

fci

FloraCulture International

WWW.FLORACULTUREINTERNATIONAL.COM

MARCH-APRIL 2021

PUBLISHED BY



AIPH

MR PLANT GEEK

An 'in-flower-encer'
that finally knows what
he is talking about

MIDDENWEG FLOWERS

Second-generation
Turkish Dutch growers
are crazy for Iris

SOUTH AFRICA

Horticultural industry
leading a future
proof charity

FOCUS ON SOUTH KOREA

Ornamental horticulture now
ready for revitalisation



World ^{23rd}
Orchid Taichung
Conference

— IN TAIWAN —

JOIN US IN 2021
VIRTUAL

Exhibition

April 24 to May 3, 2021

(April 23 Opening Ceremony and Preview)

Conference

April 24 to 26, 2021

Please check the latest information
on the **Conference website**.



www.woc23.com



Advertisement

ADVISERS



Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, R.O.C.



Taichung City Government

ORGANIZER



Agriculture Bureau Of Taichung City Government

IMPLEMENTER



Taiwan Orchid Growers Association

**This is where
the latest innovations for growing stronger
and more resilient plants are created.**



— OSMOCOTE —
**GREEN
LAB**

Welcome to the Osmocote Green Lab, the place where our market-leading solutions are created. Our expert scientists research and develop the latest innovations here. The newest invention? A small granule which will have a big impact on ornamental horticulture... **Osmocote 5.**

Osmocote 5 will be equipped with a revolutionary new technology to grow stronger, more resilient, and greener plants.

Sign up and be the first to know about this big innovation from the Osmocote Green Lab.

SmallGranuleBigImpact.com

COVID-19: ONE YEAR LATER

Well, it is now a year since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the global population. We have never experienced anything like it, on such a global scale, in our lifetimes. Here in the UK we recently passed the sad milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID and globally the World Health Organisation reports over 2.2 million deaths. So many lives have been touched, and still, many are living in fear.

One year ago, it felt like the ornamentals industry was looking down a black hole from which it would struggle to return. Images of flowers being thrown away and closed retail stores are etched on our memories. For some businesses in our sector, the impact has been severe, and all have had to adapt.

But, it has not all been bad news. The fact is that for many growers and plant retailers, 2020 was a good year and, for some, a very good year! During lockdowns, digital channels to market quickly evolved, and for millions of people, who effectively became trapped in their homes, the importance of green, plants and flowers was finally realised.

AIPH's virtual conference in September was entitled 'Recovery from Crisis', but as the speakers from many countries began to share their experiences, it quickly became clear that this industry was bouncing back already and looking positively towards the future, especially in those markets where leisure spending by consumers is key. Those reliant on events, like weddings and conferences, have been hit harder, but even there, the 'catch-up' sales after the pandemic are keenly anticipated.

As Natalie Porter has mentioned in her FCI columns, we have been given new consumers for our products. Those that have found plants and flowers have enhanced their lives through lockdown are now looking at what they do next. Many countries are facing the prospect of entering Spring with populations prevented from travelling and having to focus on their back yards. 2021 has the potential to be a very good year for many growers, but the important task for all of us now is to work out how we will keep these new consumers; how we will feed their new-found appetite for plants and how we will keep the importance of greening our cities and our lives high on everyone's agenda.

I am pleased that through FCI, we have been able to keep you up-to-date on all that is happening in our global industry. Although we have missed meeting each other at exhibitions and we all get a bit tired of calls by Zoom or Teams, it is clear that we have all learned so much through this exceptional year. One year ago, we thought that by now, the pandemic would be ancient history. It's still with us, but the end is in sight. Let's keep focused on driving this industry forwards and emerging stronger, having learned many lessons on the way.

Tim Briercliffe, Secretary-General of AIPH





COVER STORY

18 FOCUS ON ASIA

- 18 Signs of thaw for South Korea's flower industry
- 26 Chinese New Year spending survey

FEATURES

12 PLASTICS

- 12 EU proposes wide-ranging ban on microplastics
- 14 New packaging solution for plastic recycling in Australia

16 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

- Bridging the gender equality in the floriculture sector

30 SPRING FLOWERS

- Second-generation Turkish Dutch takes iris nursery to the next level

38 TOGETHER WE BLOOM

- A not-for-profit charitable initiative started by South Africa's horticultural industry

42 PLANT HEALTH

- Phytosanitary ambitions succeed or fail with the capacity of the weakest link

46 OPF MEXICO

- Preparations for Mexico's premier horticultural trade show are well underway

VOICES

04 FROM THE PUBLISHER

07 THE EVOLUTION OF THE HORTICULTURAL CONSUMER POST COVID

37 HOW DIFFERENT IS THE SITUATION IN CHINA ONE YEAR LATER

45 ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION TO EMBRACE HORTICULTURE

50 IN LOVING MEMORY: LEO KAPITEIJN

IN EVERY ISSUE

06 WORLD NEWS

08 VIS-À-VIS

35 THE GREEN CITY POST

FloraCulture International (FCI) is an independent trade magazine with the largest circulation for a world publication of its kind. FCI is published for the ornamental horticulture industry by the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH).

It is published six times per year worldwide. **Editorial Team:** Tim Briercliffe, Arturo Croci, Audrey Gerber, David Higginson, Ron van der Ploeg, Marta Pizano, Natalie Porter, Fred van Tol, Rachel Wakefield, Li Yanmei.

Contact: info@floracultureinternational.com. **Address:** FloraCulture International, Horticulture House, Chilton, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 0RN, United Kingdom. Editorial: Ron van der Ploeg, ron@floracultureinternational.com

Worldwide Advertising Office: Angie Duffree, angie@floracultureinternational.com

T.+31 6 403 277 35 **Graphic design:** Arien Bouwmeester. **Cover image:** Paik, Hye Jeong. **Printer:** Drukkerij van Deventer. **Circulation Administration:** FBW

Abonneeservice, Postbus 612, 3440 AP Woerden, The Netherlands. Sign up now for a free digital subscription: www.floracultureinternational.com **Publisher:** Published by AIPH

©2021 FloraCulture International magazine. All rights reserved. Publisher is not liable for the content of the advertisements. Photography by permission of copyright owners.

TURKEY-THE NETHERLANDS-GERMANY

Turkish Flowers launches first Virtual Trade Mission

Turkish Flowers, the International Association for Horticultural Producers AIPH and media partner FloraCulture International (FCI) announce the first-ever virtual trade mission between Turkey, the Netherlands and Germany. The free event, happens between 9-11 March 2021, and it aims to open export markets, exchange ideas and products, and scale up opportunities for the ornamentals sector and the broader horticultural industry across the three countries. Registration is now open at www.turkishflowersb2b.com

Ideally located on the crossroads between the West and the East, Turkey is a significant horticultural hub for a rapidly expanding cut flowers, plants, and landscaping market.

The Turkish Ornamental Plants and Products Exporters Association, also known as Turkish Flowers, has engaged AIPH and media partner FCI to identify, screen and arrange meetings with potential partners for each of the eleven attending growers/exporters from Turkey.

This event is for entrepreneurs from the Netherlands and Germany with interest in Turkey's ornamentals.

We welcome interest from breeders, growers, young plant suppliers, exporters,

importers, landscapers, plant retailers, wholesalers, florists and horticultural suppliers.

The virtual trade mission takes place between 9-11 March 2021 from 9am to 6pm CET. During the virtual convention, the organisation team will facilitate meetings, ensuring the appointments run smoothly and securely. Registration and attendance at the virtual trade mission are free.

Ultimately, the goal of the one-to-one meetings is to expose Dutch and German buyers to new supply opportunities from Turkey. With the inaugural Turkey-Netherlands-Germany Ornamental Horticulture Virtual Trade Mission, Turkey puts itself forward as a



horticultural powerhouse with world-class, high-quality, sustainable flowers and plants, a benign climate and good soils, counter-seasonal supply opportunities, a young, skilled and dynamic workforce and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Today, Turkish ornamentals producers export a 'beautiful bouquet with mixed colours' including fresh cut flowers, potted plants, bedding plants, trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs worldwide. They are seeking to grow this business in the Netherlands and Germany.

