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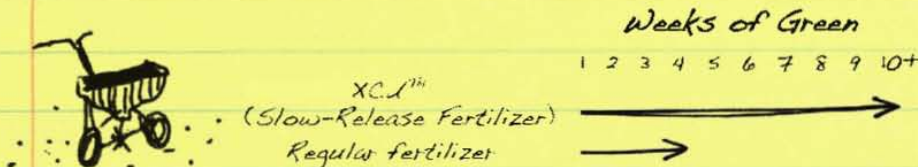
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## Saving water and growing a legacy

**J**ames “Jay” Livingston Fraleigh is a proud and progressive grower. It’s a lifestyle he is familiar with as he’s the sixth generation in his family to work the family farm, which is now Gro-Eco wholesale nursery, near Madison, FL.

Fraleigh is also a businessman. In 1999, he founded the plant nursery that’s just a short drive south of the Georgia state line. He directs the more than 90-acre operation with the help of his wife, two sons and about 50 other co-workers (during peak season).

A wholesale plant nursery is one of the first links in the Green Industry supply chain. But like every other link in the chain, it is being asked to produce and deliver its products and services in a more environmentally friendly way. This includes reducing its water and energy footprints.

Fraleigh began getting ahead of that curve a decade ago when, after months of study and hundreds of drawings, he engineered a new way — a less water-intensive, more efficient path — to grow healthy, hearty landscape nursery plants. He named it the Gro-Eco Growing System.

The patented system uses raised beds where container plants are placed in protected sockets overlaid with a drip irrigation system. The

automated drip irrigation system applies the water directly to each plant, and only the amount of water each plant needs. Fraleigh says the system saves 85% in water usage compared to traditional irrigation systems. He estimates it is saving more than 100 million gallons of water annually.

“I’m not digging ponds and ditches and trenches and becoming a waste water treatment plant. Environmentally, it’s the best way I have seen to produce container plants,” says Fraleigh.

There also is an irrigation line in the middle of the bed that maintains the proper temperature for the root system, even in harsh weather. The soil protects the roots of the plants from bitter winter cold (yes, north Florida gets freezes) and scorching summer heat. And with containers surrounded by soil, employees no longer have to set them upright again after a strong blow.

Gro-Eco plants, recognizable by distinctive blue labels, are available at retail nurseries throughout the Southeast. His long-term goal is to establish Gro-Eco Growing Systems elsewhere across the United States — close to locations, including retail outlets, where significant numbers of ornamental plants are sold. Buyers, including the big box stores, increasingly will favor local suppliers for environmental and also economic reasons, he believes.

In 2007, Fraleigh was awarded the Agricultural Environmental Leadership Award by the Florida Department of Agriculture. He says he is flattered by the recognition but stresses he created his production system for a more fundamental reason.

“I did this because I love the industry and at the same time I wanted to improve it,” he says.

Fraleigh recognizes the great responsibility he has to his family and employees. But he’s equally aware of his responsibility to preserve the resources of the region, especially its soil and water resources. The farm has been in his family since the 1840s, and he views the legacy he leaves to the land’s seventh generation, sons Russell and Lane, as central to his life’s work.

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Fraleigh says his patented Gro-Eco Growing System **saves 85% in water usage** compared to traditional irrigations systems.





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# NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

**GIE+EXPO**  
PREVIEW

## GIC places emphasis on sustainability

The president and president-elect of PLANET offer insight on how next month's Green Industry Conference will help professionals truly 'go green.'

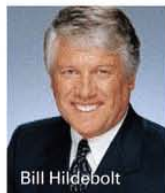
BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

**E**nglish is a living language, and words have a tendency to shift meaning over time. Different groups claim them — some might argue hijack them — to serve their purposes.

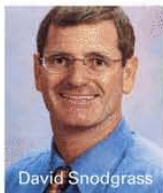
"Green" and "sustainability" are two terms whose meanings essentially have

been lost to the Green Industry because other groups have finagled their way into the "green" discussion.

*Landscape Management* spoke with Bill Hildebolt, president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), and David Snodgrass, the president-elect, about those words and about the upcoming Green Industry Conference (GIC), which runs along side the GIE+EXPO in



Bill Hildebolt



David Snodgrass

Louisville, KY, next month.

"It's all about emphasizing *professional* in the Professional Landcare Network," says Hildebolt, owner of Nature's Select Premium Turf Services, Winston Salem, NC.

The problem, he adds, is that outside the landscaping world, the concept of

*continued on page 10*

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what constitutes a "green industry" has been co-opted by other interests.

"We want to advance and take the lead in sustainable practices, and show the world we are the original Green Industry," says Snodgrass, president of Dennis' Seven Dees, Portland, OR.

That will require retaking control of

the "green" message and teaching contractors to embrace sustainable business practices and lifestyles. Neither task will be easy.

"If you ask a group of 100 people what 'sustainability' means, you'll get 100 different perceptions — 90 of them negative," Hildebolt says. "The term has been co-opted by activists and used

against us so many times.

"But we are the professionals, the true stewards of the environment," Hildebolt adds. "What we're working toward is: How do we integrate sustainability into PLANET so we can be *known* as the true leaders in this increasingly key area?"

### Learning from one another

Much of that begins with the educational programs at this year's GIC.

"Some are well ahead of others in adopting sustainable practices," Snodgrass says. "We're going to share their best practices at GIC — elevating the industry as a whole and changing and greening how we think and operate.

"This whole sustainability movement started out all about the ecology of the planet," he continues. "Now it's much broader — encompassing the necessary people and profit parts."

At GIC, top professionals in the industry will share ideas and strategies regarding sustainability and lean management, Hildebolt says. And those messages will continue through other PLANET-sponsored events in 2009 and beyond.

"We are developing a continual sustainability learning experience that will follow us from venue to venue," he says. "Last November, we had an outstanding Crystal Ball meeting on sustainability. We had a really healthy, frank discussion on what sustainability means to regulators, the public, the service sector and opinion formers."

Naturally, that discussion led to new educational opportunities at GIC.

"We're looking at how you can sustain your personnel, as well as your personal health and well-being and that of your family," Hildebolt says. "We're also looking at educating members on the many paths to increased profitability through sustainability."

Embracing sustainable business practices and lifestyles also will help the Green Industry manage the message and public perceptions.

"If you're not taking care of yourself and you don't have a profitable business model, you won't be sustaining much of anything," Hildebolt says. "At PLANET, we're taking a holistic approach." **LMM**



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