to food to clothing.

<sup>15</sup> Environmental Checklist for Garden Centres & Retail Nurseries, prepared for BCLNA by NK Marketing & Communications, 2009.

# Salient Issues and Opportunities

On page seven we listed a number of questions that needed to be answered. As a result of the research, the following issues and opportunities can be identified.

## **Issues that can be addressed through marketing and communications efforts.**

- Consumers will ultimately drive the success of any program designed to increase sales of BC-grown plants.
- There is a consumer appetite and intent to buy BC-grown plants, although it is not universal and when it comes to actually making a purchase, other selling features such as price can win the day.
- The current 100-mile food trend is easily extendable to ornamentals.
- BC-grown plants are not always easy to find in garden centres with no in-house nursery operation, or to identify as such.
- BC-grown plants do not currently enjoy a particularly strong image, not because they are not the equal of imported plants, but because the effort to position 'brand BC plants' has not been made.
- There is a clear and marketable value proposition around merchandising BC-grown plants versus plants from elsewhere, wrapped up in environmental and economic concerns.
- The triggers and techniques that could encourage more BC consumers to buy more BC-grown plants have been identified and can be used for marketing purposes.
- Any BC-grown retail sales initiative that is not something more fundamental than 'window dressing' and is not supported at the retail level will not be embraced by industry, nor will it have an effect on consumers.

## **Issues that can be addressed through other means.**

- BC Growers will not be motivated to grow more product specifically and consistently for the domestic market unless there is a clear demand on the part of consumers first, and retail customers second.
- BC Retailers will not be motivated to order more BC plants unless they see a clear consumer demand and know that they can, in fact, consistently access quality, well-priced product.
- Not all BC Growers will be willing and/or able to increase growing capacity to meet domestic needs, regardless of demand.
- Not all BC Growers will be willing and/or able to devote resources to incremental marketing activities that may be required to meet BC Retailers' needs and to succeed domestically.
- BC Growers currently focused on the export market may see some downturn in business due to the rising dollar and be looking to refocus their selling efforts to the domestic front.
- Increasing retail sales of BC plants is a worthwhile initiative but one that must be undertaken jointly by BC Retailers, BC Growers and by the BCLNA.
- Neither BC's Retailers, Growers nor consumers see logic in a locally grown plant being priced higher than a comparable imported product.

## Objectives and Outcomes

A typical strategy will include *quantitative* sales and other measurable business objectives to be met over a set period of time. This document is presented on behalf of a business collective—the garden centres, nursery retailers and growers within the BCLNA’s membership. Members of the collective will participate, or not, according to their individual business needs and goals. We cannot therefore state that these recommendations are designed to increase sales of BC-grown bedding plants by 10% over the next 10 months, etc.

What we can do is outline *qualitative* objectives that see domestic sales of BC-grown plant material increasing, year over year, such that:

- BC Retailers see the value in stocking BC-grown material, are able to obtain it easily and dependably, and are able to succeed with the category;
- BC Growers are at or near production capacity, without any corresponding decrease in export sales or cannibalization of other product sales;
- BC consumers develop a preference for BC-grown plants of all types and are motivated to identify and purchase them locally, satisfying most of their plant purchase needs.

There are achievable, mostly communications-related objectives having to do with building a positive image for BC’s nursery industry and its products, distinguishing BC-grown plant material from a myriad of competitors supplying product of comparable quality, and to avoid giving our industry a commodity image, right here at home. That positive image can be converted into increased sales.

Objectives are inter-related but slightly different in viewpoint for the three target audiences—BC Retailers and Growers, and for the consuming public.

### ***Outcomes for BC Retailers***

Retailers need to be confident that stocking and promoting BC-grown plants is a viable business opportunity in and of itself, or as a complement to what may already be a healthy retail operation. Their confidence and disposition to purchase from BC Growers will be dependent on:

- BC consumers understanding the benefits of buying locally grown plants, knowing that there is a wide variety of top quality BC-grown plant material available close to home at competitive prices, and knowing where precisely they can go to find and purchase it;
- BC Growers producing a wide variety of top quality plant material in keeping with consumer trends, identifying it as such, ensuring that BC Retailers are well aware of its availability and maintaining price levels that are truly competitive with US pricing.

