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RESEARCH REPORT

Understanding Florida
consumers' perceptions of plant
selection criteria, brands, and
communication materials



Center for Public Issues Education
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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to conduct research for the Florida Nursery, Landscape, and Growers Association (FNGLA) in order to better understand Florida consumers' perceptions of plant purchases, brands, and preferred communication channels. In order to test messages and communication materials developed for a "*Florida Garden Select*," a Florida-specific plant brand, FNGLA partnered with the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) to conduct focus groups with potential consumers around the state.

The objectives of this research were to (1) *use research to determine if the Florida Garden Select brand and its slogan "Florida Grown, Nationally Known" is a message that resonates with the intended consumers of Florida Garden Select plants;* (2) *determine what types of messages consumers respond to in relation to purchasing plants; explore consumers perceptions of plants, gardens, and landscapes;* (3) *determine consumer attitudes and perceptions of the consumer education website "Florida Gardening" and select print materials,* and (4) *to utilize results from the focus group data to equip FNGLA to create marketing plan similar to that of "Fresh from Florida."*

To meet the research objectives, three sets of two focus groups were held in geographically and demographically different regions of Florida. The first set of focus groups were conducted on March 15, 2011 in Jacksonville. The second set of focus groups were conducted on March 24, 2011 in Orlando, and a final set of focus groups were conducted on March 31 in Miami. All sessions were conducted by graduate students and staff at the University of Florida's PIE Center in Gainesville, Florida.

Focus group research has long been used extensively in marketing studies (Morgan, 1988), as this kind of qualitative group interviewing enables researchers to gain valuable insight into public opinion and perceptions. Focus groups encourage group interaction and discussion; moderators are able to ask clarifying questions to seek a deeper understanding—a feature not possible in traditional surveys (Stone, 1999).

Focus group research is based on facilitating a guided discussion on a particular topic with a group of individuals in an effort to listen and learn from their perceptions and opinions. The researcher develops the protocol and questions to guide discussion, organizes the logistics of the focus groups, and later analyzes the data for themes and patterns (Morgan 1998).

Methods

This study used a set of three focus groups comprised of representative members of the target audience (six total). A market research firm in Gainesville was hired and used Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) telephone random digit dialing (RDD) sampling to qualify potential participants. Criteria used to select potential participants were a general interest in gardening, plants, or home improvement projects. Probability samples were generated using a predetermined sampling frame based on demographic variables for all participant groups. The breakdown of the demographics of all three groups is as follows.

Demographics

Group 1 (Jacksonville) consisted of the following:

- Seven participants
- Four females, three males
- Occupations: housewife, secretary, marketing coordinator, AT&T service/repair, airport employee, HVAC technician, cancer researcher

Group 2 (Jacksonville) consisted of the following:

- Five participants
- Three females, two males
- Occupations: disabled/grandma, owner of trucking company/father, supervisor at mortgage company, stay-at-home-mom/theatre major, construction/builder

Group 3 (Orlando) consisted of the following:

- Ten participants
- Five females, five males
- Occupations: retired, collateral auditor, appliance repair company, retired, NOVA student, educational event planner, stay-at-home parent, retired

Group 4 (Orlando) consisted of the following:

- Six participants
- Four females, two males
- Occupations: recently returned from New Zealand, special education teacher, stay-at-home parent, pipe fitter, property manager, stay-at-home parent

Group 5 (Miami) consisted of the following:

- Four participants
- Three females, one male
- Occupations: Independent public relations consultant, sales manager, Information Technology/student, landscaping technician

Group 6 (Miami) consisted of the following:

- Eight participants
- Four females, four males
- Occupations: Bell South operator, retired/from Peru, retired teacher (taught a gardening class as community service too), retired science teacher, paralegal, retired (AT&T)

When asked about the area where they garden:

- Five of six groups had participants with flower gardens.
- Three of six groups had numerous participants with patio gardens or potted plants; a lawn or landscape; vegetable gardens; and/or indoor plants.

Protocol

All participants were asked to:

- Provide information about themselves (occupation, hobbies, etc).
- Describe, if applicable, the area that they garden.
- Describe their perceptions of the word “landscape.”
- Describe their perceptions of the word “plant.”
 - Where they most often hear the word “plant.”
- Describe their perceptions of the word “garden.”
 - Where they most often hear the word “garden.”
- Describe their perceptions of the phrase “home landscape.”
 - If “home landscape” has a different meaning than “garden.”
- Explain for what purpose they usually buy plants.
 - Interactive preference activity: Turning Point Exercise on plant characteristics that are important to participants.
- Describe benefits that plants provide.
- Decide if they considered plants to be “environmentally friendly.”
 - What “environmentally friendly” means to them.
 - What organizations they think of as “environmentally friendly.”
- Describe their response to the term “Fresh from Florida.”
 - If they had heard the term before/where.
- Articulate if they were aware of “Florida Friendly Landscaping”
- Respond if they had ever seen a plant that was branded
 - If so, where and which brands
- Describe, where, if applicable, they had heard of “Florida Plants of the Year”
- Describe their perceptions of the term “garden select”
 - If they had heard it before/where
 - What “garden select” means
- Describe their response to the term “*Florida Garden Select*”

- What it means to add “Florida” to “garden select”
- Select their top three choices of descriptive words
 - Interactive preference activity: Turning Point Exercise with descriptive words (select preferences, brainstorm additional words)
- Brainstorm possible taglines for a Florida plant brand
- Describe their response to the phrase “Florida Grown, Nationally Known”
- Describe attributes of Florida plants that might make a good message (for consumers)
- Elaborate on communication channels they felt would be most appropriate for marketing a Florida plant brand
- Describe their response to the *Florida Garden Select* logo
- Describe their response to the *Florida Garden Select* brochure (large)
- Describe their response to the Florida Gardening website homepage and if it is a resource they would use or not
- Select and explain sources that they perceive to be credible
 - Interactive preference activity: Turning Point Exercise on credible sources
- Suggest other factors (not covered) that are important when selecting plants to purchase

