

# Which Comes First? Supply or Demand?

K. Terrance Mock

It is inevitable. Whenever a serious discussion on increasing the role of native vegetation in landscaping takes place, the question always seems to come up. Is it more important to increase the supply of nursery grown native material, or to increase the demand for it?

Those who desire to use native vegetation in landscaping may justifiably complain about the scarcity of quality material. Some say that the general public will never fully accept native vegetation until slash pine and red mangroves are available in K-Marts. They have a point.

The growers, however, who are putting their financial lives on the line in the form of hundreds of thousands of dollars in land, materials, labor and equipment, claim that they must have proven demand for native vegetation in order to justify the investment. It

can be a humbling experience to approach a bank for a loan at 22% interest on a crop with no proven track record.

It is my opinion that substantial demand for the product must come first. I believe that the free enterprise system can meet any increased demand for native vegetation in a relatively short period of time.

I also believe that a substantial increase in the demand for native vegetation will soon appear. Here's why:

The exotic-oriented, landscape nursery industry in Florida is in much the same position today as the United States automobile industry was prior to the Arab oil embargo in 1974 — it is a dinosaur and doesn't know it! Water-loving exotic landscape material makes as much sense now as a gas-guzzling V-8 engine! Most people do not see the handwriting on the wall because they do not yet understand

that our water shortage is here to stay.

The National Water Resource Council estimates that total national water consumption is now 700 billion gallons per day. They estimate that this results in *21 billion gallons being drawn out of the aquifer each day beyond what rainfall can replace*, and that if population and consumption continue to grow at their present or projected rate, by the year 2000, over 800 billion gallons per day beyond the aquifer recharge rate will be withdrawn.

Water wars are looming on the horizon. Urban users versus agricultural users. Residential users versus industrial users. The arguments are complex and the ultimate outcome is uncertain, but one thing is sure — the cost of water, like the cost of gasoline, is going to rapidly increase. Nonessential uses will become uneconomical if not downright illegal. In the words of South Florida Water Management executive director Jack Maloy, "This is a problem technology can't solve." He sees a need for a fundamental shift in people's habits of consumption, and says, "I'm talking about the need for a major social change, and it's not going to be easy, but there isn't any choice."

So what does major social change have to do with native vegetation? Here's an example: Most people view the lush, tropical landscape of Palm Beach as the best example of the ideal South Florida habitat. But the daily water consumption on the island of Palm Beach is over 600 gallons per person, more than three times the national average. The residents of Palm Beach may have more money than most Americans, but they don't drink water or bathe that much more. Where does all the water go? On their lush, exotic yards — that's where! The illusion of tropical paradise is being artificially supported by a fragile life support system carrying a precious, liquid resource from the mainland. The choice that soon must be made is — water for our children, or water for our yards?

I think I know what the decision will be. I know that properly designed and installed native landscapes can survive with little or no irrigation. I think that demand for drought-resistant, native landscape material will eventually explode. I think that existing nurseries will scramble to "retool", just as Detroit did, in order to supply the products to meet this demand. I think that within 12 months of the beginning of this demand we will be able to buy native vegetation in K-Marts.

## CHAPTER NEWS

### TAMPA BAY

The Tampa Bay Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society was initiated and organized by Interim Society Directors, Bill Ackerman and Tony Arcuri. So far, the Chapter, with some twenty-five members, has been involved in a slide show program entitled, "Shumard Oaks," by Allen Burdett, and two plant collection/identification field trips. The main emphasis of the two field trips was to collect native trees (bare root seedling transplants and seeds) within areas in Hillsborough County scheduled for development.

To initiate our conservation effort, one member, Colleen O'Sullivan, is preparing an ordinance proposal to Hillsborough County Commissioners concerning the mandatory use of native plants in developmental landscaping schemes within the county. An ad hoc committee was elected to formulate chapter by-laws, nominate a slate of officers, and designate future long-range conservation goals.

Sponsorship in the form of stationery, xeroxes, typewriters, postage, and meeting places has been provided by Environmental Science and Engineering, Inc. (Tampa Office), Hillsborough Community College, and Biological Research Associates, Inc.

Toni Arcuri

### PALM BEACH

The Palm Beach County Chapter is shifting into gear. Paul Cummings was elected as the President and Sally Black was elected as the Vice-President.

Six Committees are being established to help increase our working knowledge of native plants and spread the word about their importance to us. The Committees are:

Horticultural Committee to deal with matters of propagation and cultivation.

Identification Committee to increase our awareness of native plants.

Education Committee to provide us with methods of spreading the native plant information to all county residents.

Environmental Action Committee to review state, county, and local legislation in an effort to assist governments in realizing the energy savings of landscaping with native plants.

Other Special Projects Committees have been established to deal with endangered species, etc.

The September meeting was a talk by Dr. Dan Austin on the subject of rare and endangered plants. The October meeting will highlight the use of landscaping with native plants.

If you would like any additional information about the Chapter, call Paul Cummings 734-4416 or Sally Black 686-6600.

Paul Cummings