Twelve of Turkey's most pioneering companies in

ornamental horticulture sector will be ready to 'meet' online and discuss potential business opportunities with buyers in the Netherlands and Germany. If you are interested in purchasing cut flowers, cut foliage, Turkish wreaths, tropical foliage plants, young plants, nursery stock products, grasses, perennials from Turkey, this is the best opportunity to talk.

Book your private one-to-one conversation in advance, and meet the participants here www.Turkishflowersb2b.com

For enquiries contact
Ron van der Ploeg
ron@floracultureinternational.com

BELGIUM

EU gives the green light to a Europe-wide marketing campaign

The EU has granted funding for a new promotional campaign to stimulate sales of flowers and plants in spring 2021.



Due to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the European agricultural sector, the EU has created an emergency fund of €10 million for campaigns helping to restore the market conditions in 2021. Lobbying by Union Fleurs and VBN has resulted in the horticultural sector being appointed as one of the five agricultural areas permitted to apply for this emergency fund. In a statement, Flower Council of Holland, the Dutch marketing arm of the Dutch floricultural sector, says it is 'proud that our joint application was successful and approved, and satisfied

we can contribute to the recovery of the European horticultural sector with this additional campaign. Including the EU financing of 85 per cent, the total budget of this campaign adds up to €1,9 million, to be invested in a generic promotion campaign for flowers and plants in France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Netherlands. The main part of the budget will be spent in France and Germany since most partners have an important trade interest in these countries. Union Fleurs facilitated the creation of the consortium of all partners."



THE NETHERLANDS

Royal FloraHolland's loss over 2020 is significantly lower than expected

Royal FloraHolland's loss over 2020 is significantly lower than feared in the coronavirus pandemic's early days.

The financial result before extraordinary income and expenditure expects to be -5 to -10 million euros.

The audit of the 2020 annual figures is not yet final. Due to the uniqueness of 2020 and the year of the Covid-19 pandemic, Royal FloraHolland has decided to present a preliminary report. Commenting on the report's figures, David van Mechelen, CFO of Royal FloraHolland says, "Given the immense withdrawal in March of last year and the ensuing massive fall in sales, this is a result we can live with. Supply volume, which was lower last year, has had a major impact on our revenues. Various factors have prevented a loss of many tens of millions. For example, the opening of freight transport borders and entrepreneurship within our sector. The Emergency Fund also brought calm and continuity and helped growers continue to produce.

The market thus recovered quickly. In addition, RFH has managed to achieve substantial additional cost savings within its own organisation, while we have continued to invest in strategic programmes." Nevertheless, volumes still remained lower than the year before in the second half of 2020, but pricing was very positive. In the end, Royal FloraHolland was ineligible for the NOW scheme(s) and the Floriculture Emergency Fund on the basis of its results. The figures will be announced as soon as they have been finalised.

Due to an amendment to the articles of association in 2015, losses are no longer apportioned to members, but are charged to the general reserve of RFH.



THE EVOLUTION OF THE HORTICULTURAL-CONSUMER POST COVID-19, PART 4

Natalie Porter is the business development manager at Porters Fuchsias (established 1985), a family-run wholesale bedding plant grower based in Formby, just outside Southport, on England's North West Coast. The company owns the Happy Plants garden centre brand, including 99 per cent homegrown grown on-site plants.

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." – Will Rogers.

If you have followed previous editions of this column, you'll know that I advocate for tailored proactivity when faced with the task of retaining lockdown gardeners.

These customers will undeniably interact with horticulture differently than their predecessors, but in a way will inevitably be more similar to every generation that will follow after that.

The digital revolution still accelerates. Future demographics will continue to be more different from those we knew previously. The recent influx of new gardeners sets us an accelerated challenge, and valuable launchpad to catch up on the lost ground.

We've briefly covered who our new gardeners might be and how we might adapt to appeal to their differing wants and needs. Yet, we have scarcely touched upon the biggest opportunity they offer- their captivation with social media. They effectively grant us an 'all-access' pass to inexpensively permeate their daily lives.

Well-thought-out socials content will organically boost the awareness, credibility and desirability of your products to vast audiences. Fifty-two per cent of all online brand discovery is happening in public socials feeds, one of the golden tickets to keeping vast quantities of lockdown gardeners engaged.

This is precious if your business isn't conventionally consumer facing business. Wherever you are in the supply chain, having a direct link to an actively engaged consumer offers an opportunity that has never previously been available.

Unfortunately, it is also far more damaging for complaints to be aired in front of an online audience, but this will happen whether you are there to defend yourself or not in our digital era. To opt-out of social media means to neglect the opportunity to remedy such complaints quickly and thus redeem your reputation; 'cancel culture' could jeopardise your business without you realising there was an issue. Lockdown gardeners offer a stronger, brighter, fairer future for horticulture, but their continued engagement is not guaranteed. Proactivity, versatility, and adaptability map the road to our success.

'I'm just green doing my thing'

For hortpreneur Michael Perry, plants are everything. He goes by the moniker Mr Plant Geek and recently listed in The Sunday Times top 20 most influential people in the gardening world. He also wears the Influencer of the Year crown bestowed upon him by the UK's Garden Media Guild.

AUTHOR: RACHEL WAKEFIELD PHOTOS: MR PLANT GEEK

He is also 'that friendly bloke' the audience so readily connects with on daytime television, radio gardening shows, podcasts, and every single social media platform to the everyday gardener at home. He was known as the 'plant hunter' at Thompson & Morgan, and his marketing skills grew in this environment for 18 years, specifically in new product development. As he describes it, writing headlines for product pictures in the mail order catalogues gave him a real insight into what consumers want and how they like to hear it. Five years ago, he had a leap of faith and became a freelancer to share his joy of gardening. FloraCulture International had an enjoyable interview with Perry over Zoom, and he gave insights into how he balances his authentic plant geekiness with the industry and the consumer.

FloraCulture International: What does gardening, flowers and plants mean for you?

Michael Perry: "My earliest memories of gardening and plants were when I was five years old, with my grandad. It is madness to stop and think I have built a career around my love of plants. There is nothing I am interested in or good at other than working with plants. I love having plants around me; it's their wellbeing properties, the joy of growing them, the pleasure of discovering new varieties, finding different ways to grow plants. I love seeing blankets of plants. Somehow, I have 150 houseplants, and I do not know how this happened. I am naturally drawn to them. I think when you love them, you do not worry or fuss

about them. It's only natural, and it is part of my life, and that's what gardening, flowers and plants are all about to me."

What do you think about today's teenagers? Are they desperately hiding their passion for flowers and plants, as you did, or do you feel a lot has changed since you came 'out and proud' with gardening?

"I naturally fell in love with plants, but it was tough to confess to loving plants in my youth. I think some of that problem links to a perception of sexuality. So, I tried to avoid letting anyone know about my feelings. These days, it is much easier to follow your passion, to be honest and to be an individual; ironically, social media makes it easier to see things and connect with

'I DO NOT BELIEVE IN PUSHING ITEMS FOR THE SAKE OF IT. I THINK THIS PANDEMIC HAS BEEN A REVELATION TO SALESPEOPLE, PARTICULARLY FOR GARDEN CENTRES, ABOUT WHAT CONSUMERS DO WANT'

people who feel the same way. When I was younger, I never saw anyone my age doing what I do. I couldn't appreciate how I felt is more normal than I imagined, so I isolated in those days. But these days, there is so much more exposure on Instagram and social media. It's cool and trendy. Now I see a future where plants are appreciated; and, the young people are already here!"

What about your garden? Where does your inspiration come from?

"My mind is a Pinterest board, and I try to deliver that in my garden. It is my space to reflect, and inspire, with blankets of plants that deliver colour, and it is also my studio where you see my gardening on social media and my website.





