

Project title Provision of funds to assist in the promotion and marketing of ProVaR

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AUTHENTICATION

We declare that this work was done under our supervision according to the procedures described herein and that the report represents a true and accurate record of the results obtained.

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CONTENTS

GROWER SUMMARY	1
Headline	1
Background and expected deliverables	1
Summary of the project	2
Main conclusions	12
Financial benefits	13
Action points for growers	14

GROWER SUMMARY

Headline

A sustainable not-for-profit organisation (ProVar) that provides a licensing and royalty collection service for hardy nursery stock varieties in the UK has been established.

Background and expected deliverables

Since the early 1990s, nurserymen had been offered an effective licensing system and royalty collection service, backed by active policing of protected nursery stock varieties, through the BARB (British Association of Rose Breeders) scheme. The BARB scheme provided a valuable service for the UK Hardy Ornamental Nursery Stock (HONS) industry and particularly the 12 existing Breeder members who had varieties placed with the organisation and the 80+ growers who were in turn licensed to produce these varieties.

In November 2005, the Executive Committee of BARB made it known that Rose members within their organisation wished to separate from the HONS sector and suggested that the two sides would be best served by two separate bodies after May 2006. This left the UK HONS sector without any organisation to administer policing and collection of royalties for existing breeders or to continue the licensing of growers to produce protected varieties.

As a result, a steering committee of HONS members was set up to form a new company for this purpose and in April 2006, Protected Varieties Ltd (ProVaR) was formed. The company is run on a non-profit-making basis and is managed by a team of Directors who, as unpaid volunteers, enable administrative costs to be kept to a minimum. As a result, royalty levels are kept low to ensure the long-term viability of the organisation and to allow it to pursue the following aims and objectives.

1. To increase awareness of the general concept and benefits of protected varieties to the trade and public as a whole, in order to generate greater sales of plants.
2. Provide an efficient policing and royalty collecting service for existing breeder members and attract additional breeders in the future, either as companies or individuals.

3. Re-issue licences to existing grower members to enable continued production of protected varieties and to encourage more growers to be licensed to grow these varieties in the future.
4. Provide a service for people wishing to gain Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) on new plants, through the submission of PBR applications on their behalf.

This work aimed to support the establishment of a sustainable not-for-profit organisation that provides a licensing and royalty collection service for hardy nursery stock varieties in the UK.

Summary of the project

1) Press day to launch ProVaR

A press day to launch ProVaR was held on 31 May 2007 at the RHS Hillside Events Centre, Wisley and attracted an audience of over 100.

Invites were sent to members of the Garden Writers Guild, garden centre buyers, wholesale growers and potential breeder members, including several from Europe.

Many visitors arrived early to view the large selection (140+ varieties), from its 12 Breeder members within the ProVaR portfolio, on display outside. Information on ProVaR was contained in a detailed folder produced for this and future promotional events. People listened to an afternoon of talks from a range of high profile international speakers, explaining the various procedures for obtaining Plant Breeders Rights and extolling the merits of protected plants and participated in discussions.

The press day gave the new organisation identity and much exposure from the large press presence, whilst also helping to clarify the benefits of protected plants to growers and retailers alike.



Figure 1: ProVaR press day – 31st May 2007

2) ProVaR website and database

A ProVaR website and database was commissioned and created. The initial design of the site was based on three main concepts:

1. Increase awareness of ProVaR and its role to growers and retailers.
2. Provide easy access to information about ProVaR plants, the range available and descriptions through plant specification sheets.
3. Increase public awareness of ProVaR plants, thereby stimulating consumer demand and hence sales at all levels.

Work began on the website in late spring 2007 and was launched in early October 2007 at www.provarplants.co.uk with reciprocal links to breeder members' and other associated sites. From the launch date the number of visitors to the site increased steadily with the plant database being the key area for bringing in traffic. After six months 629 hits were recorded over a 14 day period, of which 557 were first-time visitors to the site.



