

Understanding Florida Container Nursery

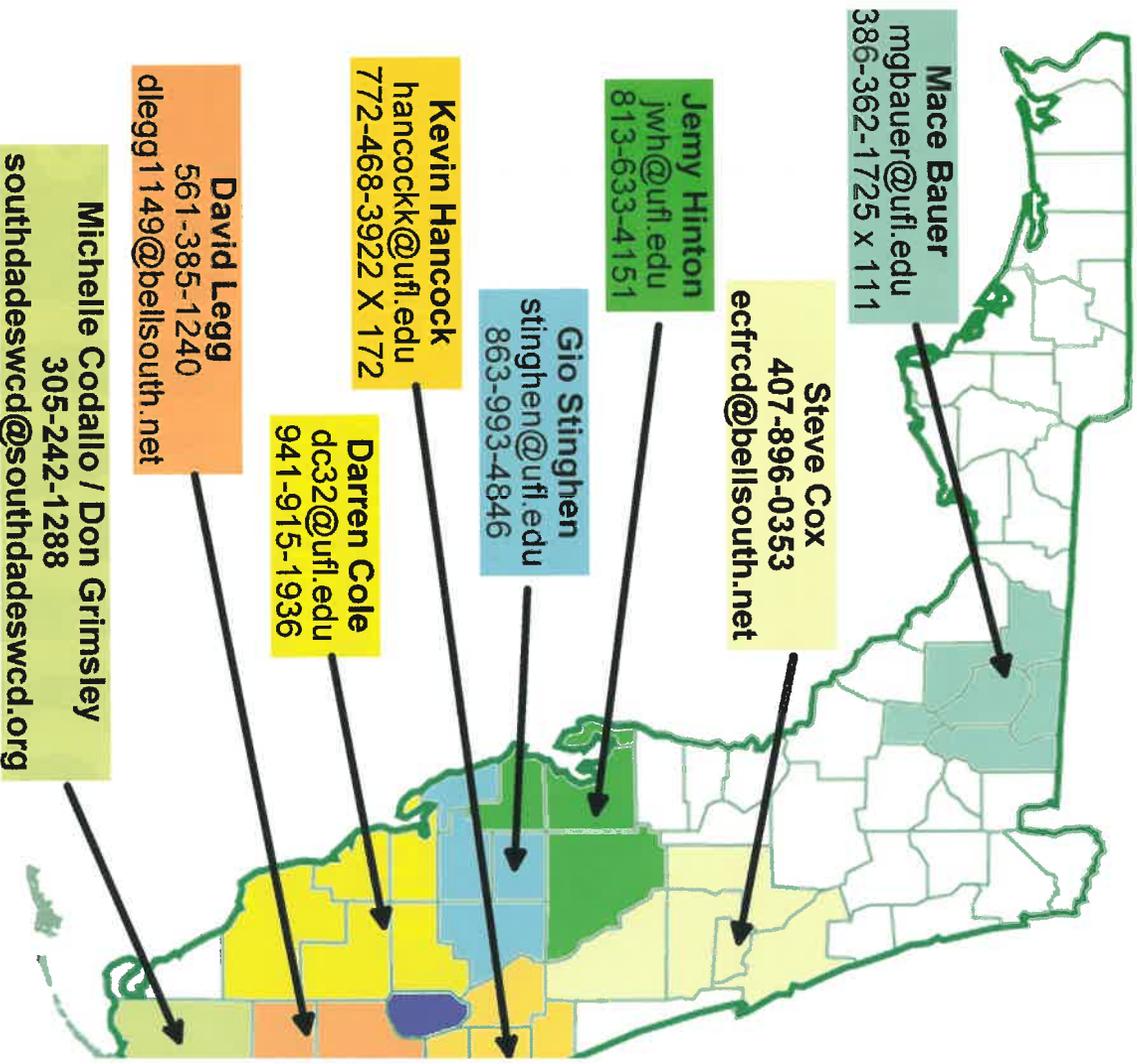
BMPs

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Dear Container Plant Producer,

The development of best management practices (BMPs) for container plant producers is a cooperative effort between the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA); the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP); and the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). To begin the BMP process, FNGLA initiated a dialogue with OAWP about the development of a Container Plant Interim Measure and, subsequently, a comprehensive BMP manual in response to a water quality issue in South Florida. The BMP manual is based on the most current and best research information from UF/IFAS and represents many hours of work, meetings, and consensus among producers and key stakeholders from the scientific, regulatory, and environmental communities. This public discussion allowed all parties involved to address specific concerns while identifying BMPs that are technically and economically feasible for container plant producers. UF/IFAS conducted workshops in South Florida to help producers implement BMPs.

