



# Mitigating Post-Recession Environmental, Marketing and Financial Risks for Nursery and Greenhouse Growers

Dr. Charles Hall, Texas A&M University, [charliehall@tamu.edu](mailto:charliehall@tamu.edu)

## Project Introduction

### Expended Amount: \$48,635

This project utilized multi-faceted education strategically targeting nursery, greenhouse and landscape operators. Building on the results achieved over the last five years of successful grants, a series of new educational materials was developed to address already-contentious green industry-related risk management issues. Some of these materials were translated into Spanish. These educational materials were integrated into a weeklong workshop on sustainability and face-to-face regional programs, as well as presentations at green industry events with historically strong attendance. A new series of online webinars was also developed to reach out to regional audiences. Other outreach tools included risk-related posts on the leading green industry blog (Making Cents of Green Industry Economics located at <http://ellisonchair.tamu.edu>), online video segments on the American Nursery and Landscape Association Knowledge Center, and e-newsletters that were distributed by the green industry trade organizations that are listed as project collaborators. We were able to reach a total of 5,675 producers with this project.

## Project Participants

Clientele targeted with this customized project included growers and landscape service providers in the green industry who had been undergoing severe financial stress in the wake of the latest recession, the bursting of the housing market bubble, and the cost-price squeeze from ever-increasing input costs and shrinking margins.

## Project Area

The project area was mainly focused on Texas and areas with similar environmental conditions in the Southern region. Some topics covered in the project are applicable to audiences nationwide.

## Project Outcomes

- Educational modules were developed from an Earth-Kind Landscape Manual, which was also translated and printed in Spanish to train Spanish-speaking employees in the green industry.
- 456 green industry personnel improved their understanding of marketing-related risks and apply sustainability and other innovative marketing strategies for differentiating their respective firms to minimize these risks.
- 343 green industry personnel learned about consumer perceptions of sustainable products and services (e.g., those produced in water-conserving and energy-conserving systems; locally grown biases and purchasing intentions; and how environmentally conscious behaviors influence buying habits).
- 1,342 clientele viewed blog posts featuring mitigation strategies of environmental risks associated with the green industry (<http://greenviion.wordpress.com/>).
- 1,223 clientele have a better understanding of the financial risks associated with economic downturns and subsequent recovery, and are now able to develop strategic business plans to minimize risks and take advantage of opportunities that might exist during future economic downturns.

- 1,323 clientele viewed a monthly series of online video podcasts that were developed and distributed on the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA) Knowledge Center to teach production, marketing, financial and human resource risks specific to green industry firms.
- 309 webinar attendees will have better understanding of benchmarking in managing their firms and choose a subset of financial and operational benchmarks to implement in their business.
- 2,167 webinar and online video attendees will access previously recorded webcasts on related risk management subjects and will use the information to evaluate and adjust strategic plans for their firms.
- Total number of participants – 358; additional views – 588; total people reached – 946 as of December 2014; economic benefits – \$11,210,437.

## Quotes

“This course was very beneficial. It is a tall order to break down your current culture, strategic planning procedures and methodologies. This course helped me provide a roadmap to do it. The industry is changing and my company recognizes the need to change. This workshop will not only provide a roadmap for assisting my team, but it also gave me a great list of walk-aways to enhance the things we’re already doing well.”

**Anonymous quote from workshop evaluation**

“Thank you for an exciting two days! This workshop did a spectacular job of providing us with a process that can help to develop our team and increase our market shares. I believe these programs can drastically change the way we approach territory management. I enjoyed the class and would have no hesitation in committing to additional training to clarify and re-enforce the concepts provided. As a new manager, I am constantly trying to find resources for establishing a proven process that can be replicated each and every time with predictable success. This will go a long way to helping with that!”

**Anonymous quote from workshop evaluation**

“This course has opened my eyes in several key areas – recruiting to benchmarking. The content from the last couple of days brought a fresh and exciting perspective to some of the most important areas in our industry. I would recommend this class highly.”

**Anonymous quote from workshop evaluation**

“The entire program was beneficial. It has been a long time since I’ve been to a risk management training, so this has brought me new ideas, sparked old ideas and has given me excitement to put the plans in place.”

**Anonymous quote from workshop evaluation**

## Project Success Story

One of the participants in this year’s risk management programming was GreenForest Nursery, Inc., which is located in Perkinston, Mississippi. The nursery was founded by Dan Batson and is located on Batson family land that has been in the family for generations. The first trees Batson sold were taken from the surrounding woods, mostly yaupon and wax myrtle trees, and sold to clients the following summer in Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, to begin establishing cash flow and increase production numbers. By 1989, they had established inventory and had made a name for themselves in the green industry. By the early 1990s, GreenForest Nursery began to expand in acreage and in varieties grown, one of those varieties being the Kathy Ann yaupon holly. Sales to the west also ramped up, expanding their sales territory to Texas, Louisiana and Tennessee. Through the 1990s, with housing at an all-time high, the nursery’s effort to accommodate their customers was to expand at a fast pace. However, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina challenged them like never before. However, because of their unbelievably loyal staff, thoughtful customers and other people, they recovered and were able to help others in the community and had their best year to date. Even in the wake of the “Great Recession,” because of principled financially sound business practices, the nursery was able to maintain planting schedules. Additions to their staff included two sales representatives and a production manager – all are tops in their fields. Because of the cost accounting and financial benchmarking strategies learned through the risk management programming, they are now back on track with a 40-acre expansion that will take them to 180 acres of efficient growing area to give their customers plant material that they want and expect.

\***Sandra Martini, H. L. Goodwin** and **Ronald L. Rainey**, Grant Coordinator and Co-Directors, respectively, of the Southern Risk Management Education Center, serve as editors of this report series. To learn more about risk management education programs and resources, visit the Southern Center website (<http://srmecc.uark.edu>) or the Extension Risk Management Education Program link ([www.extensionrme.org](http://www.extensionrme.org)).

Printed by University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Printing Services.

The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

SRME315FR-8-2015N