



The responsible sourcing of components for growing media – a UK perspective

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From the early 1990's there was increasing pressure in the UK to curtail the use of peat(s) in horticulture. These campaigns were led by various NGO's such as FoE, Plantlife and RSPB. Until 2011 the government aspirations had been for the industry to move towards peat-free voluntarily. In 2011 primary legislation for England set specific date targets for the cessation in peat use, 2015 no peat used in public procurement programs, 2020 all peat out of the 'hobby' market and by 2030 for the cessation of peat use by professional growers.

In 2011 the government set up a task force and this a) recognised that the term 'sustainable' was almost impossible to implement and replaced it with 'Responsible' sourcing of all ingredients, b) a series of projects 1 to 12 were established. Of these projects, four have been taken forwards;

- 1) The development of a responsible sourcing calculator, which would allow all materials used as components of substrates to be assessed against a series of criteria, see: www.gma.org.uk (Project P4),
- 2) A performance protocol to be developed for testing of all new substrates and their components, (Project P7),
- 3) A data collection exercise based on all component uses and mixes supplied to both the 'hobby' and professional grower markets. (Project P10)
- 4) An R&D program examining the various challenges of utilising non peat materials. Progress on the developments of alternatives has been well documented as have the barriers to further development, (ISHS, Portland USA, B Mulholland et al 2017, in press)

Currently peat reduction in the UK overall stands at around 53% when considered across all substrates and soil conditioners. Specific cultivation areas are now peat free; soil conditioners, soft fruit substrates and substrates for semi hydroponic production of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers.

The GMA is working with the government department (Defra), retailers, growers and NGO's to move forwards the continued replacement of peat(s). Simultaneously recognising that performance and price of the new mixes must not disadvantage an industry which already operates on very small margins.