Research Findings

Because there were six groups total in the FNGLA sessions, we elected to select themes and patterns that emerged in at least four groups to be the “key findings.” When notable, such as for descriptions, patterns that emerged for three groups are included (and stated as such). For topics during the discussion where participants were asked to brainstorm words or phrases, a list is included in tables in the report (additional descriptive words suggested, tag line suggestions, and specific channels of communication). The charts included in this report were produced from results of “Turning Point” exercises. This is an interactive audience-participation exercise in which participants are given “clickers” to vote, rank, and/or select preferences. When everyone has made their selection, results are visible immediately onscreen, which helps keep participants engaged and interested.

Objective 1: Determine if the Florida Garden Select brand and its slogan “Florida Grown, Nationally Known” is a message that resonates with the intended consumers of Florida Garden Select plants.

Participants thought “garden select” suggested a quality product.

- Most participants thought of a fresh or quality product, fruits or vegetables, or of a specific brand or marketing slogan. Most thought that had heard the term before (in a grocery store).

QUOTE: “When I hear it I think it may be a selection, maybe you want a primo product that you might want to put in your garden.”

QUOTE: [I think] “That they’ve carefully selected the best for us to purchase.”

When “Florida” was added to the term (“Florida Garden Select”), members of each group had a favorable response and thought of a quality product.

- Participants in four groups responded that it gave them a sense of pride or made them think of plants that would thrive in Florida’s climate.

QUOTE: “It’s Florida and give back to your home state. You see a sense of ownership.”

- Members in five of six groups responded unfavorably to the term.

QUOTE: “I’m just having problems with it. I’m like why, why is it select? Are there some dead plants that you’re going to sell me in addition? But no, if I don’t want dead ones then I have to get the Select. I don’t know what it means other than to have an association of some kind of manipulation.”

QUOTE: “It’s like initially you think it’s really good, but then in the back of your head you think they’re pushing too hard.”

QUOTE: “It’s just an advertisement for Florida.”

QUOTE: “Like these other ones are crappy so you have to get the Select.”

EXERCISE 2:	1ST CHOICE	2ND CHOICE	3RD CHOICE
Preference of descriptive words			
Proven	40%	22%	20%
Superior	30%		
Successful		25%	25%
Select			
Superstar			
Thriving			
Champion			

In an interactive “TURNING POINT” exercise, participants were asked to select their top three choices of adjectives used to describe a Florida plant among the above choices. The percentages shown are of total participants from all six focus groups.

When asked about their preference of descriptive words for a plant brand, many participants chose “proven” or “superior” as their first choice.

- “Successful” and “proven” were among the top second and third choices.

Other participant-suggested descriptive words:

Native	Hearty
Eco-friendly	Florida’s Best Choices
Nature’s Choice	Nature’s Best
Super Grown	Best Plants
Adapted	Excellent
Improved	Certified
Choice	Bountiful
Better Plants	Locally Grown

After the above-mentioned “TURNING POINT” exercise, participants were asked to suggest other descriptive words that could be used to describe Florida plants.

When asked to describe their response to the phrase “Florida Grown, Nationally Known,” members of each group responded both favorably and unfavorably.

QUOTE: “Right, I think putting Florida and nature [together]...people think beaches. We in Florida think oranges because we know how big citrus is. But people outside of Florida think about Florida and they’re thinking natural, nature, sunshine, the ocean. So they would be...they would feel good about our plants.”

QUOTE: “I don’t think it’s specific to plants if that’s what the target is for plants. It isn’t, it’s very generic.”

- Four of six groups immediately thought of oranges or citrus products when they heard the term.

QUOTE: “...if this company that we’re helping decide whatever they want us to decide sells a lot of different plants that all of you guys said, Florida Grown, Nationally Known, and you went oranges. Well if they sell Sago Palms, if they sell this wide array of plants and every single one of us said, oh oranges, then it’s not a good tag line for them. Do you see what I’m saying? Because it doesn’t help their product.”

- Members of five of the six groups were indifferent or confused by the phrase.

QUOTE: “You know I also think if they’re advertising goal is to let the consumer know that their product is good for Florida, than why do we care if it’s nationally known?”

QUOTE: “We’re selling to us because they’re designed to grow in Florida. (Am I right?)”

QUOTE: “its stuff designed to grow in Florida and other southern states.”

Other Tagline Suggestions:

Florida, where sunshine is grown at a premium

Sunshine Fresh

The Green Floridian

Florida’s Best

Better Select

Florida, Grow it Like a Native

Sunshine Certified

Flamingo Shines

Generation/legacy of Farmers

Grown in Florida

Beat the Heat

Indian River Fruit

Top Choice

Trust the Experts

Just Add Sunshine

Adapted for Florida

Certified by Florida Nurserymen

The Only Plant Floridian’s Need

Objective 2: Determine what types of messages consumers respond to in relation to purchasing plants. Explore consumers’ perceptions of plants, gardens, and landscapes.

When presented with the word “plant,” all groups perceived of something living or growing.

QUOTE: “I think of a bunch of green plants and flowers and trees. All that good stuff.”

- Four of six groups mentioned being outside, soil, or the earth.

QUOTE: “Something that grows from the earth.”

- Most groups responded that the meaning of the word “plant” depends on the context and use (verb, noun, place, thing, etc).

