



RESUME

Name: Robert Falconer.
Title: Executive vice president.
Firm: California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers, 3947 Lennane Drive, Suite 150, Sacramento, CA 95834-1973; (800) 748-6214; bfalconer@cangc.org.

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They Say...



Todd Davis
NMPRO Editor

Robert Falconer on a new invasives program

California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers has joined an organization addressing the invasive-plant issue in the state. Goals are evaluating plants and eliminating those with invasive tendencies from the trade. I spoke with Robert Falconer to find out the organization's plans and how CANGC got involved.

Q. How was California Horticultural Invasives Prevention formed? What organizations are involved?

A. Sustainable Conservation is a San Francisco-based environmental organization dedicated to bringing desperate and sometimes opposing groups together to address environmental concerns in a manner acceptable to all parties.

Cal-HIP came together when Sustainable Conservation pulled several interests together to address the problem of horticultural plants that have escaped and become invasive in native habitat. A broad diversity of organizations are involved include universities and cooperative extension services, agriculture/horticulture trade groups, arboreta and botanic gardens, landscape firms, nurseries, chain retailers, environmental groups and government agencies.

Q. What are the goals of Cal-HIP?

A. The goals are to identify plants currently in the nursery trade that are invasive and -- through education and outreach -- replace those with suitable alternatives.

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A major part of the Cal-HIP is the PlantRight program, which promotes these principles.

Q. I understand the program is organized by region. Can you describe how this works, and how the regions are split up?

A. Those who have visited California know that it is a state that is very large with great environmental and ecological diversity. That means that plants that are a problem in one place may not be a problem in the majority of locations throughout the state. We have attempted to identify regions with similar conditions and what plants are problems in those locations. We can then decide what plants to exclude from those areas.

Q. What have been the reactions of CANGC members to the Cal-HIP and the PlantRight program?

A. Although we have been working on the program for a couple of years now, we are just starting to roll out the PlantRight program to the larger industry. Those who have been involved in the development of the program are very supportive.

Q. What are the major invasive plants introduced by commercial horticulture that California is battling?

A. Some of the plants that originated in horticulture that are actively being addressed are pampas grass, some of the brooms, certain ivies and some aquatics such as water hyacinth.

Q. Are there any common landscape plants that you think the group could encourage phasing out?

A. Yes. In many cases, however, it will more likely be specific varieties of plants that should be phased out.

As an example, there are varieties of pampas grass that are reported to be sterile. There are some, however, that should no longer be sold. A visit to some coastal areas makes that very evident.

The jury is still out on the sterile varieties and we are engaging researchers at University of California-Davis to determine if these sterile varieties still produce pollen that can add to the problem.

Another plant is *Vinca major*. Again, this should be addressed in certain regions. With the extent that Scotch, French and Spanish brooms are still sold in the nursery trade, those should be phased out. However, there is a variety known as sweet broom believed to be sterile that should fill that void.

Q. What is CANGC doing to ensure the program uses science-based reasoning when deciding what plants are a danger to the environment?

A. This is what we spend a great deal of time discussing in our meetings. I believe that the majority in the nursery industry want to do the right thing and not contribute to the problem.

However, we are not willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater and get rid of plants that are not really problems for expediency sake, which we have seen happen in other programs.

I believe this would attack the credibility of the effort. It's, after all, our product and our livelihood. As I stated above, we're engaging researchers at UC-Davis and others when some of these questions come up. The difficult part is the lag time in getting answers.

Q. What can other state organizations learn from these new programs?

A. I've been encouraged by working with our partners in this effort. Some of them we have been on opposing sides with in the past on this issue.

We have come to some issues where we have had to work through differing views. Sustainable Conservation has been a good facilitator keeping everyone on the right path and I believe that having an organization playing that role has been important.

This is an issue that is not going to go away. Government and private entities are spending millions of dollars to address invasive weed problems and the nursery and landscape industry needs to stand up, be a good citizen, and do its part.

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