

Business Roundtable

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Otherwise, all the above research areas have been part of NRC since the beginning.

All NRC research is precisely relevant to the area nurseries. Research at the NRC is of benefit to the regional nursery industry, but emphasis is placed on the five counties nearby – Warren (over 50 percent), DeKalb, Franklin, Coffee, and Grundy. There are about 450 certified nurseries in Tennessee with about 80 percent being in this immediate area.

Five Tennessee Department of Agriculture inspectors are based at the NRC. Nurseries must be inspected and certified to sell nursery stock. There are between 200 and 300 certified nurseries in Warren County.

Nursery sales in Tennessee have an economic impact of about \$400 million annually with an approximate \$100 million being in Warren County. At the request of the nursery industry, fees are levied on nurseries to fund the inspection program to ensure state inspectors have the means to certify Tennessee trees and shrubs are being shipped as disease

and insect free.

There are a number of state and federal quarantines in effect to prevent the movement of disease and insects – specifically the Japanese beetle, imported fire ants – both red and black, boxwood blight, and dogwood anthracnose to name a few. Boxwood blight is very tightly regulated as there is no known remedy.

The NRC currently has about 50 active research projects. Most projects require multiple years to complete. As much as 60 percent of the faculty time is spent “in the field” – on the NRC 83-acre facility and/or conducting research at area nurseries. Research time is about 50 percent devoted to insects, 25 percent devoted to disease, 10 to 15 percent devoted to breeding and genetics, and the remainder to weed control and cultural issues.

Breeding and genetics covers developments such as nursery stock with more winter hardiness and later blooming to withstand late frosts. A challenge to NRC is the fact results take time for projects to develop. Funding sources want feedback sooner than later.

I asked about cicadas. They are not a focus of insect



Dr. Lisa Alexander is a research scientist specializing in genetics at the Nursery Research Center.

research. Cicadas are viewed as troublesome. They can cause some tree damage as a result of laying insect eggs. The variety of cicadas that “come out” every 14 or 17 years are difficult to study due to the infrequency.

NRC does deal with soil health sterilization. Tactics include having desired compounds being tilled into the soil for more effective nurs-

ery growing. Research is not conducted in the areas of shaping and pruning, as these are standardized growing practices in the industry.

The advent of new technology for nursery growers was discussed. Newer developments include:

Intelligent sprayer technology using sensors with a horizontal boom to sense the size and shape of trees to

spray only where the trees are, saving time, water, and money.

Use of drones with cameras to check for disease, drought stress, doing inventory, 3D imaging, etc.

Use of robots for weed control – spraying chemicals; automated container movement, etc.

Adding to the research challenges is the fact there are 14,000 different cultivars of nursery stock grown in our area. There is an estimated 55,000 acres of field grown nursery stock in Tennessee with about one-third being in Warren County. Most dogwood trees come from Tennessee. The website for NRC is www.tnstate.edu/nrc.

I asked about employment opportunities at the NRC. Tennessee State University has a website with an employment section online. The university would list any opportunities for the McMinnville NRC. Interested parties are welcomed to check out this resource.

The NRC does employ four to five summer college interns to work on research projects. NRC does conduct partial day training classes as new developments arise. In addition, a field day is

held each year. This year that day is July 24. There will be an open house for two hours, research talks from each of the seven faculty members, and a group dinner. A guest list of over 50 is anticipated.

NRC has spearheaded a plastic recycling program utilizing a custom rolling machine to package the plastic sheeting used in greenhouses and for nursery stock. The rolling machine greatly reduces the labor to do this task and the total time needed. NRC “lends out” the rolling machine to area nurseries for their use.

Overall, NRC is working with a recycler from Arkansas sending back annually about 50,000 pounds of plastics. NRC is working with 50-70 growers with this project. The Tennessee Recycling Coalition recognized NRC with its 2014 Recycler of the Year Award.

The TSU Nursery Research Center is a remarkable asset to our nursery industry and community. BRAC congratulates their ongoing and past achievements. NRC is helping keep Warren County as the Nursery Capital of the World.

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