QUOTE: “It could be taken a couple of different ways. I mean she said you’ve got to plant the field of vegetables or the plants on the table. Or there’s harvest you know. It could be interpreted a couple of different ways.”

- Four of six groups hear the word “plant” most often at retail outlets (such as Lowes or Home Depot).

When presented with the word “garden,” participants thought of food, vegetables and flowers.

QUOTE:” And I would think that plants, most of the plants I see; they always grow something on them, it’s cool, a lot of fruits and vegetables. Most of the ones I have in my yard are edible. It’s solid.”

Participants also thought of work, resources, or hobbies when they thought of a “garden.”

QUOTE: “Something that’s taken care of and paid a lot of attention to.”

All groups mentioned a garden as signifying beauty, tranquility, or pride when thinking of a “garden.”

QUOTE: “It’s almost like looking at a page, you can look at someone’s garden and you can see the planning involved in it. That somebody’s put flowers in a certain way, you know, the yard is perfect, the lawn is perfect, great level and you look at it, and say, hey, gee, this is a perfect garden. Rather than looking at my yard, I call it a yard but there’s spots here and spots here and I wouldn’t even call it a garden. It’s just a work in progress.”

- Five of six groups mentioned personal space or home.

QUOTE: “I think of garden as my personal space. You come to my house and you say, Oh come look at my garden. And so it’s an extension of me, it’s a place where I like to be. So the garden is very important to me.”

QUOTE: “I know one thing that when my grandmother was alive and she really had a green thumb and she was very personal about the things that she planted. They all had a story and meant something. So she gave them names, just something personal.”

- Five of six groups hear “garden” most often while shopping or in advertisements.
- Four of six groups hear “garden” most on television.

All groups felt the word “landscape” depicted something that was “large scale,” required some kind of design or planning, and was manicured and/or organized.

QUOTE: “It’s a lot of planning for landscape. It’s not just cutting grass anymore. It’s mulch and all the pretty stuff that they put in the yards.”

QUOTE: “You know the first thing I think of when I hear the word landscape is more of a broad picture of ...but more of an artistic term of landscape just what you’re looking at.”

- Four of six groups mentioned the work or resources involved in having a landscaped yard.

QUOTE: [A landscape is] “expensive and constant maintenance.”

- Four of six groups thought of food or vegetables when they thought of the word “landscape.”

Of the term “home landscape,” all groups said that planning, design, and/or organization was needed and brought up aesthetic appeal or beauty.

QUOTE: “Home landscaping seems a little bit larger scale. It seems like you’re going to see something that’s...in my garden, it’s everything. You’ll see orchids next to air plants; you’ll see everything. But when you see home landscaping, you think that someone has actually made more structure.”

QUOTE: “The curb appeal of the home.”

- Five of six groups thought of cost, resources or the work involved in having a “home landscape.”

QUOTE: “I guess the word makes me a little anxious because I keep thinking what can I do, how can I make it better? What kind of costs are involved and all that other good stuff.”

- Five of six groups mentioned residence or personal space when presented with the term “home landscape.”

QUOTE: “Yeah, it’s like personal care of your property.”

- Four of six groups heard “home landscape” most often on advertisements, while shopping, or on the internet.

Consumers buy plants for many different reasons. Decoration, specific purposes, and gifts came up most often.

- When asked for what purpose participants most often purchase plants, all groups responded that beauty and/or decoration is a large factor.

QUOTE: “I’m looking for things that are very flowery, very colorful. In the front of the house, I want it to look nice.”

- Many participants purchased plants for a specific function or purpose such as vegetable plants for food or hedges for privacy (five of six groups).

QUOTE: “Usually if you put hedges on like where their fence would be, she was saying, it’s your privacy. But I was seeing hedges close up to the wall of the house and I thought that was neat because it actually prevented anyone from coming up close to the house. Instead of just a fence.”

QUOTE: “Like they said, when I use plants, I don’t use for shape, I use for purpose, like the yam (sweet potato) when they ready to eat, I eat them.”

- Four of six groups responded that they bought plants for gifts or sentimental purposes
-

QUOTE: “I buy them for gifts because they last longer than flowers.”

When asked what plant characteristics are most important when selecting plants for purchase, plants being non-invasive or “environmentally friendly” came up often (in five of six groups).

EXERCISE 1: PLANT CHARACTERISTICS IMPORTANT TO PURCHASES	Very Important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Not important
Healthy looking	72%	22%	2%	2%	0%
Quality	65%	30%	2%	0%	0%
Makes me feel good	57%	20%	12%	2%	7%
Durable	52%	27%	15%	5%	0%
Attractive/pretty	50%	40%	5%	5%	0%
Seasonal	47%	12%	25%	2%	5%
Non-invasive	45%	22%	25%	5%	0%
Fits landscape	45%	25%	12%	0%	5%
Low maintenance	42%	22%	22%	2%	10%
Environmentally Friendly	42%	17%	12%	5%	5%
Affordable	42%	27%	17%	5%	7%
Native to area	37%	22%	22%	10%	7%
Pesticide use	35%	22%	20%	10%	12%
Fertilizer use	32%	12%	25%	12%	15%
Colorful	25%	27%	22%	10%	15%
Familiar/recognizable Brand	5%	7%	30%	12%	45%
	2%	7%	25%	5%	65%

In an interactive “TURNING POINT” exercise, participants were asked to rate the above 17 plant characteristics in regard to how important these plant characteristics are to plant purchases. Participants rated each characteristic on a Likert-type scale. Choices included: very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat unimportant, or not important. The percentages shown are of total participants from all six focus groups.

- Some participants mentioned specific plants such as kudzu, bamboo, and melaleuca as “problem plants.”

