

Nursery Certification Programs and How They Aid in Shipping Clean Plant Material: A Canadian Example

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Abstract

Van Belle Nursery started the process towards certification in 1995, allowing the nursery to conduct their own inspections. The nursery began to write their own phytosanitary certificates in 2007. The nursery's certification manual was completed and accepted by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in 2008 and undergoes regular revisions and adjustments as system and staff changes are

made and new products are added. The system includes full traceability of plant material and prevents non-certified crops from crossing the border. The main benefit of the certification program is that it allows for efficient shipping, but it also promotes excellent record keeping, encourages training for all growers and IPM personnel, and promotes professionalism in the nursery.

INTRODUCTION

Van Belle Nursery was established in 1973 by Bill and Grace Van Belle on Matsqui Prairie in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The nursery rapidly grew from a landscape supply company (with the majority of crops grown in the field) to supplying liners to other wholesale nurseries and retail-ready material chiefly to independent garden centres. In the 1990s, the nursery was increasingly shipping container-grown plant to the United States

and had a strong desire to do this efficiently and with the greatest flexibility to adjust orders at the last minute. There was talk in the industry about starting a certification program to allow nurseries to do their own inspections and write their own phytosanitary certificates, so Van Belle Nursery decided to participate right from the beginning. Since this was long before I was hired, I asked Bill Van Belle why they started this process and he said: "We have always been a progressive company and this [was] part of the path."

Van Belle Nursery started the process towards certification in 1995 and had the first audit in 1996. The benefits started shortly thereafter as the nursery went from inspections of every load to field inspections every few weeks (or as needed). The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) would write the phytosanitary certificates (“phytos” for short) based on those inspections. By 2006, the nursery had the certification manual almost completed and decided to hire me as the Crop Protection Manager to take over responsibility for the program from Grace Van Belle. In 2007, we were allowed to begin writing our own phytos and in 2008 the manual was complete and accepted by CFIA. We continue to revise and adjust based on changes in the company, but the Canadian Nursery Certification Program (CNCNP) continues to serve us well.

THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

The CFIA directive D-04-01 is the regulatory document that governs the certification program and outlines the requirements for phytosanitary and pest management systems, certifying plant material, facilities and staff, audits, manual, documentation, administration, and corrective actions. It can be found at:

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/plants/plant-pests-invasive-species/directives/date/d-04-01/eng/1323820371646/1323820675188>.

The manual is a constantly changing document as we make system and staff changes and as we grow in area and product offerings. All the changes need to be made as soon as possible, and there is a complete review of the manual at least once each year. There are four internal and three external surveillance audits per year, plus one internal and external systems audit. Each surveillance audit does include some aspects of systems, just to make sure there are no systemic errors occurring that could jeopardize the program.

Since this is a systems-based approach to phytosanitary management, it requires all aspects of planning and production to work properly. Before any new plants are ordered they need to be compared to the restricted list to ensure that they will be certifiable, and if not, that they be prevented by holds in the inventory system from being shipped to the United States. All incoming plants are inspected carefully before being allowed into the nursery. We do regular, scheduled pest monitoring of all growing locations, carefully recording all findings, treatments, and treatment results. Finally, all outgoing plants are carefully inspected, especially if they will be getting a phyto or an Interfacility Stamp (IFS) to allow them to go seamlessly to another CNCNP nursery.

In case of issues (regulated or newly introduced pest, or other problems), we need to have full traceability of our plant material. Where did the product come from? Where has it been located on the nursery? Where has it gone? Each audit includes several trace-forward (from purchase) and trace-backward (from sales) exercises. Thankfully, now this is all tracked in our computer inventory and we no longer have to dig through boxes of paper records.

SHIPPING RESTRICTIONS

Probably the most important part of this process is preventing crops that are not certified for one reason or another from crossing the border. There are three categories of restrictions that are established by the USDA that we must follow, namely: A) Any plant imported into Canada with growing media except if from the US or grown under Canadian or US Growing Media Programs; B) A list of specific genera, no matter what the source, and C) A list of specific genera if sourced anywhere except Canada or the US. We therefore need to ask all Canadian suppliers about the source of their plants so we can ensure that if they do not accidentally get

shipped as certified material if they fall on any of these lists.

The second thing that can prevent a crop from being certified and allowed to cross with a CNCP phyto is the length of time that it has been at the nursery. Generally, it is one growing cycle (4 months), but it can be as little as 28 days for annuals or tropicals that have only been grown in a greenhouse. *Phytophthora ramorum* hosts require a full 12 months if they are sourced from outside North America. If they come from another certified nursery with an Interfacility Stamp or from the US on a US phyto, they can be shipped on a CNCP phyto right away; in the case of US origin, this must be stated. If there is an item that we would like to include, but it has not completed the residency requirement, we can request a CFIA inspection and get a 1337. Essentially all these requirements come from the USDA PPQ document which can be found at:

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/import_export/plants/manuals/ports/downloads/plants_for_planting.pdf.

We added a module for Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) for hydrangeas when we had an opportunity to bring in new varieties from Europe that would be distributed all over North America. The quarantine lasts 9 months; during that time, we are watching closely for any development of rust, which is the disease of concern in these plants. Right now, the origin needs to be either the Netherlands or Germany and the plant material needs to be inspected by CFIA upon arrival. For the following 9 months, the plants must remain a minimum of 3 meters from any other hydrangea, they need to be uniquely identified by a special label which includes all their entry information, and all debris must be collected and inspected by CFIA before disposal. We have permission to take cuttings and increase the stock during this time, but all offspring are considered to have come from the same crop as the mother plants

and must continue to be identified accordingly (with the code in the inventory system and proper label). No PEQ plant can be included in CNCP and will always require a CFIA phyto to cross the border. To solve this problem, we ship plants to the US and then buy them back as stock plants or cuttings after an appropriate amount of time; after this, they can go into CNCP.

My role with the certification program also includes separate Canadian and other US and international regulations. This means that I apply for import permits when necessary, watch for other CFIA movement restrictions (for example, *Berberis* and *Rhamnus*). Some states have their own additional restrictions outlined in all the summaries listed here: <http://nationalplantboard.org/laws-and-regulations/>.

In addition, there is CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), other border issues (rice hulls), and constant vigilance for changes in regulations and new pest finds.

BENEFITS OF THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

This seems like a lot of investment in people, time, and money. Is it worth it? Yes, we still think so. The main benefit is still the same one that got us on this path in the first place: it allows for efficient shipping. But I think the side benefits are the ones that keep us going. A systems-based approach works with the product from the time it enters the nursery until it leaves, helping us maintain an efficient Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program. It promotes excellent record keeping, encourages training for all growers and IPM personnel, and promotes professionalism in our nursery. It gives us the advantage of being allowed to complete post-entry quarantine for US-bound hydrangeas on our property, and our customers have one more reason to trust the nursery to provide them with clean, healthy plants.