### ***Outcomes for BC Growers***

Growers need to be confident that developing, growing and marketing enough plant material to meet the needs of their domestic retail customers, and supporting those customers, is a viable incremental business opportunity. This includes BC Growers whose key or even sole focus may currently be export. Their confidence and disposition to grow and support the domestic market will be dependent on:

- BC consumer awareness of and demand for locally grown, easy to find plant material;
- BC Retailers’ awareness of that consumer demand and corresponding willingness and ability to stock and promote locally grown plant material.

## ***Outcomes for Consumers***

Consumers need to understand the full range of benefits of buying locally grown plants and be assured that their local garden centre has a wide variety of top quality, healthy and attractive BC-grown plant material, competitively priced. To gain such an appreciation and understanding, and ultimately a preference for BC-grown plant material it is necessary that a concerted awareness program<sup>16</sup> be undertaken, supported by:

- BC Retailers ordering, stocking, promoting and competitively pricing a wide variety of easy-to-identify BC-grown plants; training staff;
- BC Growers developing, supplying and identifying as a specific category, a wider range and greater volume of plant material for their BC retail customers.

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<sup>16</sup> This was, by all reports, the missing link in the Thumbs Up program.

# Positioning BC Grown Plants

We are going to consider BC-grown plants, collectively, as a 'brand', imbued with a suite of marketable attributes that will encourage consumers to want them, retailers to stock them and growers to grow them.

It can't reasonably be said that a BC-grown plant is fundamentally different from a same-species plant grown in equally favourable conditions in Alberta, Washington State or Ontario. The successful branding of 'BC-grown plants' will likely entail promoting benefits that could be promoted by any one of these other growing areas.

***The difference is that they are not promoted as effectively as they will be in BC.***

A brand's 'positioning' is a statement describing the position it occupies in its competitive environment, enabling target audiences to tell it apart from others. A successful positioning includes characteristics that are both differentiating and *important* to those audiences—in our case, retail and consumer buyers of BC-grown plants.

The positioning is used to influence communications with a view to establishing awareness, understanding, preference and even advocacy. As a statement it should be meaningful, inspirational, compelling and true.

We know anecdotally, and from past and current research that 'brand BC-grown plants' suffers from a general lack of awareness.

We also know that our brand has tangible, marketable and believable, economic and environmental benefits waiting to be put on the table.

The previously developed Thumbs Up program did not succeed for a number of reasons, not the least of which could have been the lack a thorough brand analysis, an incomplete understanding of how the industry operates and the previously mentioned lack of a consumer communications component.

That said, one of the objectives of this initiative *is* to distinguish BC-grown plant material from countless competitors with product of comparable quality.

There is clearly a need for a BC-grown identity on the domestic front to:

- communicate something tangible, positive, real and supportable about BC plants;
- provide visual recognition and continuity in messaging directed to key target audiences; and
- support the brand positioning with
  - retail buyers
  - consumers.

Following is a recommended positioning for the BC-grown 'brand'.

## **Positioning for BC-Grown Plants**

**For BC Retailers, selling BC-grown plants is a smart and accessible business opportunity that creates local employment and opportunity.**

**Trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials produced in BC offer clear advantages over products imported from other jurisdictions. With a 100+ year history in the province, BC Growers know best how to produce a plentiful variety of quality products.**

**Because they are not trucked great distances, BC-grown plants arrive at retail faster and fresher, and their impact on the environment is minimized.**

**With a strong start in our optimal BC climate, they have the best chance of thriving in BC gardens and the least chance of carrying imported pests or disease.**

**BC's gardening consumer can be confident in a quality product, the purchase of which supports BC businesses and families.**

Every strategy and piece of communication that goes out promoting BC-grown plant material, whether to consumers or the trade, should reflect and build upon the brand positioning.

## Key Messaging

The more often we use consistent statements about BC-grown plants, the more likely industry and consumer audiences will be to remember them and be impacted by them.