QUOTE: “They’re not native to South Florida and they’re everywhere. Certain plants just take over and kill the native plants.”

QUOTE: “You’ve got to think about whether it’s going to do something to the environment or not. And I think a lot of people get hooked on something that looks good in a magazine or something. And they say this looks good and it may not be good for the Florida environment.”

- “Environmentally friendly” was described by all six groups as “no harm,” or “non-toxic or irritable.” Five groups responded that it meant the plant was “non-invasive,” and five groups thought an “environmentally friendly” plant provided a benefit or enhancement.

QUOTE: “Harmony, it doesn’t harm the people or environment or animals.”

- When asked what organizations came to mind as being “environmentally friendly,” four of five groups thought of national non-profit groups such as Sierra Club, Audubon, and Greenpeace. Four of five groups thought of recycling or waste companies. Local organizations, national/state parks, and local food/markets were also mentioned.

Participants selected a healthy-looking plant, quality, “makes me feel good,” attractive/pretty, and durable as the most important selection criteria for plants.

QUOTE: “What I like in plants is the...I like them for their beauty so it’s important to me that they look healthy and of good quality. I mean nobody wants a plant that’s looking limp or like it’s struggling to survive.”

- Seasonal planting selections, fitting the landscape, non-invasive, affordable, low-maintenance, and environmentally friendly were also deemed important.
- Many of the participants indicated that the brand of a plant was not important (65 percent of the participants responded that it was “not important.” 25 percent of participants responded that it was neither “important nor unimportant”).

QUOTE: “When I think of brands, it’s more with clothing, and plants, it’s more God’s brand.”

QUOTE: “Like purple pots, like different plants in different colored pots? Purple pots, and yellow pots and orange pots. They’re name brand plants and they put them in these colored pots to distinguish their brand names...normally they want more for the ones in the purple pots.”

QUOTE: “What do you mean a brand?”

- Many participants did not think a plant being recognizable or familiar was important.

When asked about other factors important to plant purchases, participants indicated that conditions or particular information about the plant was important.

- Participants were interested in the size/height of the plant, blooms, conditions needed to thrive, and potential risks to pets or people.

QUOTE: “How big they’re going to get, their size.”

QUOTE: “Another thing that people mentioned besides the color is what birds are attracted to them or butterflies or fruit. So besides color, what else can it do?”

Participants thought that Florida plants ability to survive natural forces or low maintenance elements would be the best attributes to highlight to consumers.

- Five of six groups brought up natural conditions or weather specific to Florida or similar climates (drought-tolerant, heat/humidity tolerant, pest resistant, etc).

QUOTE: “Yeah, if they [plants] could withstand the Florida heat and all that sunshine.”

- Four of six groups thought “low maintenance” or “hearty” attributes would be most effective for marketing a plant product from Florida.

Participants felt that plants provide many benefits, such as tranquility and enjoyment; good for the environment and/or human health; and providing functional purposes.

- Five of six groups responded that tranquility, spirituality, mood enhancement, or enjoyment were the best benefits plants provide.

QUOTE: “I get super excited when I’ve had plants for two weeks, yes!”

- Many participants mentioned that plants providing a functional purpose (attracting butterflies, privacy, shade, etc) or benefit the environment or human health (clean air, wildlife habitat, pollination for bees).

QUOTE: “Very, very important. If everybody had trees giving shade to their house, the power consumption would drop dramatically.”

Objective 3: Determine consumer attitudes and perceptions of the consumer education website “Florida Gardening” and select print materials.

Some responses to the *Florida Garden Select* logo were favorable, but, overall, participants in each group responded unfavorably; many provided suggestions for improving the logo.

- Some participants in four of six groups liked the colors of the logo, thought it was readable, and responded favorably to the word “garden” in the logo.

QUOTE: “Oh yeah, the green is nice. I like the gold too.”

QUOTE: “I like the way it’s simple on the Florida Select.”

- Members in five of six groups thought it would be recognizable.

QUOTE: “Well Florida Select at that, from the beginning, it reminded me of what Budweiser Beer did. They made a beer called Budweiser Select and they said it’s the best ingredients they had. I think that if

you know the logo and you're driving somewhere and you see it, the yellow and green banner will definitely help it stand out and let you eventually recognize what it's for."

- Members in all six groups responded unfavorably to the logo. Participants in each group thought that the logo was not eye-catching.

QUOTE: "If you had this in the front of the grocery store as a package and you had something else beside it and I haven't tried either one of them, I would probably go with the other one because it's not eye candy."

- Five of six groups did not like the colors. Many said they were "dull" or "boring;" others thought it was the wrong tone (of green or gold), or too much green.

QUOTE: "The colors don't remind you of Florida a bit. The green is too dark."

QUOTE: "Boring, you're not going to see it on a sign if you're in a car driving by."

QUOTE: "Within this green there may be other, better choices. I mean within this pantone of green."

- Four groups did not think the logo was easy to read and thought the fonts used in the logo could be better.

QUOTE: "It's very hard on your eyes because the font is all caps."

QUOTE: "Yeah, the spacing is odd and the garden font is a little difficult to grab immediately and that's what you want to do."

- Members of five groups did not like the look of "garden" in the logo and did not think it would be recognizable.

QUOTE: "I think that the font could be a little bit clearer because if you look at it, that "r" doesn't necessarily look like an "r". I know it is because you told me but I think it should be a little bit more clearer."

QUOTE: "The garden part is aggravating."

QUOTE: "Yeah, I don't like the cursive."

QUOTE: "But as far as the Florida Select Garden logo, nah. There's one thing I associate with Florida Select and immediately and that's orange juice. Tropicana orange juice as a matter of fact."