Our efforts are now focused on obtaining input from other areas of the state on the BMP manual and on conducting additional workshops. Once completed, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will formally adopt the manual as a statewide BMP manual. This adoption will provide producers following the BMP Guidelines with benefits such as a waiver of recovery costs for cleaning up contaminated water, a presumption of compliance with state water-quality standards, and enhanced status for cost-share funds.

The Container Nursery BMP Manual is the result of cooperation between government personnel, plant producers, and UF/IFAS researchers to address all potential environmental concerns, provide benefits to producers, and highlight the many innovative and unique production strategies embraced and practiced by Florida's container plant industry. The challenge of confronting these complex issues with scientific solutions as addressed by BMPs requires a team with broad-based expertise. We are delighted to be part of the team! We seek your help and suggestions in making these BMPs the official nursery production guidelines in Florida.

Sincerely,

Ben Bolusky
Executive Vice President
Florida Nursery, Growers
& Landscape Association

Charles Bronson
Commissioner of Agriculture
Florida Department of
Agriculture and Consumer
Services

Jimmy G. Cheek
Senior Vice President,
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
University of Florida's
Institute of Food and
Agricultural Sciences

BMP Beginnings

The Florida Container Nursery BMP Guide is the result of many years of industry collaboration.

Ken Kuhl

Environmental Administrator
Office of Agricultural Water Policy
Florida Department of Agriculture and
Consumer Services

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' (DACs) Best Management Practice (BMP) program was created by the Florida

1994

Legislature in 1994 in response to a great deal of frustration expressed by the agricultural industry. The industry was confronted with a regulatory environment, primarily administered by state and local government, which was entirely punitive in its response to ground or surface water contamination believed to originate from agricultural sources.

The industry needed a more constructive approach, designed to encourage a change in behavior where necessary, but one based on science, sound agronomic principles, grower input, and economic considerations. The traditional, regulatory system provided little opportunity for grower input, frequently imposed monetary penalties, and potentially mandated production practices that were impractical at best.

Joining Forces

The legislature, DACs, and its multiple partners embarked on an experiment to develop a program based primarily on the input of agricultural producers and the best science available — tempered by contributions from the environmental community, the pesticide and fertilizer industries, state and local government, and other interested parties. This consensus approach garners a strong endorsement from legislators, agencies, agricultural producers, environmental interests, and the general public. The focus during BMP development is directed at identifying the nutrient, irrigation, and pesticide-management practices that are currently employed by a particular commodity group, and compares these practices with the latest technologies and recommendations published by the land grant institutions.

The second step involves assessing the impact of these existing practices on water resources. If modifications are necessary, then new practices or best management practices are developed by consensus. The resulting BMP manual, which is typically commodity and regionally specific, integrates existing practices with

modified or new practices based on recommendations supported by the academic community. The BMP program provides agricultural producers with an alternative to the traditional regulatory framework as a tool to meet water quality standards (both ground and surface water) and “recognizes” many of their existing production practices as BMPs. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the agency responsible for enforcing state water-quality standards, endorses the BMP development process. In addition, growers have access to cost-share funds to assist with the implementation of needed BMPs.

In 2000, nursery growers, under the leadership of the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA), implemented a policy decision to position the industry

statewide to be “out in front” of the water-quality and water-conservation issues. FNGLA felt it was important for the

industry to be in a leadership role in terms of cooperating with the BMP “movement” and investing the energy to eventually develop BMPs for implementation statewide.

Implementation And Development

In doing this, FNGLA, University of Florida’s Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences, and DACS (the BMP partners) initiated the statewide BMP development process in Southeast Florida in 2003 to address

water quality and quantity issues identified by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

in basins discharging to the Everglades. This became a priority for BMP development and implementation since a large number of nurseries were facing additional regulation and/or permitting. Numerous workshops were held with nursery producers throughout the SFWMD region to develop a manual that would be applicable and valuable to all growers in South Florida, and eventually statewide.

Concurrent with this effort, the BMP partners infused components of the “Best Management Practices Guide for Producing Container-Grown Plants,” published by the Southern Nursery Association (SNA), into the evolving BMP manual for Florida nursery producers to expand the applicability of this initial effort in South Florida to nursery producers statewide. The SNA manual applies to the entire southeastern United States.

At this point, the BMP partners, along with Florida nursery producers, have completed the BMP manual for Florida nursery producers and will be adopting it by rule for the SFWMD region by Jan.

15, 2006. The partners have also initiated workshops to discuss this manual statewide with all interested parties in hopes of adopting the same manual statewide by July 2006.

BMPs: The Benefits and the Basics

By Tom Yeager

Environmental Horticulture Professor
University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BMPs?

