



Horticultural  
Development  
Council

# Grower summary

---

## HNS 160

Investigation into the response  
of consumers to the concept of  
locally sourced plants

Final Report 2007

## **Disclaimer**

Whilst reports issued under the auspices of the HDC are prepared from the best available information, neither the authors nor the HDC can accept any responsibility for inaccuracy or liability for loss, damage or injury from the application of any concept or procedure discussed.

The results and conclusions in this report may be based on an investigation conducted over one year. Therefore, care must be taken with the interpretation of the results.

## **Use of pesticides**

Only officially approved pesticides may be used in the UK. Approvals are normally granted only in relation to individual products and for specified uses. It is an offence to use non-approved products or to use approved products in a manner that does not comply with the statutory conditions of use, except where the crop or situation is the subject of an off-label extension of use.

Before using all pesticides check the approval status and conditions of use.

Read the label before use: use pesticides safely.

## **Further information**

If you would like a copy of the full report, please email the HDC office ([hdc@hdc.org.uk](mailto:hdc@hdc.org.uk)), quoting your HDC number, alternatively contact the HDC at the address below.

Horticultural Development Council  
Tithe Barn  
Bradbourne House  
East Malling  
Kent  
ME19 6DZ

Tel: 01732 848 383  
Fax: 01732 848 498

The contents of this publication are strictly private to HDC members. No part of this publication may be copied or reproduced in any form or by any means without prior written permission of the Horticultural Development Council.

## **Headline**

The use of the Home Grown label on ornamental plants resulted in an overall increase in plant sales compared to non-labelled plants.

## **Background and expected deliverables**

A previous market research study with gardeners, (TNS Research Report, July 2006) concluded that although most gardeners do not currently consider the origins of the plants they purchase a great many wanted more information and the majority stated a preference for buying locally grown plants if given the choice. Consumer awareness of these issues has been raised by the marketing campaigns from food producers who have had great success in promoting the concept of “locally grown” and its benefits. Central to this have been the messages about reduced food miles and giving support to the local business community.

There has been no initiative for plants on this level although a small and increasing number of growers have developed and are using symbols on their plants indicating that they are grown locally. Information regarding the benefits of locally sourced plants is however lacking at the point of sale and there has been little in the way of a marketing campaign to create awareness with gardeners of the issues and benefits.

Given the positive findings of this previous research it was decided to test the consumer response to the concept of locally grown ornamental plants and its influence on purchasing intentions and the effect on home grown sales.

The project objectives were to assess:

- Consumer reaction to the Home Grown concept and levels of interest.
- Response to the Home Grown symbol itself and to the marketing messages.
- Reactions to the marketing material and its effectiveness in communicating the benefits of the Home Grown concept
- Effect on future purchasing intention
- Feedback to identify any modification required to the symbol, the communication messages and the design of the marketing material.

## **Summary of the project and main conclusions**

To achieve the objectives a number of activities were initiated.

A “Home Grown” marketing identity was developed. A symbol was designed for use on plant labels and marketing material. A consumer leaflet was prepared for use along with a point of sale board.

Four garden centres and their suppliers were recruited to take part in the test with each being supplied with leaflets and boards. Displays of Home Grown labelled plants were created and the same plants display alongside without the identity. Interviews were carried out with shoppers in the vicinity of the displays and sales were monitored at the four test sites. PR coverage was sought in the trade press to create awareness with growers and the retail trade of the project and its aims.

### *Operational Details*

Ornamentals were used in three of the locations and herbs in the fourth. The individual plant pots or trays bore a stick-on-label depicting the Home Grown symbol with a Home Grown poster placed behind the displays.

On two of the sites the consumer leaflets were placed alongside the plants. Where this was not practical in the other two, the leaflets were placed in a holder and displayed at the checkouts and enquiry desk. Displays of the same plants but without the “Home Grown” label were positioned near to the Home Grown display. Both sections were of the same size and quality of position.

The display at the Newbridge garden centre is depicted in Figure 1 (overleaf).



Figure 1. Display at Newbridge Garden Centre.

## **Results**

The results of the project have been divided into two sections. The first section summarises the results of the consumer research undertaken with gardeners. The second section details the effect that labelling plants “Home Grown” had on sales.

### **Section 1 - Consumer Research Results**

The results of the research undertaken with gardeners are detailed below. These have been summarised under 6 headings. A total of 56 interviews were undertaken across the 4 garden centres.

#### **1. Factors Considered in Plant Purchasing**

The main considerations for gardeners when choosing a plant appear to be:

- suitability of the plant for their garden
- the health of the plant.
- the lack of diseases and pests
- the price

Prior to being introduced to the Home Grown concept few respondents had considered the origin of plants and were unaware that many are imported from overseas. These findings are consistent with the TNS Research previously undertaken with gardeners for this project.

