

Plant Product Trends

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Many different direct and indirect forces create plant product trends. Our industry was once controlled by the production end of the business, but now it is more market driven. The ultimate consumers' perceived value of our product has always been the basic control of what sells and what we need to produce. Most often these values have been determined by experience with our product. In recent years more information has been available for consumers, including product availability.

Presently, the ultimate consumer for plants is the retail customer, a homeowner, and usually a woman. Just a few years ago a high percent of the plant material was sold to large commercial jobs with a much different ultimate consumer with a different perceived value. The plant product trends of the future will depend on the ultimate consumer.

The retail segment of our business will always use a high percent of our product. Color has been a major selling feature for retail sales for one reason—it is visually gratifying to the consumer. The question is can visual gratification continue to create enough perceived value to allow color to remain the hot trend it has been. To determine this, let's understand the meaning of perceived value.

Perceived value is defined as plant benefits less costs. The greater the benefits, the higher the perceived value, unless costs also rise. Costs include more than just money paid. They also include maintenance costs, replacement costs, and opportunity cost of time involved with the product.

What happens to color's perceived value if the homeowner cannot control certain pests, or the retail store price is doubled because the grower's and retailer's costs double? This is important because it is exactly what is beginning to happen in our industry due to the legislation that has or will be passed in the next few years.

- **Worker Protection Act**
 - Increased labor costs
 - Elimination of many effective pesticides
- **American Disabilities Act**
 - Increased labor costs
- **Clean Water Act, Coastal Zone Management Act**
 - Increased labor costs
 - Increased facility costs
 - Increased fertilizer and pesticide costs
- **Universal Health Insurance Legislation**
 - Increased labor costs

What is the perceived value of our product and how can we increase that value? To increase the value of our product, we must provide more than something that is pretty. To reach millions of people who place little value on aesthetics around the home, we must convince them that plants positively affect their lives in many ways

other than providing beauty for the world.

- Plants are a major source of oxygen.
- Plants filter pollutants, both air and water.
- Plants screen out noise and sights.
- Plants cool the summer days.
- Plants slow the cold winter winds.
- Plants offer shelter and food.

Plant product trends for the future will be determined by our industry's ability to convince ultimate consumers that plants are really valuable to them.

What do I think are the plant product trends over the next three years?

- Continued expansion of color
- Increased awareness of low maintenance plants, not necessarily natives
- Multiple-use plant products
- Unique products

Foreseeing trends is especially important for producers as they must start production well in advance of the increased demand in order to provide what consumers want when they want it.