Based on the lack of awareness and understanding that exists in some quarters and the needs and wants expressed by industry through the survey process, strategies and supporting communications should strive to generate the following inter-related perceptions with each inter-related target audience.

### ***Messages for BC Retailers***

- Consumers are interested in buying BC-grown plants if they are made available and readily identifiable.
- Retailing BC-grown plants is a viable business opportunity, fully complementary to the rest of my selling operation.
- BC Growers produce a quality product, have (and/or can have) lots of selection, provide good service and are competitive in price with US and other suppliers.
- BC Growers are keen to have me succeed with their products because they also succeed, as does the economy we share; they will make it as easy to sell on to consumers as possible.
- The BCLNA is behind me in wanting to support this part of my business.

### ***Messages for BC Growers***

- The BCLNA is doing a lot to assist BC Retailers, particularly with regard to generating consumer interest and demand in BC-grown plant material.
- BC Retailers are seeing/will see increased consumer demand for locally grown plants and are willing to work together to this shared goal.
- BC Retailers have the desire and the ability to move a lot of my product. The closer I work with my retail customers in BC and the more support I can offer, the better off both our businesses will be.

### ***Messages for BC Consumers***

- Hundreds of different plants are grown right here in BC—annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. Many of these are also native to our province.
- The quality is as good or better, in part because they plants have not travelled as far as have plants from California or Oregon.
- BC's Growers are real people and have been growing here for more than 100 years. Who knows better what to grow, and how to grow it, in our BC climate?
- When I buy a plant grown in BC I'm supporting the economy here at home which, bottom line, means jobs for BC families.
- A plant which was grown in the same climate and soil conditions in which I will plant it is much more likely to thrive.
- A BC-grown plant has a much smaller carbon footprint than one trucked in from the US. When I buy a BC-grown plant I'm making my own contribution to a healthier environment.

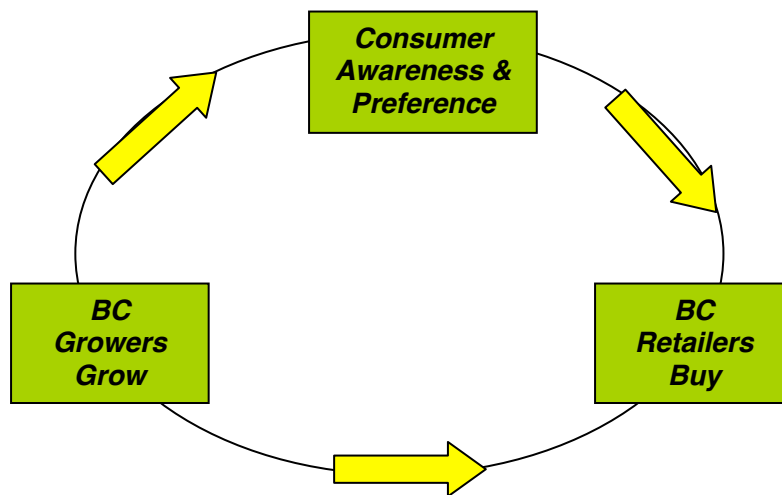
- A BC-grown plant has much less likelihood of carrying an imported disease or pest.
- My local garden centre always has a good selection of BC-grown plants. They make it easy for me to see which plants are BC-grown and which are imported.

**When we are 'on message':**

- BC Retailers will come to understand that, with BC Grower support and consumer demand, it makes good and profitable business sense to actively promote BC-grown plants.
- BC consumers will be made aware that BC Growers produce hundreds of varieties and that it only makes good sense to buy local, for the many reasons stated.
- BC Growers will appreciate that in supporting BC Retailers and making available a wide range of product, they can successfully compete with US growers.

**Here is the working dynamic:**

Consumer awareness and preference leads to BC Retailers' desire to satisfy that demand and buy more BC-grown plants; BC Growers, in turn, satisfy demand on the part of their retail customers.



# Strategies and Recommendations

This section outlines suggested directions and strategies for consideration by BC Retail and Grower members, and by the BCLNA directly. As has been stated, the BC plants sales initiative will be successful if BC Growers, Retailers and the BCLNA work together. We begin with strategies for implementation by the BCLNA as they have implications for both Retailers and Growers.