When given the (large) brochure for review, participants liked some elements but not others. In particular, most of the participants responded favorably to the inside of the brochure but not to the cover.

- All six groups commented on some part of the brochure being "eye catching" and readable.

QUOTE: “I like the sky and the sun, the freshness of it because you can see the outdoors. It’s related to that.”

QUOTE: “It reminds me a lot of the pamphlets that the county is always sending to give you information on the plants and bugs and all this stuff to let you know what’s going on. I actually have one at the house that’s very similar to the color tone here. It talks about the danger of bugs and what to watch out for. It seems official since they use those same colors.”

- Five of six groups liked some parts of the brochure in general.

QUOTE: “It makes you think of the next spring day.”

QUOTE: “I think it’s nice looking, it’s a nice looking brochure.”

- Four of six groups responded favorably to the inside of the brochure, but had issues with the cover.

QUOTE: “The inside of the brochure is eye catching and very nice. It would grab my attention. But I would never get to the inside looking at the cover.”

QUOTE: “The inside is very good quality. Unfortunately, many people won’t see the inside because of the cover.”

- Four of six groups responded unfavorably to the colors, picture, or logo selections on the brochure. Seeing the brochure made many participants think of ways to enhance the logo.

QUOTE: “Just like one plant and one tree in the front maybe with the logo. This is too busy.”

QUOTE: “If you would put a sun right here that would look much better, instead of that green tacky bar that says garden. A simple nice sun would have been perfect, I think.”

- Five of six groups responded unfavorably to design elements of the brochure, many made suggestions for improvement.

QUOTE: “I like the sky but not over the entire page. It should be some greenery at the bottom.”

QUOTE: “I just think that if it just needs to be a step up in graphic design.”

- Five of six groups did not think the cover was eye-catching enough to get potential consumers to open the brochure.

QUOTE: “I think of a hospital for some reason when I see that.”

QUOTE: “If you move this pond to the front, put your lettering up a little bit, move that to the front and then put your synopsis, this little thing about the plants, put it on the back. It probably would, I mean

for me it would catch my eye as is because “To celebrate plants” would catch mine, but just for the general public, he’s right. Put the picture of the small pond on the front, he’s right.”

QUOTE: “The inside is shiny and this is dull.”

The “Florida gardening” website homepage elicited mostly unfavorable responses; participants made a lot of suggestions for improvement. Those who responded favorably (members of three of six groups) primarily liked some of the content elements.

- QUOTE: “It seems to have a lot of good links to it, gardening information and obviously there is a gardening agency and you can ask an expert. And it probably has a chat box included in there.”
- As some of the facilities did not have wireless internet on site, participants were provide with a screen shot only (of both web pages) and were not able to navigate through the website. This may have affected the nature of the comments and questions posed by participants. For example, the screen shot captured the man lying on a hammock; many participants were distracted by the image and thought that any image used should relate directly to gardening.

QUOTE: “I’m stuck on the guy in the hammock, I’m sorry. I just think that’s nowhere. But if the web site starts moving so as far as flashing pictures. It starts taking you into the environment; let me see something, engross me. I haven’t gotten over the guy in the hammock.”

QUOTE: “The top part doesn’t match what they’re trying to sell. Are they selling a man in a hammock? They’re on the wrong page.”

The unfavorable responses to the website mostly dealt specifically with: 1) pictures, colors, or the logo, or 2) design elements.

- Five of six groups responded unfavorably to picture or color elements of the website.

QUOTE: “I think the colors on it are kind of dull.”

QUOTE: “Nothing about the pictures up there looks specifically Floridian. Like the plants don’t look like they only come from here or no characteristics.”

- Four of six groups disliked design elements of the Florida gardening website homepage. Comments along these lines alluded to the homepage being “messy,” “too busy,” or “cluttered.”
- Five of six groups provided suggestions regarding pictures/colors/or the logo.

QUOTE: “Well there could be a very lovely spectacular photo there. You know a good example is how, as much as I hate Microsoft, Bing is so cool when you get that spectacular photo. You know if you had that on the cover of this brochure, you could do it, albeit, on a smaller form on the home page. But certainly there’s no dearth of spectacular photography of Florida.”

QUOTE: “Change the setting, the scenery.”

- Members of five groups provided suggestions for improving content elements of the website.

QUOTE: “Do they organize it so you can go to a zone and see what’s available for that zone? That would be the easiest way to do it.”

QUOTE: “I think when people go to a specific web site, it’s best when they initially go to a web site, there will be quick tips. I see that on the tool bar, I see that it’s not up there. But I think the draw to get people in the door, you want to give some tips off the back so they’re going to want to go there, so they can say let me dig deeper.”

QUOTE: “If you put your zip code in and it gives you your geographical area, and if I had a link somewhere, where you can go and get your soil tested.”

- Members of five of six groups indicated they would use the website as a resource.

QUOTE: “It looks like I can probably find whatever I’m looking for in Florida, garden-wise.”

In response to the *Florida Garden Select* webpage, participants responded both favorably and unfavorably. Those who responded favorably tended to like elements of the content more than the design.

- Five of six groups liked some aspects of the website.

QUOTE: “I would use it just for the fact that I live in Florida. It’s a good resource to help me find out a source of good plants specific to this region.”

QUOTE: “See like the different search bars and things like that. Hardiness and class and the use are good.”

Unfavorable responses to the *Florida Garden Select* fell mostly into categories of colors and pictures or content.

QUOTE: “It seems like the trees and the plants there, their all green and they all blend together and it just is not appealing.”

- Suggestions for the improving the webpage included changing pictures/colors/logo or adapting/changing content.

