



# National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture

The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) creates a unified voice to promote the benefits and value of horticulture. NICH brings together academia, government, industry and nonprofits to cultivate the growth and development of a healthy world through landscapes, gardens and plants – indoors and out.

This movement nurtures a passion and appreciation for plants and increases the demand for gardening, from horticultural grants at universities to attendance at public gardens to foot traffic in garden centers.



## What's in it for me?

**More consumers create** more demand, more sales, more engagement, more funding, more relevancy and longevity.

**Greater collaboration leads** to more efficiency, power and impact with decision makers.

**Comprehensive research demonstrates** the social, economic and environmental benefits of consumer horticulture.

**Increased awareness promotes** the vital role gardening plays in a healthy lifestyle, healthy community and healthy world.

## What are the financial impacts of NICH?

By developing a cohesive voice, we will position consumer horticulture to be more successful in leveraging public funding to use to grow the entire industry – from conducting comprehensive industry wide research to implementing prioritized objectives. Be assured, this is not a marketing promotional order.

## Who is involved?

The current group of industry leaders includes researchers, extension agents, master gardeners, non-profits, growers, retailers and industry providers.

## How can I help?

- **Join** our unified effort to make this happen
- **Offer** your expert advice
- **Spread** the message
- **Get Involved** with a committee that suits your time and talent
- **Recommend** someone who should be involved

## Executive Committee

- **Chair:** Casey Sclar, Ph.D., Executive Director, American Public Gardens Association
- **Co-Chairs:** Dr. Ellen Bauske, University of Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture; and Tom Underwood, Executive Director, American Horticultural Society
- **Secretary / Treasurer:** Dr. Gail Langellotto, Associate Professor, Oregon State University Urban and Community Horticulture Extension, Statewide Master Gardener Coordinator
- **Marketing:** Susan McCoy, President, Garden Media Group
- **USDA Liaison:** Tom Bewick, National Program Leader, USDA

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## Committee Chairs

- **Academic/Government:** Margaret Pooler, Research Leader, USDA/ARS U.S. National Arboretum
- **Commercial:** Clint Albin, President, Clint Albin Consulting
- **Community:** Pam Bennett, Associate Professor, State Master Gardener Volunteer Program Director, Ohio State University
- **Economic:** Debbie Hamrick, Director of Specialty Crops, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation
- **Environmental:** Julie Weisenhorn, Associate Extension Professor, Department of Horticultural Sciences, University of Minnesota
- **Non-Profits:** Shannon Spurlock, Director of Public Affairs and Policy, Denver Urban Gardens; and Tom Underwood, Executive Director, American Horticulture Society

**Join us today and help grow consumer horticulture.**

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**Title of Project:** Engaging Stakeholders and Scientists in Multi-State, Trans-disciplinary Collaborations to Promote Systems-Based Extension and Research on Gardens and Landscapes

**Type of planning activity to be undertaken:** Strategic Planning

**Estimated amount of funding to be requested:** \$49,400

**Name, professional title, affiliation of the project director:** Ellen Bauske, Program Coordinator, Center for Urban Agriculture and Department of Plant Pathology, University of Georgia.

