

- New £5.8m redevelopment of Pershore College opens
- British Herb industry facing challenges

The latest news, views and industry information from the LED plant growth lighting specialists



Article in HortiDaily

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HorticultureWeek

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TV gardener David Domoney officially opened the £5.8m redevelopment of Pershore College at a celebratory event with students, staff, local businesses and stakeholders.

Domoney presents ITV's Love Your Garden and is a former student of the college. He cut the ribbon to open the new glass building which includes a Collections House, teaching rooms, laboratory, higher education suite and business conference zone as well as a new library area and reception featuring a living wall.

He said the horticulture industry is "phenomenal" and its diversity "transcends other industries" thanks to the many specialisations available.

British Herb industry facing challenges

British Herb growers left their annual conference on the 11th February with a clear message that they need to review many aspects of their businesses and look at other categories experience when managing change. They also need to understand their consumer better if they are to increase their share of the weekly shopping spend.

With individual presentations, and a thought provoking panel session, with Jane King of AHDB, Nick Marston of BerryGardens, Steve Edwards from PhytoLux and Carolyn Hudson from England Marketing the delegates discussed the challenges facing the herb industry.



Angela Joyce, group principal with David Domoney. Image: Supplied



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"As educated horticulturists we can become scientists, growers, educators, retailers, artists, designers, architects, landscapers, photographers, broadcasters, writers, pioneers and entrepreneurs. The opportunity to control your destiny from an education here at Pershore College is phenomenal.

"A career in horticulture is dynamic and varied, exciting and profitable. This building is more than just a highly functional education centre - its dramatic, iconic and spectacular design is a beacon that shines to change the perception of a career in horticulture."

The new development features a state-of-the-art Collections House where exotic plants can thrive, featuring permanent and seasonal collections. It is environmentally controlled through an electronic management system to control ventilation, humidity, heating and lighting. In addition to protecting and enabling the plants to flourish in a semi-Mediterranean climate, the systems are readily accessible to students as a living demonstration of modern greenhouse technology.



The new Collections House under construction

The college also has a STEM centre (science, technology, engineering and maths) and agri-tech lab where students will be able to learn about the newest innovations in the field. These include sustainable horticulture, aquaponics (an enclosed sustainable system where fish and plants grow together without the need for additional chemicals) and the use of drones in growing techniques.

A new higher education suite for students on degree programmes, including horticulture and arboriculture, a new library and conferencing facilities have also been added.

Warwickshire College Group Principal and CEO, Angela Joyce, said Pershore had undergone "probably the biggest change in its long history" in the past year, both with the new build and curriculum changes.

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British Herb industry facing challenges

Jane King highlighted the challenges of increasing population predicted in the UK and the fact that the UK is lagging behind in growth and productivity. The changes that the AHDB were currently undergoing will mean that the way they communicate with growers, and vice versa, may change.

Nick Marston was questioned on how the soft fruit industry has managed the increase in UK production and demand from 14,000 tonnes in 1999 to over 66,000 tonnes in 2015. He pointed out that the industry consolidation, varietal research and the advent of tunnel production had enabled growers to supply good quality product to UK retailers and extend the season so it started earlier and finished later. The soft fruit industry had been helped by some co-operatives using the funding available to them from EU Fruit & Vegetable Producer Organisation scheme.

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 British Herbs



Attis-7 LED plant growth lights feature in the new Collections House

"We have embarked on a fresh, dynamic journey to meet the demands of our new world and support key national priorities through the delivery of skills, education and training.

"This building is a visible landmark of this ambition. This investment will give all of our students - whether they are studying animal welfare, veterinary nursing, arboriculture or horticulture - an innovative, technologically-enhanced environment to inspire and give them the skills needed for industry today."

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The introduction of LED lighting technology and the impact on yields and quality was keenly discussed. Steve Edwards's presentation focused on the work he had done on several crops and the fact that it needed a combined strategy which included not just light but other factors, such as irrigation, being right at the same time.

Carolyn Hudson's experience in consumer research gave the audience a unique insight into what herb users, and non-users, thought about the products and how they used and stored them and also their frequency of purchase. Carolyn challenged the growers to consider how they could increase the rate of purchase amongst some of the herb lines to increase their market.

British Herbs Chairman, Nigel Stangroom said "The herb industry, like all fresh produce sectors, needs to be aware of the challenges facing them and must also learn from others how they have developed to the benefit of their growers and their customers. The speakers at the conference provided us with a forum which stimulated a very interesting debate. Our members certainly left with plenty to think about, now we must keep the debate going and look long and hard at how to move our industry forward."

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