Sun Gro Horticulture and Sustainability – Frequently Asked Questions

What is Sun Gro's role in the peat moss industry with regard to sustainability?

As the leader in the growing media industry, Sun Gro has also taken a leadership role in sustainability efforts. Sun Gro has been instrumental in developing the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association's[1] guidelines for sustainable harvest of peat moss and restoration of bogs[2]. Here are a few little known facts that show just how sustainable our use of peat moss is:

Peat moss is replenished 60 times faster than it is harvested[3]. Each year in Canada, 70 million tons of peat accumulates and only 1.3 million tons are harvested industry-wide.

Sun Gro harvests fewer than 10,000 acres, an area equivalent to about 24 average-sized US farms[4].

The total amount of land under harvest for peat is miniscule—less than 0.02% of Canadian peat lands [5] (that's 1 acre in harvest for every 5,000 acres of peat land.)

Many more detailed facts are available at www.peatmoss.com.

What steps does Sun Gro take to ensure environmental sensitivity?

Sun Gro follows best practices before, during and after harvest of peat moss:

Prior to harvest, extensive Environmental Impact Studies are conducted for Provincial authorities to ensure that local wildlife is not adversely affected.

During harvest, hundreds of thousands of acres of land adjacent to harvest areas remain undisturbed so that native plants and wildlife can thrive.

Once harvest operations cease, bogs will be restored to functioning wetlands where a vibrant ecosystem of plants, birds and animals will flourish[6].

Does Sun Gro have other policies and practices regarding use of natural resources?

Sun Gro is committed to using resources wisely. We provide exceptional products for our customers that not only meet their exacting technical specifications, but that re-purpose a variety of materials once considered waste. For example, we use coconut fiber pith, "coir", a by-product of coconut harvest along with rice hulls, peanut shells and bark. These ingredients provide benefits like water retention, aeration and drainage. Our mixes are

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[1] CSPMA – Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association. www.peatmoss.com.
[2] http://www.peatmoss.com/pm-prrec.php
[3] http://www.peatmoss.com/concern.php Each year 70 million tons of peat moss accumulate while only 1.3 tons are harvested.
[4] http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/New_Jersey/Current_Releases/NJFF0309.pdf The average American farm is 428 acres.
[5] Only 0.02% of all Canadian peatlands are harvested. www.peatmoss.com
[6] www.peatmoss.com Peat and Repeat: The restoration of a Bog

formulated to maximize plant growth in the shortest possible time, so our customers use less water, plant food and energy to achieve plant growth.

Additionally our production locations use locally available materials such as compost to help minimize the burden on local landfills.

What mineral resources does Sun Gro use?

To improve mix performance, we often add vermiculite or perlite. Vermiculite improves fertilizer holding ability so less is required or wasted, and perlite adds air space to help plant roots grow better. Perlite and vermiculite are unique materials because they increase 7-10 times in volume when processed (almost like corn kernels that pop into fluffy popcorn). This means with minimal harvest of these natural resources, a large volume of usable material is created.

In addition, both of these minerals can be converted into energy-saving insulation materials for homes and businesses. Sun Gro produces perlite and vermiculite insulation materials to help customers save energy. Although it takes energy to produce this insulation, the energy costs are recovered quickly and the saving benefits last for years.

What are the benefits of using a growing mix to grow plants?

Research has shown that plants grow faster in peat based mixes. Because of this more rapid growth, greenhouse growers require less energy, water and fertilizer to get a plant ready for consumer purchase. Since peat has exceptional water-holding capabilities, (it can hold up to 20-30 times its weight in water)[7] home gardens that incorporate peat based mixes use less water, conserving this resource, minimizing runoff and helping to preserve our streams and aquifers.

By using peat-based mixes, we are also preventing depletion of native mineral soils. Historically, growers used agricultural soils for planting and they were “mined” from various locations. In the 1970’s concern about erosion spurred Cornell University’s development of superior peat-based alternatives[8].

Another important use of peat based mixes is in reforestation efforts. Forestry seedlings have a higher survival rate when started in peat based mixes, enabling more rapid restoration of our forests. Trees, and all plants for that matter, capture carbon dioxide from the air. Carbon dioxide is a compound believed by some to influence climate change.

What are Sun Gro’s recycling practices?

Recycling is an important component of Sun Gro’s efforts to minimize waste. Historically, not all components of peat moss and bark were used, but now through further processing, what was once discarded is now used for growing media or mulch. Mulch has dual environmental

[7] http://www.peatmoss.com/hortprog1.php

[8] Boodley, J.W., and R. Sheldrake, Jr. 1973. Cornell Peat-Lite Mixes for Commercial Plant Growing. New York College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Extension Information Bulleting 43.

benefits. It is an excellent use of a forest by-product that was historically wasted[9], and it helps conserve water in your landscape as well as improving the value of your home.

Additionally, in our offices we recycle paper, and take care to properly recycle used computer equipment to prevent toxins from entering the waste stream. In our manufacturing facilities we pay close attention to our processes and continue to reduce waste in order to reduce the burden on landfills.

Does Sun Gro have an energy policy?

We strive to use energy as efficiently as possible. To ensure that our manufacturing processes are energy efficient, we maintain and upgrade equipment as a routine practice. Our production facilities are strategically located throughout North America to minimize the distance to our customers; most of our customers are within 250 miles of our production locations.

From Canada we ship our products in trucks that would otherwise be returning empty to the US after delivering food and other goods to Canada. Our products are compressed into bales to maximize loads and minimize packaging waste. We source many ingredients locally such as compost, rice hulls, peanut hulls and bark to minimize shipping distance.

We also pay attention to smaller ways to save energy. We work with our employees to reduce travel and commuting where possible. Many of our employees are able to work from home which reduces the environmental burden of driving and improves their personal lives. We even practice “lights out” when no one is using a room.

What is Sun Gro’s role in the communities where it operates?

We work hard to be a good citizen in each community where we operate. We operate in 28 separate locations and provide over 800 jobs that are safe and pay a fair wage. In many locations, our operations are vital to the economic well-being of the community. And our products help people everywhere beautify their landscapes and enhance the value of their homes.

What is Sun Gro’s commitment to the environment?

Sun Gro is committed to operating in ways that respect the environment. From leading the industry in the sustainable harvest of peat, to using energy wisely, to recycling we act on this commitment. We pride ourselves on being good stewards of natural resources. We believe that wise actions now will preserve the environment for generations to come.

[9] http://mulchandsoilcouncil.org/sustainability.html