"I look at why this plant will be of interest, compare plants to other plants, or have conversations about why plants would suit particular gardens."

Gardening is cyclical, and there is that element of 'what to do in your garden'. Still, I pick up on topical issues, such as gardening during the lockdowns, or add a twist on gardening tips such as what not to prune in your garden right now or how to deal with your Aloe Vera's soggy bottom. My aim in writing and presenting is to educate hopefully and never to patronise. I love adding my passion and humour in a laid-back style."

What is your business model, and how does it work? Is it all paid content?

"In horticulture, there is an embarrassment about making money. Yes, there are various sponsored content types on my website, from a series of products to one-off items. It is visible, and I have brand ambassador agreements.

For example, I worked with Rowse honey as their horticulture spokesperson; the project was gratifying. They chose me because of my industry connections and my consumer associations. I don't think there are many horticultural experts with that juxtaposition.

Social media is my visual CV. It shows how I can work for the industry, as much as it is inspiring my passion and gathering gardening followers.

My business model is to say 'yes' to anything and throw myself into whatever. I am keenly aware that my job is to make plants accessible and exciting for my audience, but it is my passion. I am even recording a voiceover for the Calm sleep app, and it's all about gardening."

'THERE ARE SUSTAINABLE ANGLES; I HOLD OFF PREACHING TO PEOPLE TOO MUCH ABOUT THIS. THERE ARE LOTS OF PLACES TO GO TO FOR THAT INFORMATION'

Can you tell us more about your connection with breeders such as Danziger, Syngenta and trade shows such as Plantarium or the Dutch Flower Council?

"On my website, I share with my audience: the plant of the month, or vegetable of the month, or shrub of the month or patio plant from these breeders that approach me with their products. It is my way to support the industry and get consumers enthusiastic about gardening. The exchange is instant feedback for the breeders and new knowledge for gardeners.

I was asked to host the trade show Plantarium. An event that not many consumers get the chance to see. I saw an opportunity to get my followers excited on Instagram and ran a people's choice awards, a bit like they do at the Chelsea Flowers Show. It allowed the public to vote on products that typically would be decided upon by a buyer.

The Dutch Flower Council asked me to design a garden. It was an exciting opportunity to work with them and for me to not only create my vision but also to educate my audience."

What strikes you most when speaking to industry professionals?

"Sometimes, when I talk to breeders and salespeople, they try to sell products to me, which they think I should sell to the public. I know my audience and have much more creative ways of talking to them and solving their garden problems. I do not believe in pushing items for the sake of it. I think this pandemic has been a revelation to these salespeople, particularly for garden centres, about what consumers do want.

I am not too fond of the traditional horticulture media either. It can be snobbish and inaccessible. I want people to engage in plants at whatever level and skillset. Plants are a living thing; they don't always behave in the way you're expecting – sometimes they die. I believe just talking about plants should be a great sharing experience."

Plant promotion at the industry level and consumer level are two different worlds. What approach is needed for both?

"I consult the consumer more often. But here is an example, when you go to the Aalsmeer flower market, you see great innovation, but this is an innovation that the consumers will never see because the buyers are

deciding whether the consumer will or will not like it. They are missing out on real-time consumer feedback that needs to be addressed. I suppose that is what I am doing on a small scale. Buyers need to listen more to the consumer."

How much do you benefit from your time spent at Thompson and Morgan?

"I went straight from college to Thompson & Morgan. Working in the breeding programme's product development was like being in Willy Wonka's Chocolate



factory for plants. It was just such an innovative and creative time. I give my managing director Paul Hansord much credit for my marketing experience. He catapulted me into writing catalogue copy; I was encouraged to do the television work. He pushed all the way, but I was the guy who had the passion, and that's what makes me authentic and real. Being English, we do not like to celebrate our success and boast, but I am an influencer, not just for the sake of being famous."

Talking about novice gardeners, Covid 19 has caused an influx of many young and novice gardeners. Currently, the big question in the industry is how to keep the momentum of this new hobby?

"Momentum in gardening is mostly about accessibility and not being judgemental; it's about allowing people to grow plants the way they want. The horticulture media is its own worst enemy when it puts on elite airs and graces, even getting sniffy about labels' mispronunciations. Just shut up. It's so needless, let

Michael Perry, alias Mr Plant Geek: "You can buy cheap pansies and plastic pots; it is possible to garden however you want. The barrier is whether people see the value."

people engage with plants in the way they want to and in their own style."

Covid-19 is also interesting because the industry was struggling to connect with the young generation for decades. On many occasions, we were told that gardening starts above the age of 30. Do you agree, or is gardening merely an expensive and impossible hobby when you lack the money to buy a home with a garden?

"You can buy cheap pansies and plastic pots; it is possible to garden however you want. The barrier is whether people see the value. Covid-19 has helped us see gardening's importance during the lockdowns and for people to know that gardening matters right now. For me, the connection is about the doing, and when people see it is not so much about the money and what they can afford, the movement is now about how they value the hobby of gardening."

To be a successful plant geek, you need to know your audience. What is your target market, and what understanding do you have of your demographics, interests, and how they communicate?

"I put my messages across in a neutral way, not dictating or bossy; this does make it accessible to a wide demographic. My audience demographic is here in the UK, across to Europe and other countries. I am approachable, and I think that is why I have such a mix.

A successful plant geek always comes up with excitingly new and cool varieties. How do you choose what plants to put in the limelight? Is it merely a question of who pays the piper calls the tune?

"Who pays the piper is an interesting phrase. Of course, I need to earn money. My mission is to market plants that are attractive to the consumer. I look at why this plant will be of interest, compare plants to other plants, or have conversations about why plants would suit particular gardens. I also let my followers try products in my Geek Product Trials. My angle is to make the growing of plants accessible to any skill level of gardener. I also make gardening accessible so that people will accept the failures of growing plants. A lot of this could be down to the soil or inferior compost. We have conversations about this. I see it as my responsibility to make growing plants accessible and achievable, and when you feel optimistic about something, it means you can do it."

Across the global ornamental industry, there is a jungle of schemes to highlight sustainability and ethically grown plants? How do you transmit the sustainability message?

"My message is positivity toward plants. There are sustainable angles; I hold off preaching to people too much about this. There are lots of places to go to for that information. If you go down the 'preachy' route on social media, you are likely to encourage trolls who will happily berate you for your opinion. I am open-minded, some things are not so black and white, and I do not push people into making choices. I am just green doing my thing."

EU proposes wide-ranging ban on microplastics

The EU proposes a wide-ranging ban on microplastics to combat pollution. What is the possible impact on the ornamentals industry?

AUTHOR: MARTA PIZANO PHOTOS: TEAL AGRO TECHNOLOGIES

In 2019, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA, an agency of the European Union), proposed “a wide-ranging restriction on the intentional use of microplastics in products placed on the EU market, to avoid or reduce environmental pollution”, which received full support from its Risk Assessment Committee last June. If the ensuing consultation process from other interested parties is successful, the restriction will be forwarded for approval.

OMNIPRESENT IN OUR WORLD

Microplastics are tiny plastic particles (smaller than 5mm) that result from the breakdown of larger pieces of plastic (secondary microplastics) including synthetic textiles; they can also be manufactured and added to certain products (primary microplastics). Since the use of plastic products is so extensive, microplastics have become omnipresent in our world. Currently, the releases of intentionally added microplastics in the EU market are estimated to be around 42,000 tonnes a year (Source: ECHA). In particular they are reaching the oceans in increasing volumes, creating a major environmental issue that is driving extensive scientific research, education and awareness campaigns and a variety of actions from governments and civil society. There is concern and controversy about their effects on different ecosystems (soils, water bodies, the food chain itself) and human health.

