

Hemp soil amendments, biostimulants and organic sales



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Using Hemp Hurd
Dutch Growers Go Sustainable
Biostimulants
Organic Sales
Report from the MT Outpost



Using Hemp Hurd in Greenhouse Media

Could a hemp byproduct be a viable growing media amendment for growers, one that could replace or supplement peat? Jessica Lubell-Brand has been conducting research at the University of Connecticut to investigate how hemp hurd (a byproduct of the hemp textile manufacturing process) might work in greenhouse crops. When textile manufacturers spin the wispy outer fibers of the hemp stem into cloth, the woody core of the stem, called the hurd, is left behind, and often discarded.

When researchers worked with hurd and greenhouse petunias, they found they could replace up to 66% of the peat and still have similar quality, crop time and fertility. There were some differences in size of plants and also variable results based on the size and source of the hurd. Next up: they'll test how hurd works with other plants. The research is funded by a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant.

A progress report is available [HERE](#).

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Dutch Auction Growers Set Sustainability Bar

Chris Beytes reports on this milestone in the Netherlands:

By 2027, all growers who supply flowers and plants to Royal FloraHolland, the big Dutch flower auction, have agreed to be certified by the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI). Said the Auction in a press release, “With this decision of Royal FloraHolland, growers are taking their responsibility on sustainability, in line with the future-proofing of the sector, the increasing demand from society and the requirements of legislation.”



Demand is also coming from retailers and the growers who serve them. There's a group called the Floriculture Accelerators, a group of “forward-thinking” growers who joined forces in 2017, and they have something called the FSI Accelerator Group, made up of large buyers, all of whom have committed to buy 100% certified plants by 2027.

The Dutch floriculture segment aims to be climate neutral by 2040, a goal called the Covenant Energy Transition Glasshouse Horticulture, set in November 2022 via an agreement between the Ministries of Agriculture, Economic Affairs, and Climate and Finance and various parties from the horticulture sector.

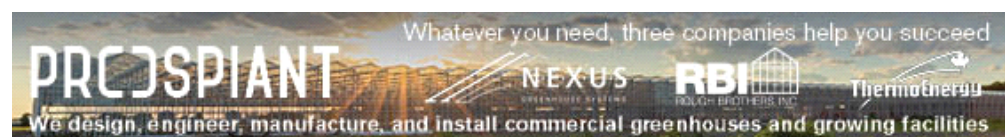
The goal? “Work on measures for energy saving and sustainability that are necessary for healthy and profitable greenhouse horticulture.”

Climate neutral means achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by balancing those emissions so they're equal or less than the emissions that get removed through the planet's natural absorption.

The shift toward climate neutrality involves energy transitions, such as LED lighting, geothermal energy and solar energy, labor, water use, use of crop protection chemicals and packaging.

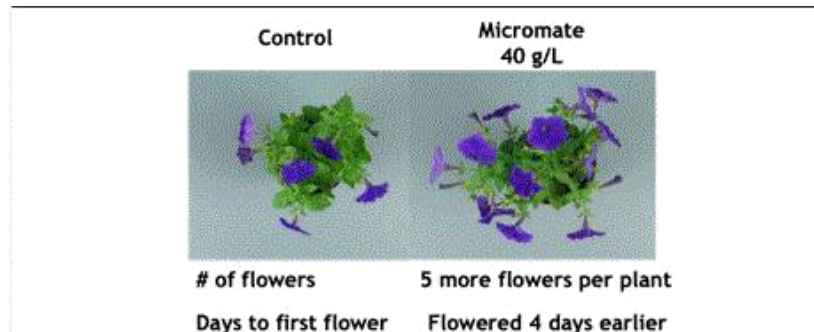
Said Auction CEO Steven van Schilfgaarde, “I am proud of where our sector is today ... Now we need to take the next step. Certification is important for transparency and objectification. With our decision, buyers on our platform will soon only buy flowers and plants from certified growers. This fits the social role of our internationally leading floriculture platform, giving customers more transparency. It also fits with Royal FloraHolland's role as a leading cooperative and floriculture hub in the Netherlands, Europe and beyond.”

According to the Auction, the 100%-certified goal by 2027 is not that far off. Of Royal FloraHolland's total product revenues, 83% are already currently environmentally certified and 71% are FSI-compliant.



Biostimulants: Digging In

Biostimulants are one of those nebulous categories: so many different options and claims, and it's hard to sort through what might work for your crop. Never fear: a new e-GRO Alert is available on "Biostimulants for Greenhouse Ornamental Production."



Michelle Jones, Juan Quijia Pillajo and W. Garrett Owen share the basics with you, along with some research they've conducted that might just convince you biostimulants are worth it. But they also warn that you need to do your homework.

They write: "All biostimulants, even those with the same active ingredients, are not equal and the product formulations are very important. Biostimulants have great potential to reduce various chemical inputs without sacrificing plant growth or crop quality. However, with the introduction of any new product, it is vital to consider both the risks and the rewards. When implemented properly, biostimulants can serve as a great addition to your grower's toolbox, resulting in higher quality plants, decreased costs, and reduced environmental impact."

Read the full e-GRO Alert [HERE](#).



Organic Sales Cool

The Organic Produce Network just released their "State of Organic Produce 2023" report. The rapid growth once associated with organic was not on display in 2023. U.S. sales in dollars grew by 1.6%, to \$9.6 billion, but overall volume declined by -0.1%. (However, we should note that conventional produce had relatively similar numbers.)

The Top 5 organic categories by sales were berries, packaged salads, apples, herbs & spices and carrots. While packaged salads are still impressive sitting in No. 2 with sales of \$1.5 billion, they had a tough year compared to the previous year. Sales declined by -3% and volume fell -5.2%. The good news for these greens was that they had a 68% price premium over conventional packaged salads. Herbs and spices did a bit better, with a 4.1% increase in sales and 2.7% increase in volume. The real winning number, however, is the price premium that organic herbs and spices get over conventional: 306%!

You can peruse the full report [HERE](#).

Report from the MT Outpost

April has already delivered me a few gorgeous days on the mountain bike, and some deep winter skiing, along with a few mud-filled adventures. It's the sun that gets me, though.

I pass by the garden, knowing it isn't time yet, and then head to the internet for some kind of gardening something—a coping mechanism when the last frost date is still a ways off. Yesterday it was self-watering planters. Today I ordered a high mountain native grass seed mix from High Country Gardens.

My favorite little garden shop just announced I can go there and fill my own bucket with organic compost, so I'll likely head that way this weekend. Meanwhile, there's a geranium I overwintered that has started to bloom, and that gives me assurance that spring is on the way.

Until next time,



Jennifer Duffield White

jwhite@ballpublishing.com

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