As provided for by statutory rule, BMPs for container nursery crops will provide a waiver of state-imposed liability for cleaning up contaminated surface or ground water provided the owner or nursery operator has done the following:

- Filed a notice of intent with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)
- Implemented and carried out the appropriate BMPs
- Maintained the necessary records of using BMPs.

The waiver is provided on the premise that a nursery operator is using the best production practices. Therefore, water leaving the nursery property is presumed to meet state water-quality standards and will not impair the natural waters of the state.

Additional benefits of using BMPs include:

- Protection from duplicate regulations at the local level
- Eligibility for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and possibly other cost-share funds for retrofitting or implementing water-conserving irrigation systems
- Improved production efficiency and possibly reduced production costs
- A demonstration that the nursery industry can exercise its ability to determine what are the “best” cultural practices and voluntarily use these practices rather than be confronted with mandatory regulations.

GROWERS BELIEVE IN BMPs



“The BMPs for container nurseries were designed for growers by growers in a proactive effort to improve water quality.

Growers that participate in the entirely voluntary program and adhere to the criteria are presumed innocent from causing groundwater contamination on site. Therefore, they cannot be held liable and subject to penalties or cleanup costs. The best part of the program is that it creates a mechanism that growers who may be in violation of current local, state, or federal regulations can implement and not only come into compliance, but actually improve, water quality. Most growers don't know that they are already practicing a great deal of the criteria listed in the BMP manual. For most, it will simply be a matter of keeping records of the cultural practices they already implement. This project has my full support.”

Erik Tietyg, Vice President, Pine Island Nursery



“The Florida Container Nursery BMP Guide was compiled by many

working groups within the horticulture industry. The intent of the Guide is to aid growers with the implementation of sound management practices. Voluntary implementation and knowledge of management practices that are detailed in the Guide will protect the water resources of Florida for all of us, and mandatory regulation will not be necessary.”

*Roger Brooks, Owner,
Four B's Nursery*

WHAT BMPs DO I USE?

The owner or nursery operator will evaluate and compare existing production practices with those listed in *Florida Container Nursery BMP Guide* to identify those practices contained in the *Guide* that are already being used. If a cultural practice is currently being used at the nursery, then it is marked in the *Guide* by shading the “Y” within the box next to the BMP. Shading the “P” within the box next to the BMP marks practices that you plan to implement. If a BMP listed in the *Guide* is not applicable, or is applicable but will not be implemented, then shade the “NA” or “N”, respectively, in the box next to the BMP. There is no minimum number of BMPs that have to be used in the nursery, but as many BMPs as possible should be used.

Thus, the *Guide* becomes documentation for the owner or nursery operator of the BMPs currently used or the BMPs planned for implementation. This information is also recorded on a separate form, along with the date of implementing the planned BMPs, and sent with the Notice of Intent form to FDACS. The *Guide* informs the reader if records are needed for supporting evidence that a BMP is being used. Forms for records and the Notice of Intent are provided in the *Guide*.

WHAT AREAS OF NURSERY PRODUCTION DO THE BMPs COVER?

Topics in the *Guide* include Nursery Layout, Container Substrates and Planting Practices, Fertilization Management, Container Substrate Nutrient Monitoring, Irrigation Water Quality, Irrigation Application, Irrigation Uniformity, Erosion Control and Runoff Water Management, Pesticide Management, and Waste Management.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

The best way to start is to attend one of the upcoming BMP workshops (see calendar on page 2). During the workshop, you will receive a copy of the *Guide*, receive hands-on training with implementing some of the BMPs, conduct an assessment of a nursery, and learn about record keeping. If you are not able to attend a workshop, contact your County Extension Office, the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association, or FDACS' Office of Agricultural Water Policy for assistance.



“Today’s nursery industry is an ever-changing place. As development seems to help our business thrive, it continues to surround us with urban influences. The technology available in

our industry far surpasses the past and directs us into practices in many different aspects. The BMPs available to our nursery help us not only with efficiency, but with costs, too. Recycling old potting soil and other organic matter is something that we do and recommend. This process affords us the opportunity to save on soil and trash-removal costs. Recycling the soil also lets us take advantage of the fertilizer already in the soil. Having the opportunity to be able to help construct these nursery BMPs is something that I felt was much needed and I was glad to participate.”

Jamie Hayes, General Manager, Runway Growers



“This BMP program is allowing us, the professional growers, to determine how best to help minimize potential nutrient runoff. I got

involved in this process a long time ago, and it became evident very early on that we, not regulators, had to set up these guidelines. In the early meetings, suggestions were repeatedly made that were impractical, unreasonable, and many times financially prohibitive. It is critical that dedicated professionals be involved in these processes so that the results are something with which growers can still be able to produce our products and still be able to be profitable.”

Wes Parrish, Co-owner, Parrish Nursery



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