

Plants for the Future – What Happens Now?

9th November 2016, Hillside Centre RHS Wisley

Workshop Report

Please note: All reports, presentations and links referenced in this document are available to download on the Plants for the Future Website, here:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/plantsmanship/Plant-Societies/plant-society-events/Plants-for-the-Future>

Introduction

This document is a summary of the proceedings, information gathered on the day and feedback from the workshop. These are not minutes of the meeting, but does contain quotes, some specific comments and ideas for taking the initiative forward into 2017.

Aims and Objectives

This was the third Plants for the Future (PFTF) workshop, following on from 19th November 2015 where the aim was to produce a set of objectives/actions around '*What does the British Plant Industry need from us?*' Whilst bearing in mind that the RHS does need to take a neutral stand and is trying to, and can only be, a facilitator in this.

There were several key aims of today's meeting:

- Feedback on the objectives and progress from the 2015 workshop
- To offer networking opportunities and share ideas and experience on the theme of producing and marketing plants for the commercial market, amongst a good audience with great deal of experience in all aspects of this subject.
- By the end of the day to decide '*What Happens Next?*'. Do we carry on with the initiative, and if so how do we develop it to ensure we meet the initial target audience and don't become stale, whilst considering the resources available at the RHS to proceed with this.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Chairman Raymond Evison opened the workshop with a brief history of the PFTF initiative, and asked the audience to consider what outcome we would like to achieve at the end of the day, and how we can take the initiative forward to reach the 'real' non-professional grower who was the original target for PFTF.

Delegates were asked to consider their feedback for the end of the meeting, or to include it in their feedback form.

Raymond briefly discussed the updates that have been made to the PFTF roadmap. The revised version is available to download on the PFTF website.

We then had presentations from our speakers

ROW WARLOW – Animal & Plant Agency Varieties & Seeds

REGISTERING PLANT BREEDERS RIGHTS

Rob talked us through the history of the relative acts, details of which are listed in the workshop presentation. Rob confirmed the following points:

- ‘Plant Patents’ apply only in the US. There are no plant patents in the EU. PVRs are not covered by plant patents. You may not patent a variety. This is a contentious issue in EU law.
- If a plant has a PBR which is coming up to 20 years (in the case of some plants this can be 30 years – but check!). It is up to the holder to do anything if they wish to. The registration lapse will be advertised in the APHA gazette. It is not possible to reapply for Rights (you can for National Listing). Once the time period has lapsed, the variety is freely available.
- The 20 or 25 years runs from the date its PVR was granted
- CPVO covers Britain and Europe. PBR is only UK. Patents only for US. You are in breach of the PBR or patent in the country it is issued from.

Rob emphasised that if you have any questions to call the APHA offices for help they are very friendly and willing to help.

DAVID KERLEY – Plant Breeder

BREEDING AND MARKETING PLANTS FOR THE COMMERCIAL MARKET

David told us the fascinating story of Petunia ‘Tumbelina Priscilla’ which is still a best seller after 20 years. The cross was made in 1995 and in 1997 was introduced by Unwins.

David highlighted that:

- Breeding is often about throwing away plants. You only have to keep the really good ones.
- If you don’t get yourself rights you can’t claim royalties.
- Breeding and selecting new plants is only a tiny part of the whole process.
- Without a good photo you won’t sell anything.
- Don’t ignore unusual seedlings. They may often be unsalable but could be something worth developing.
- Enforcing the payment of royalties can often be based on trust with the right to inspect books.
- Stopping people breeding plants with PBRs is a whole other issue.
- Think of the reason for choosing which plants to breed – out of season or fragrant.

PETER VAN RIJSSEN – Director of Concept Plants and part of Plantipp

BRINGING NEW PLANTS TO MARKET

Peter introduced us to his companies. He also introduced us to his unique Miss Saori hydrangea jacket and shoes....

Peter highlighted that:

- When you are breeding you have to ask yourself what is your target market – what do they want.
- Good garden, good picture, easy to grow, does it look good in a catalogue, patio or landscape market.
- Pictures are the most important things for catalogues.
- Mail-order can create a huge interest in new varieties for a few years
- For cut flowers the royalties a percentage of the auction price.

MORNING ROUND UP

If there are people breeding plants in their back gardens we need to find ways to encourage them to come forward, and help them with the process.

JONATHAN WARD – Ginger Horticulture

SMILE PLEASE

- Jonathan emphasised that a picture paints a 1000 words in the world of horticulture. You don't necessarily need an expensive camera – a good picture from a phone can be as effective.
- The average person gets distracted in 8 seconds and will take in 20 % of words but 100% of images.
- Be aware that publishing a photo can start a clock ticking for applying for PBR – so be careful.

STEVE AUSTIN – Plant Marketing International Ltd

A PASSION FOR PLANTS FROM DISCOVERY TO SUCCESS

Steve gave us a fascinating overview of how his passion and knowledge for plants started and developed, and how uses this in the commercial side of horticulture.

Steve explained that studying where and how plants thrive can be the key to understanding how to breed in specific traits.

Panel Discussion

THE IMPACT OF BREXIT ON THE UK HORTICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Graham Spencer emphasised that these are his own views and not those of the RHS – and that any action or inaction based on what you hear today is entirely at your own risk.

Graham recommended listening to an episode of Law in action with Joshua Rosenberg – Brexit implications.

He emphasised that despite all the possible outcomes, until Article 50 is triggered its business as normal. Speculation is interesting but proves nothing and whatever happens it will take a very long time.