SEED COATINGS

How is this related to the ornamental industry? Among products to which microplastics (generally in the



Rucola grown from seeds with micro-plastic free coatings, is suited to organic production.

form of polymers and frequently referred to as “bio-based”) can be intentionally added are seed coatings containing insecticides or fungicides; seeds are protected during the germination process and can be turned into pellets, which makes them much easier to handle (important for very small seed, which is frequently the case in ornamental plants) and significantly increases their sowing efficiency. FCI contacted some key companies to get their opinion on the potential impact that the proposed ECHA restriction could have on the ornamental seed market. We found a high level of awareness on this issue amongst seed companies, and excellent willingness to comply with the proposed restrictions. Plus, and most importantly, a strong proactive approach on the part of companies that provide seed coatings.

ONLY ABOUT 1 PER CENT IS DUE TO AGRICULTURE
“ECHA has clearly laid out the

risks of microplastics,” states Dr Marta Dobrowolska, research and development manager at Incotec Holding, a Dutch company specialising in seed enhancement. She adds, “Microplastics do not degrade and, as they cannot be removed from the environment, their concentration will only increase over time.”

She explains that this can lead to toxic effects on marine life (zooplankton) and that the agricultural sector plays only a very minor part in the release of microplastics, as only about 1 per cent is due to agriculture (half of all microplastic is due to road tyre wear, followed by washing synthetic clothes).

Still, the seed industry needs to contribute to reducing microplastic release. “Work on developing alternative binder systems which don’t contain microplastics is needed. Very recently, alternatives have been launched which perform equally well as traditional,



microplastic-containing alternatives, and this holds true for both filmcoats and pellets binders.” In line with this, Incotec has developed a new line of microplastic-free coatings for sun flower, already available to their customers. They are cost-effective, sustainable and compliant with the ECHA regulation.

EXCELLENT ALTERNATIVES

Jan Tamboer, director of Dutch company Teal Agrotech agrees that in the light of findings pointing at noxious effects associated to the use of (bio-based) polymers in seed coatings, the seed industry is eagerly looking for alternatives, and the future is in microplastic free seed coating products. Although developing alternatives

Teal Agrotech has a range of environmentally-friendly, microplastic-free film coatings for high value vegetable seed. A range of natural pigment colourings allow for better field visibility.

Inside Teal Agrotech's demo centre demo machines Pictured are seed treatment equipment.

to microplastics is a complex process, excellent alternatives are now available worldwide, that are safe for the environment and do not compromise quality or functionality. The term ‘biobased’ does not automatically mean that microplastic coatings are safe for the environment, he further explains, as the length of time required for biodegradation is crucial. The ECHA proposal restricts degradation to 48 months maximum, a condition not present in most currently available seed coatings.

NO PROBLEM FOR BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY

“Our company is aware of the proposed legislation on micro plastics”, declares Robert Conrad, seed technology research manager at Ball Horticultural Company in the USA, “if the legislation is passed as proposed, it will be no problem for us as we have been microplastic-free in our coating and pelleting for the past 30 years.” Ball often uses a chain-of-life concept in describing its seed, he adds, comprising four areas of safety in relation to the production of coated and pelleted flower seeds. Materials used in the process must pass the four tests: They have to be safe for employees producing the product, safe for employees packaging the seed, safe for customers sowing the seed and finally safe for the gardener

using our products. This includes environment safety. All materials used in coated and pelleted seed are personally sourced by Ball Horticultural and include many substances already used in horticulture such as perlite and vermiculite. No commercial-ready mixed products are used. “While we understand there is not yet an official definition of micro plastics until the legislation passes,” states Robert, “rest assured that Ball Horticultural Company will remain in compliance with the legislation.”

COMPARATIVE TRIALS

Harm Custers, from Takii Seed contributes the following statement: “In some ornamentals we apply a seed coating to improve processing, protection or germination, keeping track of the exact composition of the seed coating used. If microplastics are used, we look for possible alternatives; through preliminary comparative trials we have started investigating if these alternatives meet our expectations in terms of performance for the various crops.” Finally, Mark van der Lugt – Evanthis seeds and plants in the Netherlands, says, “We are aware of developments in this area. We also understand that research is being done by the various companies and new products are being developed. When these products are sufficiently developed and tested, we will switch to these products.”



New packaging solution for plastic recycling in Australia

What started as a small nursery industry workshop late in 2019 has evolved into a nationally funded plastic recycling initiative with the Australian Government's support.

AUTHOR: GREENLIFE INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA AND APCO
PHOTOS: SONJA CAMERON AND BRAD BROWN

Several pilot programmes in plastic plant packaging recycling have run in recent years, but the workshop participants had grander ideas to turn them into a national programme.

UNDERSTANDING THE POLYPROPYLENE CHALLENGE

Plastic products and packaging are integral to modern daily life and their consumption in Australia has increased exponentially. While plastic and packaging recycling in

Australia is well-established, only 18 per cent of plastic is for recycling or energy recovery. Australia's 2025 National Packaging Targets include a target for all packaging to be 100 per cent reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) is the agency leading the delivery of the 2025 Targets. It works on the ground with a range of sectors – including the greenlife industry – to help address their specific waste and recycling challenges. A study commissioned by APCO in 2019 found, for example, that in 2018/19, only 13.5 per cent of polypropylene (PP5) packaging on the market was recovered for recycling (~21,000 from 155,000 tonnes). This calculation is despite PP5 being relatively easy to mould. The greenlife and nursery industry is a large user of PP5 products, namely pots, labels, stakes, trays, and tubs. One major plastic pot manufacturer in Australia, Garden City Plastics (GCP), currently use over 7,000 tonnes of recycled PP5 annually to manufacture pots and containers for these customers. GCP aims to increase that amount to 10,000 or 11,000 tonnes by the end of 2021. However, a better national collection and sorting system of PP5 'waste' needs to be established to help meet this goal.

BRINGING INDUSTRY TOGETHER FOR A NEW APPROACH

In 2019, GCP and APCO coordinated the workshop with key industry players to discuss how to "close the loop" on plant packaging and evolved to a more circular economy approach for PP5 across the nursery industry. While the pilot studies demonstrate a method for industry, there is still much PP5 collected through local councils' household kerbside recycling systems. It ends up in mixed plastic bales for downgraded uses such as road base or waste to energy applications. Black PP5 packaging is sent directly to the landfill because Material Recovery Facilities use infrared technology that cannot currently recognise carbon black, and 'see' that shape as a void, sending it to landfill.

A 'call to arms' presentation was made at the Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA) conference held in Perth last year. It was one of the last face-to-face conferences conducted in Australia and possibly worldwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To address these challenges, APCO and GIA established a working group intending to develop a voluntary framework for standardising the use of sustainable and recyclable plastics in the greenlife industry. Over 60 industry stakeholders



Cameron nursery production, Arcadia in New South Wales.



Camerons Nursery owner Sonja Cameron and Brad Brown from, Arcadia, NSW



2025 National Packaging Targets of the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) Graphic provided by APCO and the Australian government.

attended the first industry-wide workshop on sustainable packaging for the nursery industry in June 2020, jointly hosted by the APCO, GCP and GIA. Participants were provided with an overview of Australia's packaging issue and heard about the challenges for the industry concerning collection and sorting of PP5. The workshop identified an industry goal to increase its use of recycled PP5 from 8,000 tonnes per year to 12,000 tonnes per year, a 50% increase by 2025.

The discussion identified that, while plastic plant pots had been the initial driver for the programme, all products made from PP5, including plant labels, trays, stakes and tags across the horticulture supply chain, could be included in the collection plan. During the workshop, it was emphasised that the PP5 recycling scheme was an 'all of industry' opportunity to support sustainable packaging in horticulture and open to all industry businesses.

The workshop was a very positive way for all participants from all sectors of the greenlife industry to provide input into the scheme. It was acknowledged that the initiative provided an opportunity for the greenlife industry to maximise the resource recovery potential for PP5 in Australia, and support consumer education for pot recycling pathways.

