

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

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The results and conclusions in this report are based on an investigation conducted over a one-year period. The conditions under which the experiments were carried out and the results have been reported in detail and with accuracy. However, because of the biological nature of the work it must be borne in mind that different circumstances and conditions could produce different results. Therefore, care must be taken with interpretation of the results, especially if they are used as the basis for commercial product recommendations.

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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Grower Summary

Headline

- HDC funds have been used to support the launch and marketing of the ProVaR service provided to HNS growers.

Background and expected deliverables

- Since the early 1990s, the BARB (British Association of Rose Breeders) scheme has offered nurserymen an effective licensing system and royalty collection service which works to protect varieties.
- The BARB scheme has provided a valuable service for the UK Hardy Ornamental Nursery Stock (HONS) industry. In particular, it has served the 12 existing Breeder members by managing their varieties and also served more than 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 and 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 with the following aims and objectives.
 1. To increase awareness of the general concept 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 to attract new and additional breeders in the future, either companies or individuals.

3. Re-issue licences to existing grower members to enable continued production of protected varieties after the split from BARB and to encourage more growers to become licensed to grow these varieties in the future.
 4. Provide a service for people wishing to gain Plant Breeder's Rights (PBR) on new plants, through the submission of PBR applications on their behalf.
- As a result, for the first time ever, the UK had a dedicated organisation to market and manage protected plants that was open to all commercial growers.
 - With the objective of increasing awareness of ProVaR and marketing the organisation and its plants to the media and growers, . ProVaR applied to the HDC to help support a campaign, with the aim of selling more plants through all stages of the trade.
 - The provision of easy access to information and specifications of existing plants in the portfolio would help increase the demand from retailers and growers alike, thereby attracting more new and innovative plant material in the future, to the benefit and value of the HONS industry and HDC members as a whole.

Summary of the project and main conclusions

- The provision of funding was to be split over two years between March 2007 and 2009. Funding in the first year focussed on three objectives:

1) To assist with the cost of a high profile Press Day to launch ProVaR

This was held on Thursday 31st May 2007 at the RHS Hillside Events Centre, Wisley and attracted an audience of over 100 from printed invitations sent to members of the Garden Writers Guild, garden centre buyers, wholesale growers and potential breeder members, including several from Europe. Starting at lunchtime, many visitors arrived early to view the large selection of over 140 varieties, from its 12 breeder members, within the ProVaR portfolio on display outside (Figure 1). All of this and other information on the organisation was contained in a detailed folder produced for this and future promotional events. After much discussion over a buffet lunch, people listened to an afternoon of talks from a range of high profile international speakers,

explaining the various procedures in obtaining PBRs and extolling the merits of protected plants.



Figure 1: ProVar Press Launch Day – Thursday 31st March 2007

The day was a huge success and 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.

2) *The commission and creation of a ProVaR website and database*

The second objective, as a result of the funding from the project, was the commission and creation of a web site and database. The initial design of the site was based on three main concepts:

- Increase general awareness of the organisation.
- Demonstrate clearly to growers and retailers the role of ProVaR and to provide easy access about its plants, the range available and descriptions through plant specification sheets. This is supplemented by a growers directory and listings of who grows each variety.
- Increase public awareness of the plants, thereby increasing consumer demand and hence sales at all levels.

Work began on the website in late Spring 2007 and it was launched in early October at www.provarplants.co.uk with reciprocal links to a number of other sites. Since this

time the number of visitors to the site is steadily increasing with the plant database being the key area for bringing in traffic. Over a recent 14 day period there were 629 hits, of which 557 were first-time visitors.

In order that the site remains fresh, it is intended to routinely change and update information via a remote PC. Other objectives for this coming year are:

- Optimise entrance to the site via search engines
- Improve the quality of plant images and expand descriptions in order that bed cards can be downloaded and printed by growers and retailers.

3) To assist with the production of a structured programme of marketing material

This third objective was seen as a key point in increasing awareness of the organisation and its role within the nursery industry. Whilst the promotional folders and biodegradable carrier bags produced for the ProVaR press day in May 2007 and future such events were a start, the most important equipment purchased was a modular exhibition display system that could be used at shows and exhibitions.



Figure 2: ProVaR' Modular Exhibition Display System at Golden Acres

This first appeared at the Golden Acres Show (Figure 2) in February 2008 as the first of a series of appearances at other shows in 2008, helped by the contribution of funds from the HDC. The stand was a big success and attracted many visitors by

using a colourful display of images and plant material. However, the fact that many people did not know of the existence of ProVaR or fully understand Plant Breeders Rights, has prompted the addition of bullet-point information side banners to the display prior to the Woking Show in July.

The ProVaR stand will also appear at Wyevale East Open Day (following interest from amenity and landscapers at the GAN show), the Midland Regional Show in August and the South West Growers in October. A ProVaR representative will host the stand.

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 that the schedule of appearances at other trade shows was already giving good publicity to ProVaR.

Financial benefits

Breeders not already registered with ProVaR can, through joining:

- License their plants to be grown by 80 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 return paid twice yearly.

Growers not already registered with ProVar can through joining:

- Gain access to over 140 new varieties. This is of particular benefit to smaller growers who often would not be able to grow such varieties as they are usually only available to larger nurseries.
- Benefit from some varieties that are easier to produce or disease resistant, thereby reducing losses in production and costs.
- Often gain competitive advantage and be more likely to resist downward pressure on price through increasing demand for PBR protected varieties.

- Gain from an increase in sales of ProVaR varieties through marketing support from Breeders.
- Benefit from promotion to retailers and gardening press resulting in increased demand from the public.
- Save time by completing only one return for shrub, herbaceous and patio plants instead of making individual returns to a number of Breeders.
- Pay royalties on sales, not on propagation or before plants have been sold.

Action points for growers

Consider becoming a member of ProVaR if you are a:

- breeder who has plants to licence.
- grower who propagates and would like to add ProVaR varieties to your range.

If you are a grower or retailer who does not propagate:

- Consider buying-in more ProVaR licensed plants already royalty-paid to increase demand and sales.