Questions from the floor:

- Info about the stakeholder group meeting with DEFRA – John David from RHS led by DEFRA. Mostly done by conference. Waiting for further info from DEFRA as they are still in fact collecting/coming back stage.
- You have to decide based on your attitude to risk whether you want to take out intellectual rights now, or wait but the panel agreed that you should still apply for rights now if you think a plant is worth it.
- Was suggested that as a rough rule of thumb - if you can commercialise in 3-4 countries or more it's worth protecting – you need to do the maths or take advice.
- Talk to people in the trade – take advice.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW

Raymond Evison and Sarah Cook discussed that perhaps the initiative hasn't yet reached the non-professional breeder, for which it was originally started.

Sarah feels we have a lot more clarity on the processes involved and we should now concentrate on reaching these people (the feedback received from delegates showed agreement with this).

WHERE, AS A GROUP, WOULD YOU LIKE PFTF TO GO NOW?

Responses on the day, from delegates included:

- The guide for bringing plants to market is much improved
- Meetings are useful for networking. Floated idea of this event at another RHS garden – this would still be a useful option. Different speakers different part of the country,
- Should we plan to hold another meeting when we know what Brexit means.
- Herbaceous plant committee – message not out to amateur breeders. Resurrect herbaceous plant day – invite gardeners to bring along plants of interest and make them aware what opportunities are available. Specialist nurseries could be involved, including those from the continent.
- Need to bear in mind the risk of showing new plants in public forum – as we clearly state in the roadmap that you should not showcase your plant in any way until you obtain rights (if you are going to choose to do this)
- There should be more meetings of this kind – but with a different focus and at different locations. Next one should be at Harlow Carr to allow a more Northern based audience to attend.
- Use Plant Societies and Affiliated societies to get the message out.
- Chap from Hillier – can guide towards RHS
- Suggested that the speakers could be added to the RHS speakers list available on the website for affsocs.
- Mention at plant societies day
- Few amateur and small scale breeders here.
- Could the RHS produce an article in The Garden - Anisa Gress, News Editor has been keeping an eye on the initiative and stated it may be time to publish something now. Will be speaking to editor about 3-5 page article on roadmap and case studies. We can produce PDF of the article for societies to distribute.
- Somebody was thinking of breeding but had problem with equipment for eg holding pollen. Practicalities of breeding. Link to magazine article or pop up stands.
- Thanks for persevering – this meeting has clarified things. Small breeders have fallen off along the way,

Would like to meet again in 2 years' time.

All feedback and suggestions from the day, and feedback forms, will be considered when deciding how to take the initiative forward in 2017. Updates will be highlighted on the webpage – and invitations will be circulated for large events.

FEEDBACK FROM THE MEETING

From the feedback received all speakers were very well received and gave a good mix of experience and information. However it is generally felt that any future meetings should have a different focus as we have now covered PBR/intellectual rights and the plant breeders' agent/marketing side and should focus more on the plants and breeding itself.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE PLANTS FOR THE FUTURE INITIATIVE CAN REACH MORE NON PROFESSIONAL/ HOBBY PLANT BREEDERS?

This feedback summary is based on the feedback received after the workshop. Although not all feedback is included here all comments have been recorded and will be considered: There were some very interesting observations around the need for specialist knowledge required as good breeding for the future will rely on a high level of specialisation, both to create varieties that adapt to our climate changes, natural pest control and fast propagation techniques, and it can be difficult for the non-professional to recognise these details and follow genetic lines.

The comments included below are based around getting the message out to encourage more non-professional breeders and those that may come across a chance sport who may not currently be involved in the horticulture industry in any way. It was suggested that it is important that the RHS has a chain on communication from the smallest breeder or amateur with accidental finds/sports up to the commercial production companies, without which opportunities will be lost on both sides.

- A stand at some of the RHS shows open to the public, stand at Plant Heritage fairs and a show (workshop?) held at another RHS location as suggested on the day.
- I would like to see a 'Specialist Plants Day' centred around a few specialist plant nurseries from the UK and Europe, with series of short talks from plant specialists on new plants and a section on plant breeding and the 'Plants for Future' initiative. The aim would be to attract keen gardeners, breeders and specialist nurseries, they would be encouraged to bring plants of interest for discussion. (of course they need to be warned about bringing plants they wish to apply for plant breeder's rights in the future)
- Some Societies have a large membership who are hybridising and creating new varieties of which very few if any go forward for plant breeders rights. How many of these members realise the potential of what they are doing? They are, in many cases, being sold around the amateur market with no return other than knowing their variety is available on a small scale. If the horticultural industry knew where to go to reach these some of the new varieties could be intercepted before they are sold & lose the opportunity of PBR then commercially tested & if good enough protected.
- If anything was commercially viable agreement could be in place to benefit the Society which could have the benefit that when results start to appear it may encourage more to follow
- Article in the Garden!
- Can we contact all Plant Finder nurseries about the next PFTF day – they are not only part of the target audience but are also well connected. (Perhaps ask them to display a poster to promote it if they are within an hour of the next venue?).
- Where appropriate use the social media power of the delegates and speakers.
- Gardeners World feature "Search for new flower varieties"

There were a few comments around helping with the breeding/propagation process for non professional breeders.

- Perhaps the RHS can offer a micro propagation workshop for small breeders. Small breeders require tools and methods for increasing their stock rapidly but not by 10,000 units. It would be useful to have some contacts with whom to discuss this without having to invest large amounts of money upfront with doubtful results. If micropropagators could offer small scale packages to hobbyists or small businesses at affordable prices, and these were advertised in RHS publications, I believe more people would have a go. I certainly would.
- You could run a workshop either independently or as part of the conference to show how new varieties are created. I am sure there are enthusiastic amateurs who would like the challenge & would benefit from some simple explanations of 'how to'. An illustration of how a variety is actually taken from 'the one' to thousands young plants distributed around the world.
- To encourage breeding work in general the RHS could provide a list of seed sources where more unusual species could be sourced for crossing
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END OF REPORT