CONTINUED PROGRESS

A second workshop convened by APCO and GIA was conducted in October to update participants on the PP5 recycling initiative and seize on an opportunity offered by the Australian Government through National Product Stewardship Investment Fund. A grant would provide valuable resources to drive further and accelerate the development of a programme. The APCO and GIA application was successful. Federal government

funding was approved to establish the Polypropylene Plant Packaging Recycling (PoPPr) for plant pots, trays, tags and stakes. GIA and APCO will work closely with greenlife and nursery sector supply chain participants across Australia to design and implement an industry-endorsed network of collection points for plant packaging. This action will enable Australians to return their plant packaging for recycling into new plant packaging and close the loop on horticultural PP5. The project has now commenced, and the first workshop for 2021 was conducted on 16 February. The workshop provided an update on progress with activities and to keep interested industry participants informed of developments and how they can maintain their involvement.

In 2021, the plant packaging project will become part of the ANZPAC Plastics Pact, a new APCO-led programme launching in the Oceania region. It will bring together key players behind a circular economy's shared vision for plastic, which never becomes waste or pollution.

ANZPAC is part of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's global Plastics Pact network.

For more information about this new collaborative project, or the ANZPAC programme visit www.ANZPACplasticspact.org.au



Bridging the gender equality gap in the floriculture sector

Women provide a crucial role within the floriculture industry worldwide, and here we celebrate this fact in tribute to International Women's Day on 8 March. In FCI's research, we interview women working in the flower sectors of two key countries: Colombia and Kenya.

Since the onset of commercial floriculture, women make up a prominent share of the workforce. In Colombia, for example, an estimated 25 per cent of rural jobs are held by women in floriculture, according to PROCOLOMBIA (a Government agency promoting exports). Trade body ASOCOLFLORES reports that the Colombian flower sector currently provides about 120,000 direct jobs, and over 65 per cent of employees are women. There are multiple additional indirect jobs that women do for the industry. What happens to these women impacts hundreds of thousands of families. It is important to note here that more than 60 per cent of women employees are the primary wage earners of their family, shouldering expenses entirely on their own. Similarly, the Kenya Flower Council (KFC) reported that 70 per cent of direct jobs generated by the Kenyan flower industry are held by women, adding up to 2.5 million livelihoods.

STRONG INITIATIVES

For many years, both trade associations have led strong initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, providing equitable working conditions and opportunities for women and men, cooperating with local communities to improve health, education and childcare conditions, and others. This positive action features in Asocolflores' Florverde® Standard and the KFC Flowers and Ornamentals Sustainability Standard, both of which can be found in the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI) Basket of Sustainable Standards. In analysing information provided by these two organisations, it becomes clear that women have gained substantial participation and perform at all levels within the sector, from fieldwork to management and everything in between. We received comments from two women in high-ranking positions. The Florverde® standard currently coordinates efforts related to environmental and social management within the UN's framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); "SDG 5, aims at achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, it has become our guiding light for our current activities," says Katheryn Mejía, Director of Social Responsibility at Asocolflores. In agreement, Loise Mukami, Senior Lead Auditor at KFC declares "KFC has realised

that the resilience of the flower industry is intricately linked with the status of women, and for that reason has worked over two decades on standards to integrate strategies and improve labour standards."

Our research finds that many flower companies are developing positive inclusion programmes to support women workers including nursery facilities for babies and toddlers, mothers breastfeeding facilities, and daycare or kindergarten units for young children. Also, providing educational opportunities for women, that will later translate into notable career advancement.

DIRECT EXPERIENCES

We invited views from women in floriculture about their work, how their careers had developed, their principal achievements and challenges they found along the way. We also asked for their advice to the next generation of women joining the industry.

Here are our highlights:



Rosaria Carulla has been working for more than 35 years in companies exporting flower at the Flores Funza Group in Bogotá, Colombia. Flores Funza brings together several

farms spanning 250ha and employing more than 2,000 people. Carulla estimates about 80 per cent of the workers are women. She currently holds a position as General Manager of Flexport de Colombia, a large farm in the group growing mostly carnations.

Carulla has degrees in both landscaping and horticulture. She began her career in floriculture in her early 20s. "In those days, it was quite a challenge to supervise the work of the older men," she says with a smile. She adds, "But I soon learned how to manage."

Over the years, she has held various positions, always striving to excel at what is the core of the business: producing cut flowers of the highest quality, within environment-friendly practices. Her work has been duly recognised – for example with an award from the US Environmental Protection Agency. She says her greatest

career satisfaction is seeing increasing numbers of women for whom floriculture, "has offered an opportunity of a better life."



Mary Luz Pérez is an accounting analyst and treasurer for Asocolflores started her career fourteen years ago as a basic operator in a flower company

offering educational support to study finance and accounting at a technical institute. She acquired experience in corporate social responsibility. She then pursued a professional university degree in public accounting and has been working for Asocolflores since 2014. As a mother of two, her biggest challenge has been finding a balance between work, study and family life. But she is proud of her achievements and "would definitely encourage younger women to pursue their goals through the flower industry."

In Kenya, **Christine Shikuku**

talks about her job with Sian Roses where she is general farm manager, with an emphasis on human resources management (HRM). She holds a master's degree in horticulture and a post-graduate diploma in HRM. She is an auditor for Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), conducting environmental impact assessments. "Gaining respect, acceptance and recognition from male colleagues is not always easy," she states. "I often have to prove myself, my knowledge and skills." In the fourteen years that she has worked for the industry, she has been offered a lower salary for a position previously held by men. Nevertheless, she has plenty of achievements to show and does not hesitate to encourage younger women to join the industry. "If you have a chance, go back to school to gain and expand your knowledge base to apply and compete for better positions in the workplace," she advises. She continues, "Never shy away from opportunities; aim high, women certainly can get there!"





Inside one of South Korea's cut rose nurseries.

SIGNS OF THAW FOR SOUTH KOREA'S FLOWER INDUSTRY

AUTHOR: RON VAN DER PLOEG, BASED ON A MARKET STUDY BY OSCAR NIEZEN PHOTOS: PAIK, HYE JEONG

Ornamental horticulture in South Korea has long been side-lined due to the country's focus on rapid industrialisation and trade since the 1980s. Many mountainous areas, challenging climatic conditions, combined with the absence of a deeply ingrained flower culture, a somewhat archaic production and wholesale sector, and an over presence of smallholdings makes growing ornamentals in the Land of Chaebols an even tougher business. Historically, protectionist trade policies plunged the country's ornamentals market into the proverbial 'deep freeze'. But recent relaxation of trade barriers, the rise to prominence of imported flowers, international market studies, and the industry's presence in global horticultural events are the first signs of a thaw.

Imagine Dianthus instead of Daewoo, carnation instead of Kia, Sunflowers instead of Samsung, and Lisianthus instead of LG. It is not always easy to imagine this in South Korea, the world's 12th largest economy, dominated by manufacturing industries such as electronics, automobiles, and telecommunications. Yet, after the country gained independence in 1948, South Korea was predominantly an agricultural state, with rice being the most important crop.

THE MIRACLE OF THE HAN

Fuelled by long term economic plans, institutional and policy incentives and a dedicated, productive and ambitious labour force, the Republic of Korea (ROK) witnessed an impressive economic boom, also translated as The Miracle of the Han River (labelled as such after the river that runs through Seoul). But rapid urbanisation and industrialisation took their toll on agriculture. In its early years of existence, agriculture contributed to almost 50 per cent of the national GDP; the primary sector today contributes only 1.8 per cent to the GDP.

At the same time, only 14.6 per cent of South Korea's land is fit for agriculture. Most of the country is forests and mountain ranges. With cold winters and hot and humid summers, the South Korean climate does not make a farmer's life easier. The Korean peninsula is frequently battered by northeast monsoons, due to the proximity of the Asian landmass that affects precipitation patterns. Last year, for example, the country reported its longest monsoon in 33 years, prompting thousands of people to evacuate and leaving at least 40 dead. And even more distressing for Koreans, are the typhoons, frequent phenomena that occurs once the monsoon has stopped.