## Strategies for the BCLNA

While the BCLNA's role in the 'Increasing Retail Sales of BC Plants' initiative is primarily one of industry support and facilitation, there are several recommended merchandising pieces to be developed on behalf of industry, related to the consistent positioning and merchandising of 'brand BC plants' to consumers in retail environments.

## BuyBC Program

The survey results indicated that there is an appetite on the part of both BC Retailers and Growers to be able to use the familiar **BuyBC product identification** and participate in the program.

With 75% consumer recognition, this is a powerful tool that has had more than 15 years of presence in the marketplace. The reasons for buying BC-grown plants are for the most part the same as those for locally grown fruits and vegetables—better quality and freshness, less environmental impact and support for the local economy. To create another new identity from scratch and accord it the necessary launch and promotional effort, not to mention funding, makes neither marketing nor basic business sense.

The BCLNA is in the process of obtaining this permission, ascertaining the specifics re logo usage and will maintain the required payments on behalf of members.

What remains is to determine the best possible use of the program to support ornamental horticulture in BC. The following first steps are recommended:

- In concert with BuyBC, develop a definition for 'BC-grown' as well as a means of monitoring adherence to its parameters so as to be able to maximize consumer confidence.
- Produce simple BuyBC or BC-grown stickers for individual pot or tagged application by BC Growers, prior to shipping within BC. These can be made available to growers, at cost, and the volume of stickers or tags produced will qualify for an advantageous printing price.
- Produce window decals of the BuyBC logo for BC Retailers' use.

## In-Store Merchandising

It is recommended that the BCLNA invest further in the development of 'brand BC-grown plants' and provide BC Retailers wishing to participate with a **kit of merchandising materials** suitable for the size of their store(s), at cost. The following elements would be available:

- Posters and/or horizontal banners—two spring, two summer and two fall professionally designed posters based on a common design template, each with colourful, tempting seasonal BC plant products and both the BuyBC and the BCLNA logos and a short and to-the-point consumer message or headline. These would be a standard poster size, 24" x 36", printed on a heavy opaque stock and would be intended for exterior window or hanging use. With a heavy enough substrate, they could be printed two sides to allow for interior and exterior view; failing that, they could be mounted back-to-back. Smaller or larger sizes could also be made available; producing a supply for all at once would ensure the most economical design and printing costs. Posters would be designed for re-use, year-on-year.

- Poster artwork would also be formatted for Retailers' print and web use, and files provided free of charge.
- Horizontal bench stripping/skirting such as supplied by Proven Winners and other brands would also be made available, again based on the poster artwork.
- Promotional/advertising copy would be developed and provided free of charge. Copy would be concerned with the benefits of buying locally grown plants and intended to complement BC Retailers' own specific price and item text.
- Template for 'hot sheets'—"BC Grown Plants Available Now", for preparation by retailers.
- Template for print ad design, for final preparation by Retailers.
- Window decals "We Proudly Carry BC-Grown Plants", with BuyBC logo.

It is recommended that the creative artwork and consumer message or headline be refreshed/renewed every third year, again at cost.

## Consumer Communications

A further recommendation is to develop an annual **consumer brochure**, designed to graphically complement the in-store posters described above, outlining the benefits of buying BC-grown plants, presenting what's available from BC Growers this season, the basic characteristics including common and botanical names, heights, bloom colours and timing, other attributes such as being bird or butterfly attractants, and planting requirements. This piece would list BC Retailers who are participating in the program and carrying the products, and displaying the BuyBC logo.

This piece would be funded one of two ways:

1. Cooperatively funded through an assessment to each BC Retailer wanting to be listed and focus on BC-grown products and each BC Grower wanting to be associated with and supply the program. Distribution would be through the Healthy Garden Guide, community newspapers, community centres, retail garden centres and nurseries, and home and garden shows.
2. Partnered with the large municipalities and coupled with basic gardening and garden design tips, watering information, mulching tips, fertilizing etc. [Click here](#) for an example from Australia.

