

## **Planting a Positive Future—An Overview of Three National Tree Planting Programs**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Of all the many national tree planting programs, the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN) believes that three have great potential to benefit nurserymen, plant propagators, researchers, and horticulturists. I'll briefly describe what each of these programs is trying to accomplish and how each one works. I'll also tell you whom to contact for more information and give you an idea of what these programs can mean to you.

### **SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA) PROGRAM**

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) set up a program in 1991 to increase environmentally-beneficial tree plantings on state or local government lands. It was also designed to benefit small businesses that provide, install, and maintain plant material.

The SBA program provides federal funds for tree planting. These dollars are matched by state or local government funds or in-kind contributions. A total of \$16 million in SBA funds is available for fiscal year 1993 (which began October 1st). These funds are available to states on a population-based formula.

Local governments can apply to a governor-designated state agency for a grant through this program. Usually, the state forester or urban forester is the SBA tree-planting program coordinator. To receive a grant, local governments must provide a minimum of 25% in matching funds or in-kind contributions. Some towns have used maintenance services as in-kind contributions. The SBA grants can be used to purchase, plant, and maintain trees in the community.

In this program trees must be planted by small businesses and may come from either private nursery growers or state foresters. The SBA's definition of small business is one with less than 100 employees.

This program is relatively simple and has generated some substantial dollars for new plantings. The federal government's fiscal year is from October 1 to September 30. In fiscal 1991, the program's first year, \$35.5 million was generated for tree planting. Fourteen and a half million came from the federal government. The remaining \$21 million came from matching local contributions. These dollars helped plant over 4.5 million trees in more than 1,000 projects.

In fiscal year 1991, the program's second year, \$15.7 million was contributed by SBA. Local government contributed \$20.6 million resulting in a total of \$36.3 million in new tree-planting activity. The state of Texas, for example, generated tree-planting funds of nearly \$2.5 million. Florida had similar success, generating funds of over \$2 million. Georgia generated over \$900,000 in tree-planting funds. And the list goes on.

Contact your state forester for a grant application, along with program rules and deadlines. Usually that person is the program coordinator. Once the information

is in hand, work with your local government to apply for grants.

One AAN member worked with local government and obtained a \$15,000 SBA grant for a street-tree program. He offered this advice to nurserymen and women who hope to copy his success:

- 1) Build a rapport with city officials,
- 2) Get information from your state program coordinator,
- 3) Prepare to do a selling job to local government,
- 4) Don't forget that you can work with more than one town on grant proposals.

The SBA tree-planting program is having a positive, measurable impact during challenging economic times. Not to be outdone, the private sector has also introduced some promising programs. TREEPOWER is one of these.

## **TREEPOWER**

In 1990, the American Public Power Association (APPA) introduced an ambitious plan to plant 16 million trees. This means one tree for each U.S. public power customer. APPA is the trade association representing publicly-owned utilities.

Utilities are interested in tree planting for two reasons. First, state regulators are increasingly urging, or mandating, them to implement programs to help reduce consumption. They call it demand-side management. Fortunately, there is a growing body of science that is making the case for tree planting as a cost-effective way to conserve energy. The utility industry is beginning to recognize this.

Tree planting also builds community relations. Utilities deal with some pretty tough issues, like rate increases, the controversy over global warming, and possible health effects of electromagnetic forces (EMFs). Positive recognition isn't always easy to come by. Sponsoring a tree planting is a terrific way to show good corporate citizenship.

The APPA actively encourages its member utilities to develop TREEPOWER programs in their service areas. They offer plenty of how-to help in designing a program and in generating publicity. AAN offers its member as a resource to utilities for technical information, plant material, and maintenance services.

We at AAN believe this program has tremendous potential. Already hundreds of thousands of trees have been planted across the United States, and an additional 1.5 million trees have been pledged to be planted. Just a few examples: The Omaha, Nebraska, public power district has committed to planting 50,000 trees each year. In Utah, the Murray City Power Department is planting 350 trees a year. The city of Manassas, Virginia, plans to plant about 1,500 trees a year. And the New York Power Authority has allocated \$50,000 a year for 5 years for plantings. These are significant planting programs with real dollars behind them. AAN expects TREEPOWER to grow as the tangible benefits of trees become better understood and valued.

