



**April 25, 2022**

TO: Mr. Jim Clinton  
Mr. Larkin Simpson  
[Louisiana Central Inc.](#)

FR: Dr. H. Nolo Martínez  
mano-Y-ola LLC

RE: **Executive Summary:** The Louisiana Central Regional Nursery Industry Cluster Report

**The Louisiana Central Regional Nursery Industry Cluster Report** focuses on the nursery industry's existence and significance within [Louisiana Central's](#) 10-parish region. The following document summarizes the information found in the larger 60-page study, which contains all data and source citations. For a copy of the larger study, please [use this link](#).

The gross farm commercial nursery crop production value of Louisiana Central's 10-parish region is about \$50 million. The largest segment of the nursery industry in Louisiana and Louisiana Central service area are woody ornamentals, primarily trees, and shrubs. Woody ornamental growers in Louisiana Central sold products worth more than \$39 million during 2019, and Rapides Parish sold about 97 percent of the total. The estimated industry value-added activity in the Louisiana Central region amounted to \$26.12 million in 2019 and \$73.62 million at the wholesale level. Most recent estimates account for 286 nursery operations with more than 1,500 acres in the region's production.

Louisiana Central's service area nursery industry is distinguished for its historical significance, an increasing number of small businesses created and maintained, and renewal opportunity with a growing immigrant population dedicated to the industry. The nursery industry in the Louisiana Central region is over 100 years old. Mr. Samuel Stokes was the pioneer of the nursery industry in Forest Hill around the 1920s; he was a self-taught horticulturist and helped propagate Central Louisiana native plants. Mr. Stokes also taught his trade and business to other residents. These successful entrepreneurs grew the industry slowly, but many Forest Hill residents began working for the local nurseries after World War II. New generations have come along to take their parents' places, and many married into other nursery families. The growing industry started attracting nursery distributors and other associated businesses. By the 1980s, Forest Hill was named "*Nursery Capital of Louisiana*."

Today the nursery industry's success continues with the diversity of its workers and owners, including Hispanics and other immigrants. From 2000 to 2020, the population decreased in all parishes in Louisiana Central's region, but the Hispanic/Latino population increased by 67.5 percent in Louisiana giving the industry much-needed work and future entrepreneurs. To most growers, labor issues are the greatest threat to the industry. Staff hiring, training costs, and maintaining a steady workforce may challenge the industry to consider automation or lean production, but these are difficult and costly. The report found that, due to costs, many nursery growers are not using the H-2A temporary agricultural workers program in the region, and many of the operations' sizes make it impossible to afford the cost and filing requirements.

One significant indication that the nursery industry will have a positive future in the next few years is the current housing market's strong stretch across the nation. Nursery industry economists link the industry

sales growth to healthy housing starts, rising home values, and recovering job market. Furthermore, nursery growers negotiate price increases based on future home development.

There are economic indicators that explain and measure some of the significant strengths and assets of the Central Louisiana Nursery industry.

- Rapides Parish is key to the greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production compared to other parishes in the region. For example, in 2021, the average quarterly wages paid by commercial Nursery and Floriculture producers in Rapides Parish amounted to \$3.57 million compared to \$7.52 million for Louisiana.
- The industry is more concentrated in Louisiana and Rapides Parish than the national average for all nursery, garden center, and farm supply stores.
- During the second quarter of 2021, there were 35 flower, nursery stock, and florists' supplies merchant wholesaler establishments in Louisiana, and eight in Rapides Parish. The total quarterly wages for Louisiana in this industry were reported as \$2.6 million, of which \$809,256 were in Rapides Parish. Rapides Parish accounted for about 20 percent of the state's wages in the flower, nursery stock, and florists' supplies merchant wholesaler.
- In the lawn and garden equipment supplies stores economic sector, there were 310 establishments during the second quarter of 2021, of which 32 were in four of the 10 parishes in the Louisiana Central service area. These four parishes (Rapides, Avoyelles, Natchitoches, and Allen) paid \$2.5 million in wages in the second quarter of 2021. It is difficult to estimate the number of employees due to the seasonal nature of the jobs, but this is a good indication of the job activity in the industry.

## **Implications and Opportunities for Louisiana Central Inc.**

### **1. Become the industry's leading advocate and supporter**

Trade shows are one of the most effective marketing options for growers to connect to distributors, other markets, and clients. There is no single entity or promoter representing the region's business. More prominent growers from the area have the resources to do it, but most other growers are not represented. It is an opportunity for Louisiana Central to help generate interest and business while also learning about different companies associated with the nursery business that are not receiving information about the benefits of doing business with Central Louisiana's more extensive diversity of manufacturing companies. It is also beneficial for other nursery owners to stay abreast of the opportunities and happenings outside the region. Louisiana Central can become that communication channel and representative. If Louisiana Central can create a network to outside markets, the agency's team can share that information via social media, conferences, seminars, and newsletters.

Moreover, it is possible to create a nursery industry conference to highlight the economic impact and importance to the region. This conference can serve as an opportunity to educate other businesses and local industries about the potential to strengthen relationships.

### **2. Climate Smart Commodities opportunity and funds available**

Currently, the Biden Administration is injecting more than one billion dollars to support nonprofits, farmers, and universities to create new partnerships for [Climate-Smart Commodities](#). These are

substantial and multiyear grants to establish pilot projects that create market opportunities for commodities produced using climate-smart practices. Louisiana Central's connections with farmers and the Natural Resources Conservation Service can establish collaboration and partnerships to get incentive dollars for farmers/growers willing to participate in climate-smart programs. Greenhouse gas and carbon sequestration benefits and equity are key among project evaluation criteria. For example, bamboo farmers from Florida plan to compete for grant dollars to establish climate-smart markets. This new market, and many others, will need the support of nurseries and production to grow.

*Note: mano-Y-ola will be competing for climate-smart funding in two of the 2022 opportunities.*

### **3. Entrepreneurship and Small Business instruction and coaching**

Start a membership of small and medium nursery growers and potential new growers that may benefit from business entrepreneurship classes and host these on-site to generate more interest and to accommodate the growers' environment, tastes, and preferences. mano-Y-ola found talented growers willing to share their knowledge and learn from others in the area. However, a leader entity or a convener with a strong interest in the industry's success may be the right opportunity to start the learning and connections.

One other theme and subject is to help growers understand the benefits and opportunities available in government cost-sharing programs. This can be one of the most frustrating issues for farmers and growers, however, understanding how to do business with the United States Department of Agriculture will eventually help them with assistance available and needed during natural disasters and situations over which growers do not have much control. Our experience is that most farmers who ultimately enhance their knowledge and relations with the agency get the most benefits and opportunities. Unfortunately, it often requires the help of retired USDA professionals or nonprofits to establish training and connect farmers with the agency directly.

### **4. Commission and publish annual enumeration and performance reports, including the 10-Parish Nursery Industry's Economic Contribution to the State.**

Frequent and brief study reports focusing on the region's nursery industry sales and revenue data are an opportunity for Louisiana Central Inc. to support the growers and the area. It requires building a solid partnership with the Louisiana Nursery Association, LSU Ag Center, and the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Growers may feel better about giving information through a trusted source willing to publish or use it to benefit all growers in the 10-parish region. It is also an incentive when growers expect frequent and concise reports to highlight their industry's progress using the right indicators.