As a support to the consumer brochure and in-store merchandising materials, it is suggested that the BCLNA undertake a **consumer information campaign** consisting of public and media relations, and paid media advertising. The objective of this program would be to build awareness of the fact that there is a significant BC ornamental industry as well as to outline the benefits of buying BC-grown plants. As such, it would need to be well-planned and adequately funded.

- Enlist support of GardenWise, daily and community newspapers and other local lifestyle publications for articles and for donated or discounted advertising.
- Secure a high-profile 'champion and spokesperson' for BC-grown plants, or develop someone into assuming such a role.
- Run ads in BC consumer publications such as GardenWise, Westworld, Vancouver Magazine and other city magazines, community newspapers. The ads will be based on the

design template used for in-store posters and will thereby create continuity of message and visual cue.

- Undertake a 'Plant BC Day' event in key downtown and pedestrian/commuter centres around the province, modeled after 'Raise a Reader' and similar 'guerilla' marketing tactics. Give a small potted BC plant to passersby.
- Incorporate BC-grown message into school gardening and [Ag in the Classroom](#) programs.
- Profile individual BC Growers as part of a promotional or merchandising campaign—"I grew this and I'm your neighbour" theme.<sup>17</sup>

It is not believed that a consumer web presence would be of value at this time however it may be a future consideration, potentially as a component of the current BuyBC site.

## Industry Relations

With respect to the present initiative, BCLNA's industry role is a matter of increasing professionalism, providing support, facilitating inter-commodity relationships and seeking funding for research and other ongoing activities that cannot practically be undertaken by individual member firms.<sup>18</sup> With that in mind, the following is recommended:

- Revitalize and renew focus on the **Retail Commodity Group** as a viable, separate and thriving BCLNA collective with its own needs, issues and expertise. Schedule a minimum of two meetings annually, bring in high-calibre speakers to address business and consumer issues of concern and interest, and foster interaction, collaboration and discussion between companies.
- Facilitate a **cooperative working environment** between BC Retailers and BC Growers, potentially making one of the Retail meetings a joint Retail and Grower event.
- Help facilitate the development of an annual '**Top 10 BC-grown plants list**' and coordinate a retail promotion to generate sales.
- Seek funding for and coordinate ongoing retail projects such as consumer attitude, awareness and buying behaviour **research**.
- Facilitate the ability of growers to **stay on top of consumer trends** and tastes in landscape design and changing preferences in plant material. Retailers in BC as well as internationally expressed the wish that growers in their areas were current in this area and focused on growing accordingly.
- Ensure the **BCLNA Retail Chair** is highly engaged and able to motivate, negotiate, lobby, deal with all levels of government and be willing to share ideas.
- Develop a **new section of the BCLNA website** devoted to the people, the plants, the successes etc. of the BC-grown initiative. Encourage retailer-grower interaction by means of a discussion board. Showcase new products and solicit new ideas.
- Investigate the pros and cons of revitalizing the **BC cultivar research** program at UBC.

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<sup>17</sup> This technique has been used successfully in the credit union sector with a similar objective of encouraging consumers to 'keep their money in the community' as opposed to banking with the 'Big 5'.

<sup>18</sup> A July 2008 article in Today's Garden Center stated that the membership rosters of green industry associations are made up of the most progressive businesses and the reason they are more successful and innovative is because of the connections they make and the ideas they gather from each other.

- Provide truck **decals for BC Growers**: “Proudly Growing for BC’s Garden Retailers”.
- Research the viability of including one or more BC Growers on the [Circle Farm Tour](#).

## ***Strategies for BC Retailers***

It is well-known that garden centres and nursery retailers are the first port of call for consumers when it comes to gardening information, not only for problem solving, but also with respect to product selection and use, garden design, care techniques and origin of plant material. In addition to seeking assistance from garden centre staff, consumers also use placards, tags, banners, signs, labels, videos and other visible communicators for help in making purchasing decisions.

It only makes sense that BC Retailers would become a focal point for the support and promotion of BC-grown plants, indeed the ‘home’ of BC-grown plants.