QUOTE: “You can look at it four times and four times, you see Florida Select on that one page. It’s like over appeal.”

QUOTE: “You guys are going to hate me but that logo’s got to go. I’m telling you, it has to go.”

QUOTE: “I’m presuming that if you click on that it gives you more information about each particular plant. And like how it would run season wise. I mean, I’m seeing pictures but what season are those pictures? Could they put pictures up there that show the plant in all the different seasons?”

When asked what search engine words they would use to find such a resource as the Florida gardening website, most participants responded that they would search for “gardening,” “Florida gardening,” or “Florida plants.”

Objective 4: Utilize results from the focus group data to equip FNGLA to create a marketing plan similar to that of “Fresh from Florida.”

Many participants had not heard of specific plant brands before. Some that indicated they had described retail outlets, not actual plant brands.

- Members of each group indicated that they had heard of a specific plant brand, but few could produce a name right away.
- Members of each group indicated that they had not heard of a specific plant brand.

QUOTE: “We’ve probably seen them but not the tags.”

- Of the prompts used (Proven Winners, Monrovia, Wave Petunia, Georgia Gold Metal Plants, Athens Select, and Florida Friendly Plants), only Monrovia came up without being prompted.
- Very few groups had heard of any of the prompted plant brands (maximum of one or two members of three groups).
- Many participants thought of a branded plant being a retail outlet or a specific local plant variety (Jacksonville Perkins Roses, RF orchids, etc).

QUOTE: “Yeah. At Home Depot they have them, different kinds. Like there’s certain nurseries that grow so they’ve got their brand on it.”

QUOTE: “Well I was thinking about brands like, I guess the brands would be like which store, that’s what I was thinking about, who sells it.”

“Fresh from Florida” was familiar to participants, but most of them thought of oranges, other fruit, or vegetables.

- When asked what comes to mind when they hear the phrase “Fresh from Florida,” all six groups thought of oranges.
- Four of six groups thought of other fruit (besides oranges) or vegetables.

QUOTE: “I think of strawberries, too, when I think of Florida.”

QUOTE: “One eyed kiwi, mangoes, avocados, lemons.”

- Members of all groups had heard of “Fresh from Florida” before, but members of five groups indicated that they had not heard of it before.
- Those that had heard of “Fresh from Florida” thought they had heard it before in the grocery store/shopping or at a farmers market or fruit stand (four of six).

Members of four of six groups had heard of “Florida Friendly Landscaping,” where members of four of six groups had also never heard of the campaign before. Nobody knew who used the phrase or specifically where they had heard it before.

QUOTE: “I’ve heard of Xeriscape but I’ve not heard of Florida friendly landscape.”

QUOTE: “Are you talking about those trees, when they give away trees?”

Participants’ perceptions of “Florida Plants of the Year” were mostly positive, and related to plant productivity or quality or being some kind of winner.

- Five of six groups were reminded of plant productivity or exceptional quality.

QUOTE: “I would like say that it would be a plant that is hardy to Florida, you know with the weather right for our zones.”

QUOTE: “I think of something that would bloom year round or be beautiful year round.”

QUOTE: “Tried and proven.”

- Members of five groups thought of an award or winner.

QUOTE: “It seems like a contest but I’m not for it. It seems silly. I don’t know what it means.”

QUOTE: “Plant of the year, well, if they had a contest and that plant was the plant of the year.”

- Nobody in the focus groups had heard of a “Florida Plant of the Year” before.

Four of six groups thought they would look for information on a specific plant brand on the internet.

Preferred communication channels of the participants included television, Internet, newspapers, magazines, or all channels.

QUOTE: “If you would want to throw in TV, you would want to do it on the home gardening channels. Maybe it’s like a few different channels about gardening and real estate, modeling homes. I know people love watching those and getting ideas of what to do. So if you’ve got commercials talking about it in between and they’re thinking, hey, I can do some nice stuff here. And here are plants that are perfect for me.”

QUOTE: “Create new buzzwords, people pick it up and they say this is great, this is new, look what’s coming out of Florida. Look what they’re doing they’re promoting a name, they’re promoting what they have.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Television	HGTV, DIY, Home/garden channels, Travel Network, Model Homes, Food Network, PBS, SHTV, Discovery, craft channels, local stations, Tom MacCubbin programs, Oprah
Internet	Pop-ups, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, social media, Tom MacCubbin websites
Newspapers/Magazines	Southern Living, Better Homes & Gardens, garden section of the newspaper, Tom MacCubbin columns
Other	XM radio, billboards, books, special events (like Earth Day, Arbor Day, etc)

- Five of six groups recommended television for marketing purposes.

QUOTE: “If you would want to throw in TV, you would want to do it on the home gardening channels. Maybe it’s like a few different channels about gardening and real estate, modeling homes. I know people love watching those and getting ideas of what to do. So if you’ve got commercials talking about it in between and they’re thinking, hey, I can do some nice stuff here. And here are plants that are perfect for me.”

- Many groups specifically suggested the HGTV (Home & Garden) and DIY (Do It Yourself).

QUOTE: “HGTV, you can’t beat it.”

- Four of six groups recommended the Internet for marketing purposes.
- Four of six groups recommended using newspapers and magazines for marketing purposes.

QUOTE: “Well I think that’s key influence is blogger, which would be really important, and then it would spread from there. But also, I think it’s a very targeted thing as well. I see it very much in

magazines that were targeted, maybe Home and Garden channel; I don't know what that kind of cost is. I don't see this as a mass thing."

