



NICH Invites All to Join Together Under the “Big Tent”

More than 80 Industry Leaders Attend Annual Meeting & Create Strategic Plan for Growth

People in our industry love plants.

Cultivars or natives, houseplants or edibles, trees or shrubs, urban forest or fairy gardens, it doesn't matter.

Sharing a love for plants and our passion for our industry was the overriding theme at the 3rd Meeting of the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) held in Atlanta June 27-29.

NICH – pronounced like pitch - started as an audacious idea to unite all stakeholders in consumer horticulture and get 90 percent of U.S. households gardening by 2025.

Some 80 U.S. green industry leaders and innovators - from academia to commercial growers to associations – pooled their collective brainpower at the meeting and created a strategic plan to achieve that mission. It is centered on several “big ideas”:

1. Grow consumer horticulture
2. Build unified engagement across consumer horticulture
3. Ensure federal, state and other sources of funding

At the meeting Marvin Miller of Ball Horticulture imagined a new “big idea”. He saw NICH as a big tent with open sides.

“I was thinking an umbrella was too small and restrictive,” he explained. “NICH is more like a big tent so people can come under the tent and join the cause yet have the freedom to be independent for their specific objectives and operate for those specific objectives outside the tent.

“We all can appreciate the opportunity to expand the use of plants and the appreciation for horticulture and grow the horticultural community,” he explained. “In my mind, this is where NICH can play a significant role in bringing those with these common goals together.”

This “big tent” idea caught fire at the NICH meeting.

Casey Sclar, NICH’s Inaugural Chair and Executive Director of the American Public Gardens Association, added, “NICH welcomes all sectors to gather under this tent and creates one powerful, unified voice to promote the value of plants and ultimately grow all aspects of end-use horticulture.”

Attendees at the meeting, ranging from seasoned veterans to millennials, spanned all sectors of consumer horticulture.

Because the mission is so compelling, Cammie Donaldson, executive director of the Native Plant Horticultural Foundation, joined NICH long before she attended her first meeting in Atlanta.

Donaldson and several Florida native plant growers attended the meeting and agreed to support the “big tent” building process (unification) and anything else they can to move NICH forward.

This was the first time Beth Tuttle, president & CEO of the American Horticultural Society, attend a NICH meeting. She thought it was a fantastic opportunity to meet some of the “true leaders” from across the horticultural landscape – industry, government, academia, and nonprofits.

Tuttle believes, “A coordinated, collective action strategy to advance consumer participation and success in horticulture is the way to instill a culture of gardening in all Americans. We are proud to be a part of this important initiative.”

For Susan Yoder, executive director of Seed Your Future, it was her first experience at a NICH meeting, too. What impressed her most was the collaborative desire and passion for the big picture. Yoder reiterated what many feel, “Without plants, people – and our planet – will not survive. Can we get people to see, appreciate, enjoy, grow, buy and talk about plants? Yes, we can!”

First time attendee Danny Summers, managing director of the Garden Center Group, was energized by the opportunity to have an impact on what the consumer sees, understands and buys. “In my view, this is the first time we have had the opportunity for the entire industry to be singing the same song,” he said.

He sent an email the very next week and asked all of his members and supporters to join NICH, pointing out the grassroots organization is not asking for money. “They need all of us on their mailing list to have more impact when working with potential funders,” Summers added.

Bob Polomski, Clemson University Extension Specialist, was another first time NICH attendee. He says NICH has done much to organize around its important mission to “grow a healthy world through plants, gardens and landscapes,” and hopes the field of horticulture will continue to grow with our collective voices driving NICH to new heights.

NICH was an eye opener for Sylvia Gordon, landscape designer. “Many others think, as I do, about the importance of the end consumer,” she said. “I look forward to growing a larger industry following and the eventual connection with all consumer horticulturist.”

Peter Moe, director of the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, reflected on how fortunate we are to work in a field that creates a more beautiful and healthier world. “We are excited to work together across university, association and corporate boundaries to encourage more people to participate in horticulture and learn how it will add to their quality of life,” he said.

The meeting concluded with the group motivated, passionate and action-oriented. “Our next steps will drive us closer to our end goal of creating a country where everyone loves plants as much as we do,” Sclar says.

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Sidebar:

NICH Accomplishments

Since the first national meeting in 2015, NICH has made strides that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago.

Since its inception, NICH has:

- Set up goal-driven [working committees](#) amidst its [organizational structure](#) with [by-laws](#)
- Received [federal funding](#) from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and participated in recent USDA-NIFA [listening sessions](#)
- Created free to use marketing materials, including [five infographics](#) (#PlantsDoThat), housed on a comprehensive [website](#)
- [Spread the word](#) via press releases and articles in trade magazines, and presentations at dozens of conferences and industry trade shows
- Captured the breadth and depth from three scholarly manuscripts to many trade stories and social media posts
- Released five surveys and created a participant list of over 500+ stakeholders and supporters

Visit NICH today at consumerhort.org to learn more and get involved.