## **Merchandising and Display**

BC Retailers will have the opportunity to ‘dress’ their stores in the livery of ‘brand BC-grown plants’ to whichever degree suits the needs of the business. Many BC Retailers indicated that they would prefer to use their own merchandising materials—inclusion of the BuyBC logo would be an option in this case.

- The **merchandising kits** discussed above will be made available for order and will be guaranteed to provide a strong BC-grown message that will complement and connect visually and in terms of text with advertising and other communications to which consumers will also be exposed.
- Maintain an up-to-date supply of customer ‘hot sheets’—“BC-Grown Plants Available Now”, for pick-up just inside the door. Keep websites updated with this information.

On entering a BC garden centre or retail nursery, it should be immediately clear to consumers that BC’s ornamental horticulture industry is alive and well and that products are available right then and there. **Good signage** is often referred to as ‘the silent salesperson’.

- It should be easy to locate BC-grown plants, including natives, whether grouped together or merchandised in other ways. BC’s Retailers report various techniques for displaying plants, BC-grown or otherwise. Some will display in blocks of colour, some by plant classification and others will merchandise according to growing requirements—shade, sun, waterwise etc. If one of these methods is preferred, BC Retailers could consider *adding* a BC plants section and using pole signs so it can be spotted at a distance.
- The benefits of buying locally grown plants are also clearly displayed and information is available for customers to take away. Make available the consumer brochure discussed above.
- Display one or more window decals “We Proudly Carry BC Grown Plants”.

Good presentations can promote impulse buying. In our time-stretched society, retailers compete for a customer’s discretionary minute, not just their discretionary dollar. And consumers can be said to ‘vote’ with that dollar.

Many garden purchases are made based on what looks ‘good’ in the display, what’s displayed alongside, what is bright and colourful and what care and additional information is provided. Almost half of consumers responding to our survey reported that this is, in fact, how they shop at their local garden centre.

To that end:

- Use **display gardens** to showcase a variety of BC plant material and complementary planting schemes, and provide some background information on the growers, if possible, in order to 'humanize' the message.
- Pre-plant attractive **containers** entirely with BC-grown plants, and merchandise as such.
- Build a **native plant garden** and show how natives can work well with other, sometimes more colourful and familiar BC-grown perennials and shrubs.

## Promotion

**Copy** detailing the benefits of buying BC-grown plants will be made available and can be used both for print ads and on store websites.

BC Retailers may wish to consider leasing or lending space to preferred BC Growers on a rotating basis with a view to a '**come meet the grower**' event. This is in keeping with one of the themed consumer communications recommendations—"I grew this and I'm your neighbour".

## Employee Selling Skills

Marketing may bring traffic in the door but only good sales staff can turn browsers into buyers, whether of BC plants, tropicals or gardening supplies.

- **Give your staff the tools** to open a sales encounter, read verbal and non-verbal signals and probe as to what the shopper wants. They should understand the purchase decision making process, be able to handle both indifference and outright objections and be able to upsell. Rather than saying 'Are you finding everything you want?' which requires a 'yes' or 'no' answer, have them engage more deeply and comment 'Those are really beautiful plants. Did you notice the apricot gerberas over there? They were grown by a nursery in the Fraser Valley.'
- Provide sales staff with an amount of money and have them shop other garden centres in the region. They will experience one of two things—service better than what they themselves are offering, or service that leaves much to be desired. Either provides a good staff discussion opportunity.
- Position one person per shift as the '**grown in BC**' **point person**, not necessarily exclusively, but ensure that if a customer asks what BC-grown product you have on the bench, will it grow well in my garden conditions, should it receive any special care or consideration etc., that you have someone ready with the answers.
- Make sure they **know the product**, BC-grown plants or otherwise. This does not mean memorizing features and benefits but really understanding what's on the bench, where it came from and why buying plants grown locally is good for the environment and the economy.

The **benefits of gardening** for mind and body are many and although not specifically linked to the sale of BC product, continuing to promote them will benefit sales of plants and supplies generally.<sup>19</sup> Be sure employees are able to include these points in their conversations with customers, as appropriate:

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<sup>19</sup> Source: Canadian Ornamental Horticulture Alliance, The Impact of Horticulture on Canada's Economy, Deloitte and Touche LLP, 2009. More information available in Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Literature Review of the Documented Health and Environmental Benefits Derived from Ornamental Horticulture Products, George Morris Centre, 2007.