POPULATION

More than 51 million people consider South Korea their motherland. Ethnically speaking, they represent a very homogenous



Glasshouse production Lathyrus.

population with 98 per cent Koreans and two per cent Japanese. South Koreans are proud of their culture and language and economic achievements. Showing interest in Korea's culture and language is always a good icebreaker. However, conversation topics such as tensions over trade, regional rivalry and shared history with other Asian countries can easily ignite fiery debates. The Koreans cherish their earlier history when its kingdoms ruled large parts of present-day China, Russia and Mongolia. It is wise for foreign investors to do their homework first on Korean history; this will always put you a step ahead.

Over the past few decades, the rise of incomes has catapulted millions of South Koreans, 65 per cent of the population into the middle classes. South Korea, is also a densely populated country with half of

the population living in Seoul's buoyant capital. By comparison, the country is 2.5 times the size of the Netherlands, a country that has 17 million inhabitants.

The population break down by age shows that only 13.2 per cent are younger than 15, 19.3 per cent is between 15–29 year old, 22.7 per cent between 30–44, 24.5 per cent between 45–59 while 20.3 per cent fall in the age bracket of 60 years and older.

South Korea has seen a major ageing transition over the past 50 years; when 2017 marked the year that the country had more older people than young for the first time.

CHAEBOLS

Economically speaking, South Korea, with a GDP of €1.65 trillion in 2019, is the 12th largest world economy that is technologically very advanced and has a high standard of living. The income per capita is €36,000 (PPP model). Quintessential Koreans are the chaebols, sizeable family-owned business conglomerates that dominate the business landscape. Chaebol means 'wealth clan' in Korean, and for many years this corporate structure has forged closed ties with the government, receiving support in the form of subsidies, loans and tax incentives in turn.

BOOM AND BUST CYCLE

The thought of fifty-one million wealthy South Koreans does conjure

Harvesting Lisianthus when the first flower has fully opened.



up images of jam-packed markets and shopping carts filled to the brim with flowers and plants. At least if we depart from the idea that flowers are a luxury good and their demand is highly dependent on income. However, in South Korea, the issue is thornier, even if it is a well-known fact that Koreans love their luxury and are not quick not feel uneasy about spending on high-end products.

Gelare Nadere, the agricultural counsellor at the Dutch Embassy in Seoul, describes the situation as a 'boom and bust cycle'. The boom-times fuelled by higher corporate spending, for example with 'grand opening flowers and display' to impress customers. This past 20-year period has been a blooming period bringing good returns for both growers and traders. However, Nadere identifies 2005 as a tipping point in South Korea's ornamental horticulture history when the demand for locally grown cut flowers started to wilt. Despite the average income that continued to rise.

Nadere cites the Anti Bribery and Graf Act as one of the 'complicating factors'. In 2016, these 'regulations against decadence' aimed at banning luxury goods and lavish (floral gifts) for government officials.

"However, the paradox was that the production of locally grown flowers came to a standstill while imported flowers from the Netherlands,



Colombia Kenya and China gained market share," said Nadere. She added, "We were very curious to understand the reason behind this development. The purpose of a 2019 market study commissioned by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Seoul in collaboration with the Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO) was to better understand the dynamics of South Korea's flower industry and to identify the steps needed to professionalise this industry."

COHORT MARKET STUDY

The author of 'The Floricultural Market in South Korea, 2019', Oscar Niezen of CoHort, identified market trends, collated key data of production, consumption, import and export demand. Niezen painted the present and future market scenario and finally included a SWOT analysis that focused on the Dutch industry

Inside one of the country's flower wholesale markets.

In Seoul there are experienced florists who personally prepare and design each luxury flower arrangement.

professionals' outlook to enter or expand their position in what he calls 'a stagnant market'. Niezen talked to dozens of industry professionals from within his network in South Korea, the Netherlands, Japan, PR China, ASEAN countries, Africa, and Latin America. He also embarked on an 'industry safari' that began in South Korea's cut flower heartland, known as the Gyeonggi province. Gyeonggi translates as the 'area surrounding the capital' and is the most densely populated of South Korea's nine provinces. Gyeonggi's land is relatively flat, with fewer extreme weather events and a short distance to Seoul's multi-million consumer market.

STATISTICS

South Korea's most recent statistics points to 4,936 hectares dedicated to ornamental horticulture. The report, provided in 2017 by the Ministry of Agriculture Food, and Rural Affairs, states cut flowers are grown on 1,334 hectares, and 3,622 hectares adds up to the area for potted plants, trees (fruit trees not included) and shrubs. In 2017, the total (wholesale /FOB) value was €442 million with cut flowers valuing €143 million. Interestingly, most (90 per cent) of the cut flower production is protected cropping (poly houses) while 71 per cent of potted plants, trees and shrubs are grown in the field.

The CoHort study found market trends following other developed countries, the number of 'flower farms' almost halved between 2001-2017 to 7,400 in 2017 from



13,500 in 2001. Meanwhile, South Korean flower farms are the average size of 7,000m². The scarcity of land, coupled with fewer students in agriculture studies and the fact that many young people do not look at ornamental horticulture as a profession to get into, causes a loss in skills and an ageing workforce. The average age of a flower farmer is 64, and the age rises as the workers decline.

The total ornamental acreage decreased by about 20 per cent to 5,000 hectares in 2017; down from 6,400 hectares in 2001. Production numbers (stems/plants) have dropped steadily, from about 2.6 billion in 2001 to less than one billion in 2017. Finally, production value (in KRW) has remained almost constant, at around 600 billion KRW (€461 million).

WHOLESALE MARKETS AND AUCTIONS

By narrowing the focus of the 2001–2017 situation down to cut flower production, CoHort's study indicates that the total area of production halved to 1,300 hectares; down from 2,600 hectares in 2001. Its production value decreased from KRW 331 billion to 183 billion (€142 million). Fresh cut flowers sell through government-owned wholesale markets and auctions (1/3) and private markets (2/3). South Korea's government established a nationwide network of eight –'run by government' – flower wholesale markets/auctions to modernise the sector's market structure.

Two of these markets have suspended operations, while six of these Dutch-style auctions continue to operate.

The auction houses set the prices, and serve as trade platform between growers, wholesalers and retailers. It is safe to say that the future of the publicly-owned auctions depends on removing unnecessary, burdensome regulation, which stifles future growth.

In its study, CoHort delivered anecdotal evidence by highlighting the case of a local grower who tried to convince the auction's management about the benefits of post-harvest cut flower food



solutions to give the flowers the immediate care they need. The auction officials rejected this idea arguing that "the auction will not incur risking accusations of favouritism towards one commercial production company with these chemicals" – a proof of how highly 'politicised' the ornamentals sector in South Korean can be.

In the absence of an independent quality inspector, growers have no protection against the whims of unscrupulous wholesalers governed by their profit margins and whose inclinations are to further monopolise parts of the market. The government's attempts to get a better grip on floral wholesale, including a licensing system for wholesalers, has failed.

Flower displays brighten up the street of South Korea's buoyant capital Seoul.

Hortensia glasshouse production.



Yangje flower market in Seoul is arguably the country's largest semi-governmental wholesale flower market. This marketplace lifted the ban on imported flowers two years ago, allowing imported flowers sales between the market's tenants. According to reliable sources, prohibition still exists under its auction clock.

The Banpo-Dong Bus Terminal Market in Seoul is the major player in terms of privately run flower markets.

Thirty-seven per cent of all locally grown ornamentals go through the (semi-) governmental markets. In comparison, 63 per cent go to private markets, an imported hub for flowers sourced from abroad. In the case of locally grown cut flowers, the majority (65 per cent) go to the (semi-) government markets while 35 per cent go to private markets.

