

# Environmental Auditing of the Hardy Nursery Stock Sector

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## The Hardy Nursery Stock Industry

Although quite fragmented, comprising of a few large growers and many smaller enterprises, the hardy nursery stock industry supplies garden centre retailers with a range of plants and is worth £217 million. Often margins are tight, and keeping up to date with current developments in best practice, science and technology, and legislation etc can be difficult.

Isolated from the demands placed on the food sector, there is an absence of regulator and retail pressure, leaving the industry without incentive to increase environmental awareness although HDC have singled out the industry as needing to maintain a green image (Anon., 2001). Issues concerning environmental protection and sustainability are generally of low priority as the pressure of maintaining high standards of product appearance leads to the use of various ongoing chemical inputs. Hence, environmental management techniques such as auditing, the use of environmental indicators, and risk assessments are rarely used. Furthermore, within the hardy nursery stock sector there is a noticeable absence of support systems to provide simple guidance and advice and hence encourage, promote and aid the implementation of sustainability mechanisms.

## The Concept:

Born out of the need to raise awareness of growers of the environmental issues and management techniques available, the concept behind the project was to develop an environmental audit, a mechanism of support and advice, for the hardy nursery stock sector. Funded by DEFRA, the project research and development has been carried out by AERU (Agriculture and the Environment Research Unit) at the University of Hertfordshire based on previous groundwork (Hall *et al.*, 1998). A simple check-list type system that is compatible with the forthcoming EUREP GAP protocols used by the retail sector has been developed using the outline of Integrated Crop Management modified to be of particular interest to the hardy nursery stock industry.

## A General Description of the Audit:

The audit is a simple paper based self-assessment procedure incorporating performance indices, advice and guidance notes. The audit enables growers to assess themselves on their environmental performance, identifying strengths, weaknesses and priorities for improvement whilst broadening their knowledge and understanding of the issues involved.

## The Audit Structure:

The audit is structured in nine sections:



Site



Organisation, Planning and Management



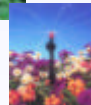
Varieties and Rootstocks



Soil/Substrate Management and Crop Nutrition



Crop Protection



Resource Management



Waste and Pollution Management



Wildlife and Landscape



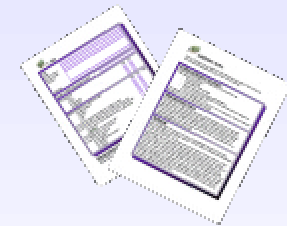
Monitoring and Auditing

## The Performance Indices and Scoring:

The performance indices have been based on environmental performance, standards of practice in respect to legislation etc, and practicality of implementation (if applicable). A performance account is opened for each answer to any one question and a separate score given for perceived environmental impact, the standards of working practice and practicality (if applicable). The final balance of the account produces the overall audit performance score for that response.

In effect, a grower will receive bonus points for conduct above and beyond the measures imposed, if the action taken is no more and no less than what is required, no points will be awarded. However, if a grower is not meeting the standards set or is having a detrimental impact on the environment, then a negative score will be accrued.

Once a total score for each section of the audit is calculated it may then be used with the self-assessment and advice sheet to identify problem areas, construct a course of action and prioritise tasks.



## Guidance Notes:

The guidance notes aim to provide a platform of knowledge facilitating a wider understanding of the issues raised and topic areas considered within the audit. They contain summaries of related topics, legislation etc., Codes of Best Practice and contact information for various consultants.

## Further Information:

For further information please visit the AERU website at: [www.herts.ac.uk/aeru/](http://www.herts.ac.uk/aeru/) or email: [aeru@herts.ac.uk](mailto:aeru@herts.ac.uk)

## References:

- Anon., 2001, Investing for a growing future. Horticulture Development Council.
- Hall, A. M., Slaney, L. & Stevenson, R. 1998. A feasibility study of the use of Integrated Crop Management for outdoor ornamentals. The 1998 Brighton Conference - Pests and Diseases. BCPC. pp 619 - 624.