- Four of six groups recommended that "all channels of communication" or as many as economically feasible would be good for marketing a plant brand.
- Three of six groups brought up Tom MacCubbin, who has hosted a "Florida Home Grown" program on the radio (over 20 stations across the state), TV (PBS local channels), and newspaper (column in the *Orlando Sentinel*). MacCubbin is a retired UF/IFAS Extension Agent who specialized in horticulture/ornamental lawn and plants. He has also authored six books.

When it comes to the credibility of sources, participants found the University of Florida, landscape professionals, horticulturalists, and commodity groups to be the most credible.

QUOTE: "One thing from the schools or something, from the schools where they have people who help from killing plants on purpose. They make them more durable. I know the University of Florida, they invented the bug to kill the mosquito. They pretty much work on both angles, they try to kill them and they try to keep them from dying. They've got kids who actually put time and effort on the survival of the plant and try to make it so I can't kill it."

- When asked what makes a source credible, many participants responded that "track record," "expertise," or having "programs in place" help make an organization trustworthy.
- Non-profit environmental groups, growers/nurseries, local county extension offices, retail outlets, and friends and family were also found to be perceived as credible.

QUOTE: "Maybe credible is wrong but friends and family, if they're good gardeners, that's going to be your first stop."

QUOTE: "I think I learned the most from Sierra Club and state information, the local media. They really want to let us know something about our environment and plants. So I pick up information, there's not that much out there but whenever they do come out and say something, it's interesting."

EXERCISE 3: Credibility of sources	VERY CRED	CREDIBLE	NEITHER	LITTLE CRED	NO CRED	DO NOT KNOW
UF/IFAS	67%	25%	2%	0	0	5%
Landscape professionals	20%	55%	15%	10%	0	0
Horticulturalists	50%	42%	2%	0	0	5%
Commodity groups	50%	35%	2%	2%	2%	2%
NGO environmental groups	25%	47%	17%	5%	2%	2%
Growers/nurseries	45%	45%	5%	5%	0	0
Local Extension	42%	30%	15%	5%	0	10%
Retail outlets	10%	42%	22%	20%	5%	0
Friends/family	17%	42%	22%	5%	2%	10%
County officials	5%	15%	25%	17%	20%	20%
Media	7%	32%	20%	17%	12%	10%
Social media	0	20%	25%	10%	15%	12%

In an interactive “TURNING POINT” exercise, participants were asked to rate the credibility of the above 12 types or categories of organizations in regard to how credible they thought them to be. Participants rated each characteristic on a Likert-type scale. Choices included: very credible; credible; neither credible nor not credible; not credible; or do not know. A selection of “Do not know” indicates that the participant does not know who or what the organization is. . The percentages shown are of total participants from all six focus groups.

Recommendations Based on Findings

Recommendations for marketing a Florida-specific plant brand based on the findings of the focus groups are broken into four categories: 1) branding and marketing, which includes general findings that reflected potential consumer attitudes regarding purchasing a specific plant brand; 2) the *Florida Garden Select* logo; 3) the large *Florida Garden Select* brochure; and 4) the Florida gardening website (homepage and *Florida Garden Select* tab/webpage).

Branding/Marketing: In regard to the *Florida Garden Select* name brand, the majority of participants responded favorably to “garden select,” but had mixed feelings when “Florida” was added. Many participants thought of a quality or fresh product, while others thought it sounded too much like an advertisement or suggested that other products were of lesser quality. Some participants thought adding “Florida” did not change the name much (from simply “garden select”). When asked about preferences of descriptive words, “select” was not chosen as one of the top three choices. Participants preferred “proven” or “superior.” Other comments alluded to the brand not being specific to any particular kind of product as “garden” was considered by many to be vague or non-indicative of the kinds of plants sold. When presented with the word “garden,” members of all of the groups thought of vegetables or food, beauty or tranquility, or flowers. The word “plant,” however, made participants in all groups think of a living growing organism which could include all kinds of species.

Regarding the proposed tagline “Florida Grown, Nationally Known,” participants in all groups responded both favorably and unfavorably. Many participants thought of oranges or citrus products when they heard the tagline. The nature of many of the comments made by participants included confusion regarding the “nationally known” portion of the tagline (the information they were provided indicated that *Florida Garden Select* plants would be marketed to southern states with similar climates), as well as confusion regarding the “Florida grown” portion of the tagline (many participants did not understand or were concerned if the plants were native to Florida or not). Because “non-invasive” and “environmentally friendly” came up as important plant characteristics, this should be clear to potential consumers.

Because so many of the participants alluded to the brand of a plant being “not important” when selecting plants for purchasing, it will be essential to successful marketing to showcase the brand in unconventional

ways. Participants rarely remembered the name of a brand of a plant, and many thought only of the store where they were purchased. The target audience (potential consumers) chose healthy-looking, quality, and “makes me feel good” as the most important characteristics for purchasing plants. For a successful plant brand marketing campaign, the organization should consider these plant characteristics and 1) strive to meet the chosen “important characteristics with the products themselves (*Florida Garden Select* plants), and 2) utilize these plant characteristics in a marketing campaign. Other characteristics deemed important included the plant being durable, attractive, non-invasive and fitting the landscape. It seems that the product (plants) does not easily lend itself to a marketable brand in the eyes of potential consumers.