The country's wholesale system for marketing flowers is archaic, highly fragmented, frequently relying on closed and often exclusive relationships between small growers and small wholesalers. But there are a few exceptions to this rule.

KOREA FLORIST ASSOCIATION (KFA)

Endorsed by the government, the Korea Florist Association (KFA) is the most potent voice in South Korea's ornamental horticulture. It is a growers' alliance defending the interests of its members towards trading businesses. KFA's mission



is to help its members manage a successful, profitable business and lobby the government to remove growth barriers.

When discussing the current status of the industry as well as the need for a long-term strategy KFA representatives note that the country's flower industry has shrunk significantly over the last decades due to decreasing flower consumption.

To turn the tide, KFA's campaign repositioned flowers as more than just ceremonial decoration emphasising that flowers make the perfect gift and that people can also use them to celebrate their special occasions.

In 2019, South Korea enacted a law to develop, promote, and revitalise the sector and KFA played a pivotal role in its inception.

Under this law, KFA supports the government to develop a long-term strategy with investments in infrastructure, logistics, cold chain, export promotion and the need to increase the average Korean flower farm business income being the key objectives.

South Korea has a well-earned reputation as a global IT and AI leader, having trade agreements with many countries. The country's farmers are proud of South Korea's economic achievements and its status as an export powerhouse. However, they can not help feeling frustrated as they generally believe that in order to obtain more free trade agreements the country's

agriculture sector has been sacrificed.

Conversely, Korean experts argue that FTAs have helped agriculture to become more innovative. FTA's in the pig and greenhouse fresh produce industry, for example, encouraged farmers to become more competitive than suppliers from abroad. Meanwhile, more protected sectors such as rice, beef and flowers lag behind in the development. Over the past three years, FTAs have caused floral imports to increase. Despite the fact that imported flowers are not always easy to accept for local flower growers, in the end they will contribute to the innovation of the Korean flower sector.

Auctioning of potted Phalaenopsis.

Being a florist in South Korea can be challenging with customers frequently purchasing cheaper flowers at wholesale destinations.

KFA intrinsically associates with the Korea Agro Fisheries & Food Trade Organisation – also known as 'aT', the body responsible for running the (semi) government-owned flower auctions and assisting Korean enterprises in expanding their global reach.

South Korea's foremost nonprofit trade promoting organisation operates from local offices and several branches worldwide, with aT's European headquarters in Paris. The CoHort study suggested that aT may well be one of the best-placed candidates from a government perspective to develop a long-term economic plan to build a more robust, more competitive ornamental horticulture industry.





CEREMONIAL FLOWERS, TRENDY FLOWERS AND MASS FLORAL

In terms of sales outlets, South Korea hosts many old fashioned flower shops with a limited assortment of cut flower varieties including the staple ceremonial Buddhism flowers. No one expects a floral revolution to happen soon. Still, there are hopeful signs of trendy flower shops in downtown Seoul which provide customers with easy and immediate experience and exciting new varieties. Being a florist in South Korea can be challenging with customers frequently purchasing cheaper flowers at wholesale destinations. There is also a new, young consumer shopping for houseplants at pop-up stores and supermarket chains such as E-mart, Lotte Mart and Home Plus. So far, mass-market cut flower sales are still in their infancy with currently, a few pilots underway. One of the conclusions drawn in the CoHort survey is that there is a severe lack of growers/ importers who can provide constant volume, uniformity and quality and on-time delivery to service the mass floral market. If the industry can address this issue, supermarkets will be interested in adding cut flowers to their product portfolio, which may also contribute to the development of the Korean flower sector at large.

IMPORT DYNAMICS

More international sourcing may be needed to provide volume and to boost mass floral sales. South

Korea flower and plant imports show it is recession-proof; even the 2008 global financial crisis did not heavily impact ornamentals' import value. In terms of total floricultural products imports, the primary markets of origin are China, the Netherlands, Taiwan and Thailand. Overall the import value of ornamentals increased to €60 million in 2017 up from €18 million in 2001, an unexpectedly healthy economic development. Further analysis of import flows of cut flowers, shows a spike in imports, up to USD 35 million in 2018 from USD 1 million in 2001. Among the reasons cited are 'sharply priced imported' versus 'rather expensive locally grown'. Imported cut flowers mostly originate from China (with an import volume of €10.4 million), Colombia (€7.9 million) and the Netherlands (€4.2 million). Imported flowers include 'classics' such as Chrysanthemum, rose, orchid and tulip, which partially compensate for the shrinkage seen in locally grown cut flowers. The CoHort study revealed that China is the largest exporter of chrysanthemums to South Korea, accounting for 91 per cent of the import value of that species. Colombia is the largest exporter of carnations representing 77 per cent of the import value.

As for less mainstream cut flower species, Colombia and the Netherlands are increasingly exporting exciting new varieties to

South Korea's government established a nationwide network of eight –'run by government' – flower wholesale markets/auctions to modernise the sector's market structure. Featured here is Yange's auction room.

South Korea (although breeders are reluctant to launch novelties out of fear for illegal propagation of their PBR protected varieties). Industry professionals mostly agree that floral imports will continue to grow in the coming years, creating new international suppliers possibilities.

EXPORTS

In providing some key facts and figures in term of export values, export volumes and destinations, the CoHort outlines that in 2017, the export value shows a staggering decline since 2010. Following the 2010 'boom in blooms' representing a value of 103 million USD (€93.3 million) total export value plummeted to 23.6 million USD (€21.4 million) in 2017.

To date, cut lilies account for approximately 60 per cent of South Korea's total flower exports. Japan is the top export destination and takes 100 per cent of the country's lily exports.

Other export markets such as PR China, the US, and the Netherlands have gone down to nearly nothing. Interestingly, the South Korean government continues to provide subsidies to cut flower exports, but these only cover part of transportation costs.

Meanwhile, CoHort identified the major challenges the South Korean flower industry is facing. The problem is that locally grown flowers are not always meeting the end consumer's needs and expectations. Shoppers complain about short vase life, thin stems, a not so uniform product, and they have a perception that locally grown flowers are too expensive. Also, imported flowers look more luxurious to the South Korean eye. The negative factors that influence the local cut flower quality include the following: an ageing farmer population; lack of horticultural education and crop expertise; a poorly structured industry; the absence of a cold chain; the omnipresence of small holdings; rising labour costs, and, rising input prices for fertilisers, and crop protection products.

CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Digging deeper, one will discover

that cultural traditions are also at stake. Typically, South Koreans use flowers for short ceremonial events. So these practices do not encourage growers to focus on extended shelf life for ceremonial flowers. With the rise of the new trendy consumers who buy in pop-up stores and online, these growers find it difficult to meet today's consumer's quality expectations.

Contrary to Japan, where consumers appreciate flowers grown with every imaginable attention to detail and are ready to pay the right price for it, the South Koreans are infatuated with video games, electronics, luxurious items and cars. The feeling is that customers would rather spend their money on food and leisure than on flowers and plants. South Korea also has an ambitious and educated workforce and a strong working culture. Koreans work more hours per week than almost every other OECD country. People do not spend much time at home to enjoy flowers and plants, nor do they regularly visit family and friends at home, and rarely bring flowers.

REVITALISATION

The CoHort study supplies enough reason to suggest that ornamental horticulture in South Korea is now ready for revitalisation. While the stable and wealthy condition of South Korea's economy rises, there is a trend of sustainable cities that prioritise

environmental conservation and invest in protecting, restoring and maintaining urban green spaces. A vital part of the reinvigorating process is an investment in cold chain technology and cultivation techniques, quality starting material, education and marketing. CoHort's SWOT Analysis shows that a stable, growing economy, consumer wealth, the rise of e-commerce, investment opportunities (notably in newly reclaimed land areas along the coast) and young consumers' demand for 'new' and better flowers and plants as strengths of the South Korean market. Weaknesses are limited institutional consumption (austerity), lack of knowledge at different levels, insufficient distribution systems and small farm holdings.