#### **2. The Home Grown Symbol**

The design of the Home Grown symbol was liked by nearly all respondents and interpreted by most as locally grown.

The symbol and associated wording spontaneously conveyed many of the positive attributes that we wished to be associated with British/locally grown plants including:

- Better for the environment
- Support for local (British) growers
- Plants would be better adapted to the local conditions

A very small number interpreted Home Grown to mean grown on the premises where the plant was sold and several respondents thought the plants would be grown by local cooperatives. It was demonstrated that this misunderstanding could easily be overcome

by the inclusion of a descriptor on the plant label with the region where the plant is cultivated e.g. Home Grown in Surrey, Home Grown in East Anglia.

### **3. Response to Communicating the Source of Origin**

Prior to being introduced to the “Home Grown” concept few respondents had considered the origin of the plants and were unaware that many are imported from overseas. These findings are consistent with the results from the TNS Research.

When presented with the benefits of locally grown plants the interest among most respondents was very high. Almost without exception they responded very positively to the Home Grown marketing messages and this was borne out by the high numbers saying they would purchase “Home Grown” in the future.

The provision of information on the origin of the plants raised interest in the subject with respondents and a number of respondents were so enthused that they requested more information on the subject.

### **4. Key Marketing Messages**

The key benefits consumers associated with Home Grown Plants were:

- Better for the environment
- Supports local growers and the local economy
- Reduced incidence of pests and diseases
- Better/healthier plants

It is clear from their comments that many are environmentally aware and already support and understand the benefits of local produce from the food industry.

### **5. The Marketing Material**

The consumer leaflet effectively conveyed the key benefits of Home grown plants.

The overall design was liked, thought to be eye catching and was described as “very professional”.

Respondents were not asked specifically about the poster but the few who made reference to it liked the way it conveyed the main benefits and commented that it was easily seen and stood out among the other promotional material.

## **6. Influence on Purchasing Intentions**

Once the benefits of Home Grown plants were known this had a significant and positive influence on future purchasing intention:

91% said they would be more likely to buy the plant bearing the “Home Grown” symbol. The remaining 9% said it would have no effect on their decision. No one said it would make them less likely to purchase.

### **Section 2 - Sales Results**

Despite being asked to do so, one of the outlets failed to record the sales of the plants which were not labelled Home Grown. This made any comparison of sales levels impossible. Of the three outlets who recorded the sales levels two reported higher sales for the Home Grown plants. The percentage differences in favour of the Home Grown labelled plants were:

The Farm Shop        + 16%

Newbridge            + 13%

The third site Rushfields, recorded higher sales for the non labelled plants. However sales were very low at just 28 pots for non labelled and 22 pots of Home Grown. There is also a suggestion that the position of the two displays may have influenced this result as the non labelled plants were first in line of the flow of traffic. Some other evidence exists that suggests that other factors apart from consumer preference alone influenced this result and the results at The Farm Shop and Newbridge are a fairer reflection of the consumer response to the concept. See science section for supporting evidence

*Given that there was no prior consumer publicity and therefore consumers had no awareness of the Home Grown concept before visiting the garden centres the sales results are very encouraging and support the research findings that creating awareness of “Home Grown” and the associated benefits will result in gardeners buying more of the plants which bear the symbol.*

## **Trade and Growers Response**

The comments from the growers and retailers taking part in the trial were very positive. All wanted to continue to promote Home Grown after the trial ended. Several asked how they could acquire more leaflets and labels. Requests have also been received from several growers/retailers who have seen the publicity and wanted to know how they could participate.

## **Financial benefits**

Increasing the sales of 'Home Grown' plants at retail outlets will increase volumes of UK plant sales for UK growers.

## **Action points for growers**

- The consumer is receptive to information on the origin of ornamental plants and promoting Home Grown will enable them to make an informed choice. This in turn will benefit those growers promoting Home Grown.
- Growers should use the "Home Grown" symbol. The impact and the benefits will be greater if growers collectively use the "Home Grown" symbol on labels and marketing material. Growers developing their own symbol will only serve to confuse the customer. Growers will benefit from the greater impact and cost effectiveness of marketing offered by a national symbol and consistent marketing messages.
- This initiative provides an opportunity for growers to raise profile in their community by using it to obtain PR coverage. Use the customer benefits which the research has identified as the basis for an article.
- Get the retailer to organise a "British Grown" area to maximise the impact and create consumer awareness.
- Jointly organise a buy "British" promotion with retailers.