Figure 2: Screenshot of ProVaR's homepage (www.provarplants.co.uk)

3) Marketing and promotional material

In addition to the promotional folders and biodegradable carrier bags produced for the ProVaR press day in May 2007 a modular exhibition display system stand that could be used at shows and exhibitions was also purchased

This staffed stand was first used at the Golden Acres Nurseries show in February 2008 (Fig 3). Whilst the stand was a big success and attracted many visitors, through the colourful display of images and plant material, the fact that many people did not know of the existence of ProVaR or fully understand Plant Breeders Rights prompted the addition of bullet-point information side banners to the display prior to the Woking Show in July 2008.



Figure 3: ProVaR Modular Exhibition Display System at the Woking Show

Other events that the stand appeared at during 2008 were the Wyevale East Open Day (following interest from amenity and landscapers at the GAN show), the Midland Regional show in August and the South West Regional Growers show in October (Fig 4).

Whilst one of the communication objectives of the project was the possibility of a stand at an HDC Open Day or event, after consultation with the HDC, it was decided that such a presentation did not fit any of the planned workshops and the schedule of appearances at other trade shows was already giving good publicity to both ProVaR and the support received from the HDC.



Figure 4: ProVaR Modular Exhibition Display System at SWRG

Other than a stand and presentation at Contact in January 2009, with the cost of attending shows being high and with little chance of reaching a wider or different audience than in the previous year, it was decided that another approach was needed in 2009 to further the promotion of ProVaR and make best use of the remaining HDC funds.

In order to promote the plants within the ProVaR range to growers, retailers, breeders and the public, several approaches were made to build a permanent show garden at East Malling Research, RHS Wisley and Stoneleigh Park but these failed to materialise for different reasons. However, with the IPPS Conference tour taking place in Eire at Fitzgerald's Nursery in the summer of 2009, an opportunity was taken to establish over 100 ProVaR varieties alongside other European trials in a dedicated area of the nursery (Fig. 5). Despite two harsh winters - which have meant some varieties being replanted - the area, to which ProVaR contributes a yearly sum to assist with maintenance, is steadily establishing and providing a reference point for international and UK growers.



Figure 5: Display Garden at Fitzgerald's Nursery

In a similar initiative, at the request of the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC), ProVaR members have provided pot grown liners of many of the ProVaR listed varieties. These were grown on by SAC students (Fig. 6) prior to planting out in a new demonstration area (Fig. 7) for which the planting and maintenance plans, together with the information boards (Fig. 8) were designed by students as part of the overall project.



Figure 6: Plants being grown-on at Scottish Agricultural College



Figure 7: Area for Planting at Scottish Agricultural College


ProVaR

PROTECTED VARIETIES LTD

Exceptional plant varieties for UK growers


About ProVar

Protected Varieties Limited (ProVar) is a non-profit organisation, founded to raise awareness to new ornamental plants. Any funds received from its members are used to cover cost and to keep the organisation evolving. The company acts as a one-stop-shop for organisations from every level in the industry, from breeder and grower to Retailer and even horticultural journalists, with a wide range of services and information. ProVar received support and funding for its initial set-up and website development from the Horticultural Development Council (HDC).




Plant Breeders Services

ProVar offers various services to its member, if a breeder is in the initial stages of applying for Plant Breeders rights ProVar will complete application forms and have the plant sent to an appropriate testing centre. Once the plant has gained certification ProVar undertakes marketing the variety but including it in its plant listing and catalogue as well as issuing information of its release to growers, retailers and journalists. The role of policing illegal plant duplication and the collection of royalties will also be done on the breeders behalf.



Plant Breeders Rights

Under the Intellectual property legislation (UPOV agreement) a breeder can apply for Plant Breeders Rights, this gives the breeder the right to register the new variety as their own property and to therefore collect the royalties due from sales of that plant. To gain this status the plant must be tested against three core criteria. The plant must be "Distinct" in at least one characteristic from others other varieties available and must remain "Uniformed" and "stable" in form and description after repeated reproduction.