- 30 minutes in the garden can burn the same number of calories as a 30-minute workout.
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation endorses gardening as a physical activity that can help prolong health and life—especially for the senior population.
- The presence of plants helps reduce stress and increase productivity—in the home, workplace, outdoors etc.
- Horticulture therapy has been shown to reduce physical pain, improve memory and concentration and encourage social interaction.

## **Strategies for BC Growers**

BC Growers wishing to increase their share of the domestic BC market can do a lot to assist BC Retailers in moving maximum volume through to consumers' gardens. Consumers are, in the end, everyone's customer.

### **Labelling**

The research conducted for this project made it clear that tagging or labeling product destined for BC Retailers with an identifying mark or symbol would be both valuable and 'do-able', and that the notion of connecting with the well-established BuyBC program is seen as a worthwhile. It is recommended that BC Growers apply **BuyBC stickers or tags** to product being shipped to BC customers, positioned such that the end consumer will readily see them.

### **Promotion**

As mentioned above, consider the value of '**grower weekends**' at select retail customers' locations, for example, the '*Nursery XYZ Weekend at Retailer ABC*'. This would entail bringing in a good and varied supply of fresh plants, providing one or more staff, ideally a 'grower' or owner, to mingle, chat to consumers and assist with selling. Not only will this put a face on the BC ornamental nursery industry, it will also support the key messaging as outlined on pages 45-46. It has been done successfully with food, as in 'meet the farmer', and there is no reason it could not be a successful strategy for our industry.

Apply a **decals** to your delivery trucks and office location: "Proudly Growing for BC's Garden Retailers".

Collaborate with other growers on the development of an annual '**Top 10 BC-grown Plants**' list.

Note that one recommendation for the BCLNA is to develop a grower profile campaign, eg, "I grew this and I'm your neighbour" themed ads. Should the Association elect to research this, consider the potential value to your business of such high-profile exposure.

**Encourage landscapers to buy** more from you for the environmental and other BC-boosting reasons covered above, as opposed to bringing plant material in from elsewhere.

### **Customer Service**

Some retailers have mentioned, anecdotally, that they feel they are better serviced by US growers than by their BC counterparts, mentioning specifics like frequent personal visits and contact, general appreciation and strong longstanding relationships.

'Customer service' ranked very high when BC Retailers were asked what attributes they consider when choosing suppliers of plants, second only to 'quality' and 'delivery'. They ranked BC Growers as 'very good' or 'good', but not 'excellent' on this attribute. They also characterize BC-grown plants as 'high quality'.

The easier it is for BC Retailers to buy from BC Growers, the more they are likely to buy. **Take away any real or imagined barriers** that might exist so there is no reason not to buy from you.

- Make sure sales reps are personable, knowledgeable about the product and reliable when it comes to delivery times.
- Host buying events at your location, inviting current and prospective retail customers, presenting your lines and fostering relationships in a semi-social setting.
- Provide as much information about products as possible—BC Retailers indicated that they put a great deal of effort into training their staff to be knowledgeable about BC and other plant products and you can assist them with this.
- Retailers also indicated they like to respond to availability ‘hot sheets’ over the course of a selling season.

When BC Retailers were asked what problems or issues would prompt them to drop a supplier, these were the ‘would definitely drop’ and ‘would probably drop’ results:

**Would definitely drop**

- product quality slipping and/or unreliable
- poor or incorrect labeling
- prices increasing, or inflexible

**Would probably drop**

- late or spotty delivery
- lack of product or hort knowledge (on the part of reps)
- packing methods not in keeping with retailer’s requirements

Retailers also expressed a desire for growers to be **up-to-date with consumer tastes** and trends in gardening, plant selection and landscape design such that the products made available each buying season would match up.

# Final Notes

There is little doubt that 'buy from your local nursery growers' sends a strong and eminently supportable message to consumers as well as retailers.