**Name, professional title, affiliations collaborators:** The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) Executive Committee includes: **Casey Sclar**, Executive Director, American Public Gardens Association (NICH Chair); **Ellen Bauske**, Program Coordinator for the Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture and Department of Plant Pathology, University of Georgia (NICH Co-Chair); **Tom Underwood**, Executive Director, American Horticultural Society (NICH Co-Chair and NICH Non-Profit Council Co-Chair); **Gail Langellotto**, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture, Oregon State University (NICH Secretary); and **Susan McCoy**, Director, Garden Media Group. Committee and Council Chairs (NICH Marketing); **Margaret Pooler**, Research Leader, USDA/ARS U.S. National Arboretum (NICH Academic Council Co-Chair); **Rick Durham**, Extension Professor and Master Gardener Coordinator, University of Kentucky (NICH Academic Council Co-Chair); **Clint Albin**, President, Clint Albin Consulting (NICH Commercial Council Chair); **Pam Bennett**, Associate Professor, State Master Gardener Volunteer Program Director, Ohio State University (NICH Social Goals Committee Chair); **Debbie Hamrick**, Director of Specialty Crops, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation (NICH Economic Goals Committee Chair); **Julie Weisenhorn**, Associate Extension Professor, Department of Horticultural Sciences, University of Minnesota (NICH Environmental Goals Committee Chair); and **Shannon Spurlock**, Director of Public Affairs and Policy, Denver Urban Gardens (NICH Non-Profit Council Co-Chair). In addition to the NICH Executive Committee, there are XX additional committee and council members, and a total of 155 people subscribed to the NICH listserv. For additional information see: <http://www.consumerhort.org>.

**Brief description of stakeholder problem being addressed:** Gardening and landscaping (i.e. consumer horticulture, or CH) drives the consumption of an array of specialty crops and have multi-faceted impacts on the economy, environment, and public health. The broad impacts of CH reflect the diversity of CH activities and settings: CH includes the interior and exterior cultivation of ornamental and food plants in residential, commercial, and public spaces, as well as in community and school gardens<sup>1, 2</sup>.

Economically, gardeners have impressive purchasing power. In 2015, gardeners contributed an estimated \$36.1 billion to the US economy, which translates to \$401 in lawn and garden spending per household<sup>3</sup>. While these figures include consumer purchases on lawn and garden products, they do not include additional monies spent on gardening books, garden coaching, garden tourism and other ancillary goods and services<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to gardeners, public and private consumer horticulture service industries such as landscape, park maintenance, irrigation, and lawn maintenance are impressive drivers of the economy. In Georgia alone, they contribute \$7.8 billion to the \$700 billion state economy.

These industries also directly and indirectly account for a total of nearly 87,000 full- and part-time jobs in the state<sup>4</sup>.

Consumer horticulture service industries directly manage or maintain a significant amount of public and private land. In fact, lawns represent the single largest irrigated crop (by acreage) in the United States<sup>5</sup>. There are more acres of lawn in the United States than the combined acreage of corn, alfalfa, soy, orchards, and rice<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, the decisions and management methods of gardeners and consumer horticulture service industries are bound to have direct impacts (good or bad) on environmental quality.

Researchers have documented the important role that CH plays in conserving biodiversity<sup>6,7,8</sup>, and have argued that conservation plans could better harness the positive environmental benefits of gardens and landscapes<sup>9</sup>. Besides biodiversity, CH systems potentially contribute to environmental sustainability in other ways: e.g. nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, water and air purification and moderating urban heat islands. However, maximizing the positive environmental benefits of CH is stymied by a lack of research-based recommendations that are scale- and system-appropriate<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to the potential environmental benefits, CH systems influence human health and well being. They encourage healthy eating habits<sup>10</sup> and physical activity, and provide food and space for reflection and relaxation. These sites improve air quality, reduce noise and satisfy our innate need for natural repose and beauty. Studies suggest that CH environments may have direct and positive impacts on human health and wellbeing, but more research is needed to understand their significance to public health<sup>11</sup>.

Socially, gardens can serve as living laboratories for science classes, demonstration gardens for history classes, or a community gathering spot for families, neighbors and friends. Gardens provide a place for immigrants to grow culturally important fruits and vegetables that are often difficult to find in local stores<sup>12</sup>. Gardens and landscapes are a source of civic pride and have been associated with decreased neighborhood crime and increased shopping in retail areas. Once again, although the potential positive social impacts of CH are broad and substantial, most reports are anecdotal and rigorous research reports are rare.