## **COOL COMMUNITIES**

During the past three years, we've seen a tremendous amount of interest in urban forestry. We see it in the rise of volunteer tree planting groups, in the emergence of private sector programs like TREEPOWER, and in the increasing federal expenditures on urban forestry. In fact, current congressional appropriations of nearly \$25 million for urban and community forestry represent a ten-fold increase over the last 3 years.

We've also seen the birth of a refreshing, new federal strategy to encourage environmental improvement and energy conservation. Instead of the traditional command and control regulatory approach, the Department of Energy and the EPA are experimenting with a new strategy that is more proactive and positive. Cool Communities is an example of this new thinking.

The program is a joint effort of American Forests (formerly the American Forestry Association), the Department of Energy, EPA, AAN, and the utility industry.

Cool Communities is a 5-year experiment. Its main goal is to gather scientific data on the cooling and energy-saving benefits of trees and surface lightening. Surface lightening is a fancy term for painting roofs, streets, and sidewalks white. Another important goal is to educate the public about the value of trees in energy conservation.

Why plant trees? Because our cities are too hot. In fact, it's been shown that they're up to 10 degrees hotter than the countryside. Scientists call this the "urban heat-island" effect. Studies shows that this added warmth costs us up to \$1 million an hour in air conditioning. It also helps create unhealthy smog levels. Research also shows that planting the right trees in the right places could cut energy use by 10 to 50 percent.

Seven cities were chosen as models for the Cool Communities experiment: Tucson, Arizona; Frederick, Maryland; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Austin, Texas; Dade County, Florida; Springfield, Illinois; and Sacramento, California. As we speak, Cool Communities staff are organizing project teams in these cities. Participants will include local nurserymen and women, city officials, utility executives, and scientists. Job one is to conduct tree inventories and gather data on energy use and citizen awareness. The next step will be to begin public information campaigns.

Progress reports will be issued every two years and a final report will be published at the end of the fifth year. What does the Cool Communities program mean to you? We believe it will have a tremendous impact on how trees are used in energy saving programs. All of us know that trees are more than an aesthetic enhancement. We know that trees are a practical, cost-effective investment to save energy. And we know that trees are the only part of the urban infrastructure that appreciates. Roads, sidewalks, and bridges depreciate after construction.

Cool Communities will carefully and systematically measure the energy-saving benefits of trees. This data will enable us to bring a critical dollars and cents reality to our marketing because when we talk about the benefits of trees in economic terms, we are speaking the language of the developers, builders, governments, and homeowners.

## **THE FUTURE OF TREE PLANTING PROGRAMS**

AAN believes that the long-term outlook for more environmental tree planting is very positive. The public is concerned about the quality of our air and water. Their concern weighs on the minds of public policy makers, who are looking for new solutions. New approaches, like Cool Communities, represent an exciting, positive response to the challenge of energy conservation and pollution prevention. All of these trends mean opportunity—and challenges—for everyone involved with the nursery industry.

What will your role be in the future of tree-planting programs? As propagators and researchers, you will play a critical role in the development of our future tree

supply. We believe that the marketplace will gradually become better educated about tree selection, planting, and maintenance. As this happens, the demand for high-quality, disease-resistant, drought-tolerant plant material will increase. It won't be easier to grow and sell trees, to be sure. But the grower who stays in touch with and meets the market's needs will be best positioned to reap the rewards.

It is AAN's commitment to continue to be a strong advocate for more trees in our cities and communities. And we will always promote the concept of the right tree in the right place. We will continue to seek out partnerships with groups that promote responsible tree planting, and continue to work closely with nurserymen and women to understand your needs and challenges.

I had a high school football coach who always said that "there's no such thing as luck." "Luck," he said, "is when opportunity meets preparation." I can't think of a better way to sum up the challenge—and opportunity—we all face today as we plant a positive future for our industry and for our world.