However, the ultimate success of that message (selling more plants, increased revenues, higher profit margins, improved quality image, repeat purchases etc.) and its sustainability over time will depend on any number of cultural, societal and lifestyle factors.

Here are three overarching truths:

1. Whether BC-grown or not, if the quality isn't there, all the promotional flag waving, environmentally conscious messaging and other efforts will not, in the end, make a difference.
2. The need for BC Growers and BC Retailers to collaborate in the motivation and winning over of BC consumers is clear.<sup>20</sup>
3. The consumer remains king.

Where do we want BC's industry to be in 10 years?

- To be Canada's top ornamental plant producing province on a per capita basis.
- To be recognized as the preferred source of quality plant material by BC Retailers.
- To have BC consumers not only express a preference for buying local, but to act on that preference, year-to-year.
- To be growing to capacity, with minimal skilled and unskilled labour shortages, and with no corresponding downturn in export business.
- To be active in the plant research arena, and recognized for it.
- To continue to bolster BC's image as a 'garden-oriented province', in terms of the nursery business generally, tourism draw and desirability as a location for economic investment and development.

The further covered within this document are just the beginning of an ongoing collaborative and potentially richly rewarding business initiative for BC Retailers and Growers.

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<sup>20</sup> While the landscape sector is not specifically part of the present initiative, much of what is recommended for the grower-to-retailer dynamic could be applied equally to the grower-to-landscape relationship, as well as to relationships with corporate buyers such as municipalities.

# Appendices

## ***Survey Instruments***

The following links will take you to the online survey instruments. In order to make these available, the surveys themselves remain open, however the settings are such that only one response per computer will be accepted. If you have already responded you will be unable to complete the survey again and we thank you for participating. If you have not yet responded, feel free to respond to the survey that applies to your business.

### **BC Retailers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=W4e0hlyjBjG99SHlq3wTSg\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=W4e0hlyjBjG99SHlq3wTSg_3d_3d)

### **BC Growers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=EI9s8YuKPoSvoYy5rADtAQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=EI9s8YuKPoSvoYy5rADtAQ_3d_3d)

### **Canadian Retailers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=8muDcXZ3MvtBagJUS72s0w\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=8muDcXZ3MvtBagJUS72s0w_3d_3d)

### **Canadian Growers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=v\\_2bqN59vq8zglYAMsDaZJkw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=v_2bqN59vq8zglYAMsDaZJkw_3d_3d)

### **International Retailers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=KggUx\\_2bjmT0GspW4zECi7Pg\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=KggUx_2bjmT0GspW4zECi7Pg_3d_3d)

### **Consumers**

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=CURWOZ93GToK6DcvmK5wyw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=CURWOZ93GToK6DcvmK5wyw_3d_3d)

## ***Weblinks***

Should you be reading this document in hard copy form, here is a list of weblinks referred to throughout.

### **Other 'Buy Local' programs:**

#### **California Grown**

<http://www.californiagrown.org/>

#### **Buy Local, Buy Vermont**

<http://www.vermontagriculture.com/buylocal/index.html>

#### **Australian Made, Australian Grown**

<http://www.australianmade.com.au/australianmade>

### **Foodland Ontario**

<http://www.foodland.gov.on.ca/>

**Heart of Washington**

<http://www.heartofwashington.com/about/index.html>

**BuyBC**

<http://www.bcac.bc.ca/buybc/>

**Eat & Drink BC**

<http://www.bcrfa.com/eat+-drink-bc>

**BCfresh**

<http://www.bcfreshvegetables.com/bcfresh/home>

**Pick Ontario**

<http://www.pickontario.ca/buylocal.asp>

**Plant Publicity Holland**

<http://www.pph.nl/Page/ncttrue/sp12075/ml2/lan=2/index.html>

**Home Grown**

<http://www.hdc.org.uk/>

**Miscellaneous:**

**Consumer brochure from Australia (page 47)**

<http://www.vincent.wa.gov.au/cproot/276/46/6062-19453%20LR.pdf>

**Ag in the Classroom (page 48)**

<http://www.aitc.ca/bc/>

**Circle Farm Tour (page 49)**

<http://www.circlefarmtour.com/>