***Despite the impact of consumer horticulture on the economy, the environment, human health and well being, social systems and communities, there is currently a lack of federal funding support for consumer horticulture research, education and extension.*** We thus came together to unite university efforts in research, education and extension with the goals of the diverse stakeholders in industry, the public sector and the gardening public. We call our organization and associated efforts the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH).

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) has made a huge and positive impact on the production of commodities such as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and nursery crops and floriculture. However, funding has been elusive for consumer horticulture projects. Of the 162 projects receiving SCRI funding between 2008 and 2015, all have focused on the production side of horticulture. None have addressed the consumer end of horticulture. The lack of funding has severely limited research on the ability CH to promote outcomes that align with USDA-NIFA legislative priority areas. NICH represents the consumers, non-profits, and industries that purchase specialty crops and assist in the use of these crops. As these groups grow and prosper, they will drive demand and consumption of specialty crops.

In less than two years, we have aligned dozens of organizations, crafted a mission and vision statement, and developed a working set of core values<sup>13</sup>. We have crafted three goals to address the potential benefits consumer horticulture will have on community, economic, and

environmental systems<sup>13</sup>. We developed specific objectives to guide our work on each goal<sup>13</sup>. We have created three councils within NICH to oversee the interests of our diverse stakeholders: academic/government, commercial, and non-profit members. Our strategic plan has been vetted by scientists, extension specialists, industry representatives and non-profits, but there is much more work to do.

**Brief description of relevant expertise represented by the project team:** The project team was assembled to provide comprehensive and deep knowledge of consumer horticulture. We represent Land-Grant Universities, Nonprofits, and Industry and have many perspectives and areas of expertise including arboriculture, community horticulture, gardening, landscaping, master gardener, retail nursery, marketing and communications, public/botanical gardens, soil science, plant pathology, entomology, plant breeding and more. NICH leadership members have previously managed or currently manage multi-state and trans-disciplinary projects, and are experienced with strategic planning and collaborative projects.

**Description of the planning activities to be undertaken and the expected outcomes of the planning process:** Our plan includes four phases (i.e. recruitment, gap analysis, launch, implementation), summarized in Fig. 1.

During the recruitment phase, we will broadly increase participation of CH industries, as well as participating scientists. We will use our existing networks and will broaden into new territories to seek input and encourage participation from retail nursery owners, landscape industries and other CH service providers. We will draw on expertise from economists, public health professionals, sociologists, ecologists and other fields that can inform best practices and research protocols in CH. We will reach out to a diversity of non-profits and community leaders working in CH to support the public good, including school garden coordinators, community garden leaders, horticultural therapists, and more. We will utilize professional societies and conferences, trade publications and recertification events, gardening workshops and events, multiple newsletters and listservs, as well as our website to broadly recruit industry professionals, academics and non-profit and community leaders to NICH. New NICH members will be invited to actively work on strategic initiatives (NICH committees), advise NICH leadership and provide feedback on NICH strategic planning (NICH councils) and/or to stay informed of our progress (NICH listserv) and help to advertise NICH efforts.

We will use a series of focused listening sessions (conducted online and in-person) and surveys to identify and prioritize a short list of CH research and extension gaps. We will use the organizational structure of the NICH councils (academic, industry and non-profit) to advise NICH leadership on high-priority areas. We will use the organizational structure of our committees (social, environmental and economic goals) to organize working groups around these high-priority areas. These gaps will be the target of future SCRI SREP and CAP proposals.

We will craft a business plan to energize and sustain NICH efforts in the long-term. The business plan will include leadership succession planning, fundraising and development, marketing and recruitment, and key benchmarks and evaluation metrics. The business plan will allow NICH to become financially sustainable, oversee the implementation of the strategic plan and ultimately, to support the development of future SREP and CAP proposals. Once again, we will work closely with NICH committees and NICH councils when crafting our business plan.

