



Special Initiatives Edition

The National Clean Plant Network (NCPN) is a USDA-supported, cooperator-driven initiative that annually coordinates and supports the activities of clean plant centers throughout the United States. The mission of NCPN is to protect the health and value of American agriculture by providing high quality, propagative plant material which is free of targeted plant pathogens and pests, toward the goal of ensuring that U.S. specialty crop producers remain globally competitive.

This mission is primarily achieved through the establishment and maintenance of clean plant foundation programs, therapeutics and diagnostics. The Network provides an avenue for propagative plant material, otherwise forbidden, to enter and move throughout the nation for use by specialty crop industries. Currently, the Network supports 7 crop groups: fruit trees, grapes, hops, berries, citrus, sweet potato, and roses. There are up to 27 clean plant centers across 20 states, representing up to 40 distinct crop-focused programs. Core NCPN activities include plant pathogen diagnostics, therapeutics, clean plant foundations, and governance.

In 2018/2019, NCPN received an increase in its base operating funds, in part to support a series of special initiatives intended to better understand and advance issues of interest to the Network. Five such initiatives have been undertaken by members of NCPN, including: Strategic Planning, Education/Outreach/Communications, Economics, Quality, and Scientific Information Sharing. These initiatives have either evolved organically as an NCPN program or been identified by NCPN planners and stakeholders as an emerging opportunity.

Ongoing Special Initiatives in the National Clean Plant Network

Strategic Planning

When NCPN was established in 2008, one of its foundational documents was a Strategic Plan which guided the program through both the Farm Bills of 2008 and 2014, the statutes under which the Network was authorized. In 2017, Network managers embarked upon a comprehensive revisiting of NCPN's Mission, Vision, Strategies, Goals, and Objectives with the express purpose of renewing the Strategic Plan. Ten representatives from all corners of the Network have been working to establish a revised Network plan that will reaffirm the program's direction, better circumscribe the Network, and weave NCPN's various traditions tightly together. The plan serves as a basis for advancement of NCPN specialty crops, clean plan centers, and working teams, and establishes actions to strengthen and advance the Network. Once the newly proposed Strategic Plan is documented, it will be shared with stakeholders for feedback and ratification. The new Strategic Plan is anticipated in 2019/2020.

Education/Outreach/Communications

In 2010, agricultural extension agents and NCPN national and crop coordinators began meeting to discuss the Network's need for an education/outreach program designed to inform nurseries and growers about the value of using clean plants. They organized themselves into the first NCPN working group, harmonizing across crop lines with the intent of developing tools needed to reach all relevant clean plant stakeholders. The team, composed of about 30 Network members, has developed an initial NCPN communications plan, program brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, posters, presentations, displays and branding strategies. In 2018/2019, program funding has been secured to: 1) review and revise the Networks communications plan; 2) advance and target NCPN outreach materials to ascribed audiences; 3) explore the possibilities associated with establishing a formal NCPN Extension program in addition to ongoing outreach activities; 4) engage as a permanent component of ongoing NCPN Strategic Planning; and 5) evaluate and formalize the working groups leadership structure and directions.

Economics

Even before the establishment of NCPN, economists variously associated with clean plant initiatives have been generating localized studies indicating the positive economic benefits to industry when using plants derived from clean stock. In 2018/2019 the Network provided 'proof of concept' funding to members of NCPN to come together to assess and evaluate existing economic studies, to better understand the Network's and stakeholders needs for additional economics information, identify lessons learned and gaps, and to create a roadmap under which economic studies are utilized to enhance the Networks mission and products. Program managers, economists, and stakeholders are all engaging in this initiative. Under a series of workshops, approximately 40 NCPN members are convening, in a multi-step process, to outline a course of action for advancing the use of economic data as an outreach tool in educating others about the value of using clean plants.

Quality

Networks such as the NCPN, whose high-profile goals are to ensure global competitiveness and food security, have unique tasks and responsibilities. NCPN's focus is providing high-quality, propagated plant material free of targeted plant pathogens and pests to ensure the global competitiveness of specialty crop producers. Quality disciplines are essential in all aspects of NCPN program management to ensure the integrity of diagnostics, therapeutics, and foundation collections. Furthermore, quality of NCPN-supported clean plant centers, their respective processes and products, and of the Network overall is a driving force of the Strategic Planning process. Several areas of quality management, quality assurance, and quality control are recognized by Network members as being important and in need of analysis and advancement, including scientific program credibility, governance and management, recordkeeping and information, the administration of foundations, and communications. Through a series of NCPN-supported workshops, NCPN Center Directors, managers, and stakeholders are engaging in an analysis of what quality means in NCPN. This planning effort is leading to the identification of immediate critical quality needs, and the establishment of the concept of 'quality' as a formalized and ongoing endeavor throughout the entire Network.

Scientific Information Sharing

NCPN-supported scientists are in key positions to identify and address pathogens that have the potential to do harm to the nation's agriculture, and to do so in a timely and efficient manner. These scientists also play a critical role in informing regulators and industry about disease-causing organisms and possible mitigation strategies. There are more than 150 viruses and virus-like agents that threaten the specialty crops currently included in the National Clean Plant Network. Managing viruses in G1 blocks and further down the line requires information gathering and sharing among scientists and with affected stakeholders. In fiscal year 2018/2019, NCPN began supporting an NCPN cross-cutting initiative under which scientists working on NCPN-supported specialty crops (fruit trees, grapes, hops, berries, citrus, sweetpotato, and roses) can more efficiently collaborate, develop, and share information for use in the program's education/outreach initiative, such as fact sheets and peer-reviewed on-line information services.

The Future

NCPN planners, program managers, and stakeholders continue to explore new and better ways of delivering clean plant services to industry and other users; including concepts in addition to those mentioned here. The drafted new NCPN Strategic Plan is proposing the concept of *Special Initiatives* as one of the Network's goals--as a place where necessary and new ideas can be recognized, tested, and applied. The Network intends to continue engaging such Special Initiatives going forward.

A Look Ahead: *What's Happening in the Network*

- **January 9-11, 2019** [North American Raspberry & Blackberry Assn](#), Savannah GA
- **January 20, 2019** NCPN Sweetpotato Tier 2 Meeting, New Orleans MS
- **January 22-25, 2019** [American Hop Convention](#), Monterey, CA
- **January 22, 2019** NCPN-Hop Tier 2 Meeting, Monterey, CA
- **January 31-February 1, 2019** NCPN Grape Tier 2 Meeting at FPS, Davis, CA
- **February 3-6, 2019** [North American Strawberry Assn](#), Orlando FL
- **April 11-12, 2019** NCPN-Roses Tier 2 meeting at TAMU, College Station, TX

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