Rosie Burgon, HND Horticulture

Figure 8: Information leaflet designed by a Scottish Agricultural College student

An indication of the growing recognition of the importance of ProVaR was that in autumn 2009, Horticulture Week magazine asked if ProVaR would endorse the New Plant Category at the Grower of the Year Awards 2010, something that they wished to repeat earlier this year. This recognition was enhanced further when the HTA invited ProVaR to stage a large new plant display at the new National Plant Show at Stoneleigh in June 2010 (Fig. 9) and sponsor the new plant award (Fig. 10) for which ProVaR were pleased to provide an engraved glass award (Fig. 11).



Figure 9: ProVaR stand at HTA National Plant Show



Figure 10: Winners of Best New Plant award sponsored by ProVaR



Figure 11: Best New Plant award sponsored by ProVaR

Main Conclusions

- At the outset, there were 80 grower members licensed to grow ProVaR varieties. Whilst this figure has dropped slightly to 78, this is still pleasing at a time when some small nurseries have stopped propagating and others have closed or amalgamated.
- The number of breeder members has increased from 12 to 17, with 4 of the 5 new members being prominent European breeders.
- This in turn, has increased the number of varieties that can be propagated by ProVaR members from 140 varieties in 2007 to 177 today.
- As the standing of ProVaR has grown, breeder members have been encouraged to include more of their larger and more significant protected varieties.
- At the start of the project, annual returns from grower members totaled 843,000 units in 2006, generating commission of £17,128. By 2010, this had increased to 1,044,000 units with commission of £22,032, despite a lowering of commission rates from 20% to 15% in July 2009 and a change in the timing of declarations from propagation to first point of sale. Both initiatives were introduced to further encourage increased production of ProVaR varieties, by reducing the cost to growers and postponing payment of commissions until point of sale rather than the considerably earlier stage after propagation.

- Since the launch of the website in autumn 2007, when it received around 1000 hits per month, numbers have continued to grow with visits currently around 2500 per month. Around 90% of these are new visitors and upwards of 230 being repeat visits.

The level of exposure and recognition that ProVaR has achieved over the period of the project has been extensive but could not have been achieved without the sponsorship and help received from the HDC.

Financial benefits

Breeder members benefit from the promotion and increase awareness of their varieties through the ProVaR annual catalogue, website and presence at trade shows as well as being able to:

- License their plants to be grown by grower members in the UK.
- Operate under one licence agreement, thereby saving the breeder from issuing individual licences to each individual grower.
- Benefit from an efficient and policed royalty collection service from growers, with returns paid twice yearly.

Grower members benefit from a license to propagate 177 varieties from some of the best breeders and plant developers in the UK and Europe, leading to good marketing opportunities as well as often benefiting from:

- Access to varieties that are usually only available to larger nurseries.
- Production of new and improved varieties that can be easier to produce or disease resistant, thereby reducing losses in production and increasing returns.
- Gaining competitive advantage and being more able to resist downward pressure on prices through increasing demand for PBR protected varieties.
- An increase in sales through marketing support from breeders and promotion to retailers and gardening press, resulting in increased demand for ProVaR varieties from the public.
- Time savings from completing only one return for shrub, herbaceous and patio plants instead of making individual returns to a number of Breeders.
- Paying royalties on sales rather than at propagation.

Action points for breeders, growers and retailers

Consider becoming a member of ProVaR if you are either a:

- Breeder who has plants to license in the UK.
- Grower who propagates and would like to add exciting ProVaR varieties to the range offered to increase sales.

Or, if you are a grower or retailer who does not propagate:

- Consider buying-in more royalty-paid ProVaR licensed plants, either as liners to grow-on or as finished saleable plants, to benefit from the strong demand and sales that ProVaR plants can generate.