We will host a national meeting for a final vetting and launch of the strategic plan. The strategic plan, itself, will include the high priority research and extension objectives, as well the

NICH business plan. We estimate 125 people will attend this meeting. At the meeting, NICH leadership and committee chairs will present the results of the gap analysis, and the short list of prioritized research and extension plans. NICH leadership will present the business plan, and organize working groups to develop timelines for implementation of strategies and tactics. We will articulate a plan for documenting and evaluating progress in the near term (i.e. next 6-12 months), and over time (i.e. 3-5 years).

**Fig. 1. Plan of work to engaging stakeholders and scientists in multi-state, trans-disciplinary collaborations leading to the development of future proposals.**



**Brief description of the benefits to growers/processors/consumers and how that benefit will be documented and evaluated:** NICH's mission is to grow a healthy world through plants, gardens and landscapes and our vision is to use stakeholder partnerships to increase the percentage of U.S. households participating in consumer horticulture to 90% by 2025. We have a strong message (CH benefits your health, your family, your community, and the environment) that awaits rigorous research and extension projects to document and articulate the multi-faceted benefits of CH. By documenting and articulating the benefits of CH, as well as promoting all aspects of gardening, we will encourage the purchase of plants and CH services and supporting goods. Given recent indications that the gardening public is not fully exercising its purchasing potential<sup>3,14</sup>, our efforts could not be timelier.

A NICH strategic plan will not only identify and organize around high-priority research and extension objectives, but will also provide CH professionals a platform for advising and guiding future CH research and extension projects. Our business plan will provide opportunities for CH professionals and organizations to invest in key project areas.

The benefits of our activities will be documented and evaluated by: broadly increased participation in NICH across all target sectors (academia, industry, non-profits); the creation and implementation of a business plan to sustain NICH efforts (which will include key benchmarks and evaluation metrics); identifying extension and research priorities and the creation of working groups for future SREP or CAP proposals.

Ultimately, our goal is to position the CH industry and professionals to have direct, positive impacts (and to mitigate negative impacts of CH) on the environment and in communities, through the sale of CH goods and services. To reach this goal requires that we engage and listen to CH stakeholders, and identify and articulate best practices in CH materials, design, and maintenance. NICH's strategic planning process will result in prioritized research and extension objectives and a business plan that will sustain and energize efforts, ultimately benefitting the CH industry and consumers via documented best practices and research-based recommendations.

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**Date**

Dr. Tom Bewick  
National Program Leader  
Division of Plant Systems Production  
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Dear Dr. Bewick:

On behalf of the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association (OLCA) and Willamette Landscape Services, Inc. I am writing to express my strong support for the project entitled *Engaging Stakeholders and Scientists in Multi-State, Trans-disciplinary Collaborations to Promote Systems-Based Extension and Research on Gardens and Landscapes*. This pre-proposal has been submitted to Specialty Crop Research Initiative grants program, as a Research and Extension Planning Project.

I currently serve as President-Elect of OLCA. OLCA is a not-for-profit statewide professional organization that advocates for the landscape industry on local, state and national issues affecting both the profession and the world we live in. OLCA members are professionals, who take pride in their work and uphold the highest standards in horticulture, environmental practices, agriculture and the landscape business.

I also serve as Vice President and CFO of Willamette Landscaping Services, Inc. in Tualatin, OR. We know from hard experience that the best choices for the long-term protection and enhancement of landscape quality costs a bit more than the “cosmetic” practices commonly employed. We gladly explain to customers what we mean by “best horticultural practices” and demonstrate how those practices represent the greatest value and actual long term savings for everyone. Documenting and communicating the benefits of our approach would benefit landscaping companies, such as ours.

The landscaping industry has always supported production research and extension; it is time to provide support for our customers so that they can enjoy the many benefits of gardens and landscapes. We are eager to support NICH and the potential it has to increase consumer interest landscaping services.

I fully support NICH as they seek funding to finalize their strategic plan, identify high priority research topics, and develop a sustainable organization. I’m looking



forward to participating in NICH and am eager to see that this movement grows and prospers.

Sincerely,