Recommendations for branding/marketing:

- ✓ Consider other brand name options besides “select,” as it was not selected by focus group participants as a good descriptive word for plant products.
- ✓ Reconsider the use of “garden” as many potential consumers may think of vegetables or flowers and not the many varieties of plants that would be encompassed in the *Florida Garden Select* brand.
- ✓ If, as suggested, *Florida Garden Select* plants will be marketed to southern states with similar climates, “nationally known” may not be the best descriptor in the tagline. Reconsider either the scope of the marketing campaign or the tagline itself.
- ✓ “Florida Grown, Nationally Known” was considered to be non-indicative or vague in terms of what it is alluding to. Since “garden” produced a similar response, it may not be descriptive enough of the product (all kinds of plants).
- ✓ Because citrus products have been so successfully marketed in Florida as well as out-of-state, there is a tendency to associate the *Florida Garden Select* name and “Florida Grown, Nationally Known” tagline with citrus. It may be necessary to be more non-citrus specific in order to differentiate the brand from Florida oranges.
- ✓ Utilize visually appealing and widely disseminated placement of logo. Simply attaching the brand to the pot of the plant or tag inside does not seem to get the attention of potential consumers. The display of *Florida Garden Select* materials and merchandizing in stores where they are available for purchase as well as consumers preferred communication channels for advertising should be a key component of the marketing plan.

Logo: In regard to the *Florida Garden Select* logo, though some members responded favorably to the colors, the readability, and the potential for it to be recognized easily, the majority of participants thought that the design, colors, readability, and font of the logo could be improved. Some participants had a hard time getting

past their aversion to the logo when presented with other communication materials. Participants in all six groups did not think the logo was eye-catching, and members of five groups thought the colors were off or dull. Five groups thought that the logo was hard to read or did not like the look of the word “garden” in the logo. Some participants liked the look of the logo better when it was on the large brochure with the sun behind it rather than by itself.

Recommendations for Florida Garden Select logo:

- ✓ Given this kind of response from the target audience, it is recommended that the logo design, colors, and font be reevaluated and ultimately altered to better reflect Florida-specific plants.
- ✓ Many participants found the cursive in the word “garden” be distracting and/or difficult to read. “Florida Select” seemed to stand out to participants more than the whole message.
- ✓ In regard to color, many of the unfavorable comments were made regarding the tones of colors used (both green and gold).
- ✓ In terms of design, the leaf did not, overall, receive a favorable response. Many participants thought that the graphic selected could be more representative or suggestive of Florida (palm trees, sunshine, outline of the state, emblem, etc).

Brochure: In regard to the (large) *Florida Garden Select* brochure, the majority of focus group participants had a favorable response to the inside but not the cover of the brochure. Because the content is gardening and assorted plant species, many participants were confused by the sky on the cover; they thought that there should be some “greenery” or landscape with plants to reflect the content. In general, participants thought the inside of the brochure was useful, attractive, professional, and appealing. The cover was thought to be non-indicative of the inside material and too verbose. Many participants indicated that they would likely not open the brochure because of the cover.

Another factor to consider for printed communication materials is the intended audience. Many participants questioned whether or not the brochure was meant for the public/potential consumers or growers/nurseries/master gardeners. It was not clear to potential consumers what the intention of the brochure was or who the material was meant for.

Recommendations for Florida Garden Select brochure/print materials:

- ✓ Given the responses to this particular communication material, it is recommended that the cover be redesigned to more sufficiently reflect the content and material on the inside.
- ✓ In the case that many of these brochures have already been printed, it is recommended that the design elements be inextricably related and connected to the content.
- ✓ Many participants found the paper and quality of the brochure to be very professional. For additional printed communication materials, it is recommended that the same or similar kinds of stock and weight are utilized.

Website: In regard to the proposed Florida gardening website, in particular the homepage and the *Florida Garden Select* tab/webpage, the majority of participants (members of all six groups) responded that they thought the pictures and/or colors or design elements could be improved. Many of the design elements centered around the webpages being too busy or cluttered.

Although the website was not “live” when participants were prompted to respond to the homepage, and as such, many commented on the particular picture that the screen shot captured (man in a hammock), the point was clear: all images, photos, and graphics should have a clear connection to the content. Participants indicated that they would like to see images more related to growing plants in Florida.

Though most of the participants indicated that the *Florida Garden Select* tab of the Florida gardening website would be useful, they did think that it too could be improved. Most of the comments centered around the use of pictures and colors “blending in” to each other and the *Florida Garden Select* logo appearing so often; many participants found it to be redundant.

Participants made suggestions for the content on the website that included adding links to local resources, indicating where the *Florida Garden Select* plants can be purchased, including more plant-specific information, and providing an interactive map of hardiness zones.

The majority of the participants thought that it was a resource they would use to find information about gardening in Florida, indicating that, with some work, this website could occupy an important niche.

Recommendations for Florida gardening website:

- ✓ When selected images to use on the Florida gardening website, ensure that they are connected or related to the material. Potential consumers may find images and graphics not obviously related to the content to be confusing or distracting.
- ✓ Work on “de-cluttering” the website. There are a lot of useful features, but participants indicated that it was too much to decipher. Some of the features could be added to additional tabs (such as the “inspirations,” “garden resources,” or “upcoming events.”)
- ✓ Ensure that the features listed above are kept up-to-date (particularly gardening tips and upcoming events).
- ✓ Include more plant-specific information (size/height, soil/water/light conditions, blooms/fruit/flowers, etc). Consider adding images of plant species during different seasons or show multiple images of each plant.
- ✓ Instead of just a map of the hardiness zones, incorporate an interactive map of hardiness zones. When a viewer clicked on their particular hardiness zone, all of the *Florida Garden Select* plants in that zone could be showcased.
- ✓ Make sure that the search terms “gardening,” “Florida gardening,” and “Florida plants” will bring up the website. Many participants indicated that it is important to them that the website be in the first few sites suggested by the search engine.
 - Currently, when you google “florida gardening,” the *Florida Garden Select* website comes up after <http://floridagardener.com>.
 - When you google “Florida plants” or “gardening,” the *Florida Garden Select* website does not seem to come up at all.