Interestingly CoHort references the rise of imported flowers' to prominence as a development that can negatively impact the sustainability trend. Sourcing cut flower imports from far-away regions like the Netherlands, East Africa and South America using long haul transport by air causes high emissions of CO₂. For the short term, this situation expects to persist. It will, however, be an incentive to put more efforts in revitalising local ornamental production.

Download CoHort's full report
<https://bit.ly/3plzVew>



Valetine display in the streets of Seoul: Limonium, Hydrangea, Gypsophilla and preserved flowers Made in Italy.



GOYANG FLOWER SHOW: VENUE OF CHOICE FOR B2B MEETINGS

Unlike China and Japan, South Korea has no flower trade exhibition in the truest sense of the word. However, the country's annual garden and flower festival has evolved into something bigger than a large audience event. It is the venue of choice for those who want to explore business opportunities in South Korea's ornamental horticulture industry.

The 2021 edition of the International Horticulture Goyang Korea show (24 April – 10 May) will showcase the latest industry trends while providing an exciting programme for cultural, educational and professional exchanges.

Visitors will be treated to cool new flower and plant varieties, botanical collections, creative model gardens, floral installations. The 2021 Goyang Flower Show will also host a series of B2B events and farm tours in Gyeonggi province, South Korea's epicentre of cut flower production.

An expected 50,000 business people will visit IHK2021. There will be a special Business Lounge for promoting horticultural business trade as well as a Matchmaking Forum with free online registration for industry professionals. According to IHK, the Matchmaking Forum is a unique platform for finding new business partners and exchanging ideas.

International Horticulture Goyang Korea 2021 Quick Facts

Dates: 30 April – 15 May, 2021.

Venue: Ilsan Lake Park, Goyang-Si
Gyeonggi-do

T +82-31-908-7642

F +82-31-908-7760

sales@flower.or.kr / bom@flower.or.kr

Working together for better plant health

24 March 2021 | 12pm-5pm GMT



AIPH INTERNATIONAL PLANT HEALTH CONFERENCE

In association with



Free virtual online event

The International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) in association with FloraCulture International, will host the AIPH International Plant Health Conference online on 24 March 2021, from 12 noon until 5pm, GMT.

This free to attend virtual conference will be of interest to growers, breeders, traders, retailers, associations, exhibitions, regulators and anyone that cares about reducing plant health threats while maintaining a thriving horticultural trade.

Event objectives:

- To share best practice and experiences from industry-led initiatives that reduce plant health risk
- To present research on plant health initiatives in different countries
- To determine interest in more global cooperation on plant health initiatives

FREE TO ATTEND VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

For more information click the link below

WWW.AIPH.ORG/PLANTHEALTHCONFERENCE



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH

2020

The AIPH virtual Plant Health event is recognised by the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH 2020), which is supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and the International Plant Protection.

Event Partners



Bronze Sponsor



Gold Sponsor

**Royal
Flora
Holland**



CHINESE NEW YEAR SPENDING SURVEY

The China Flowers and Horticulture magazine recently published insights into 2020 consumer habits and trends based on online questionnaires, 'wholesale flower market safaris' and a survey of 6,700 Chinese consumers to determine spending patterns and buying willingness during the Chinese New Year.

AUTHOR: LI YANMEI

Chinese New Year is only a few days behind us. This year, the lunar holiday fell on 12 February (Friday), and lasted until 26 February. It is about 15 days of celebration and 2021 is the Year of the Ox, which is a good sign for trade according to the Chinese zodiac.

ONLINE MARKET RESEARCH

This lunar festival ranks among China's most important floral holidays. To better understand consumer behavior and trends, China Floriculture Magazine – a publication of the China Flower Association – carried out extensive market research online in December

2019. The different market surveys attempted to understand how buyers choose and use their flowers, where they buy them, and their preferences. And it learnt more about the various decision-making stages Chinese customers go through before making a floral purchase to celebrate the new year.

1.4 MILLION PAGE VIEWS AND 6,300 PEOPLE RESPONDENTS

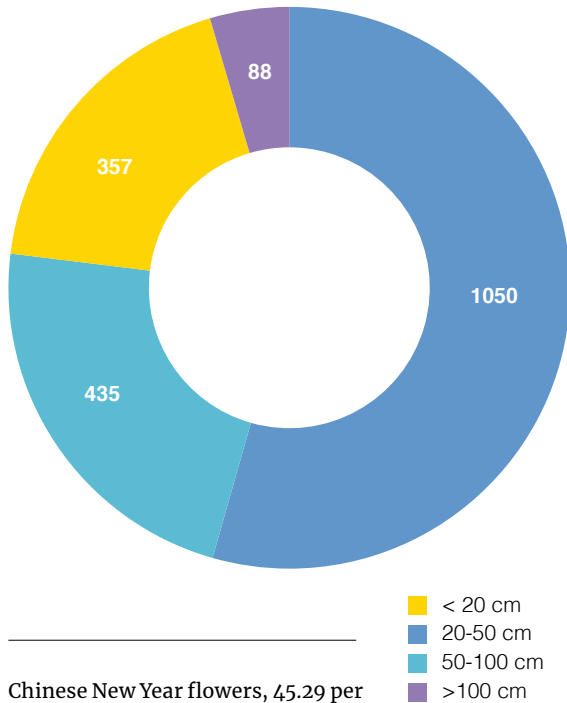
The magazine also used a different platform to publish a questionnaire on consumers' purchase intentions regarding to 2020 Chinese New Year flowers. They took to WeChat, Weibo, and Chinese gardening magazines' social media platforms

between December 10–22, 2019. While designing their online survey the marketers posed the usual demographic questions to gain insights into respondents' age, gender and region followed by questions on the point of purchase, the flower's purpose (gift or own use), cost, flower preferences and plant care. Altogether, 1,466 respondents answered 15 questions. The survey's creators also chose to use Weibo for five random surveys on purchase frequency, chosen varieties and preferred flower colours. This choice of promoting the survey resulted in more than 1.4 million user views and 6,300 replies.

YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN ARE THE PRIMARY CONSUMERS

In looking at the only survey, the 1,466 respondents' breakdown was as follows: 35.45 per cent male; 64.55 per cent female; 21.24 per cent aged 25 or younger; 43.44 per cent aged 26 to 40; 28.89 per cent aged 41 to 55; and 6.42 per cent over 55. This survey found that young and middle-aged women have more spending power than many realise. This demographic includes flower lovers and represents the most significant chunk of New Year flowers shoppers. Figures from the survey respondents show 46.93 per cent say they are very familiar with

Favorite sizes for CNY flowers



Chinese New Year flowers, 45.29 per cent answer that they have a basic understanding of flowers at this time of year. Only 7.79 per cent say they have no clue when it comes to the significant meaning of New Year flowers.

In answering the question about the importance of flowers at this time of year, 44.6 per cent of respondents agree that traditionally, they would go to the flower market to purchase New Year flowers, with 48.09 per cent admitting they do not buy New Year flowers regularly, and only 7.31 per cent make clear it clear they do not buy New Year flowers at all. The social media survey reveals that among the magazine's WeChat followers, there is a significant portion of influencers in social media. Social media marketing has helped build the New Year flowers' 'brand' across China. Most people agree that buying New Year flowers is an important consumer habit from this cohort of respondents.

RETAIL OUTLET PREFERENCES

The survey asks about the retail experience. In answering, 77.78 per cent of respondents say they prefer to do their floral shopping at large flower markets, 35.84 per cent chose corner florists, 18.25 per cent opt for online platforms, and 26.93 per cent

purchase their flowers at the Spring Festival flower fairs.

It is no secret that China has rapidly become one of the biggest e-commerce markets globally, but what is surprising is that most floral purchasers prefer to go out to the physical stores to buy New Year flowers. Marketers think that this has to do with checking the quality of potted plants before purchase. And those who buy online mostly buy from Taobao, especially some premier shops such as Tasha's Garden, Heidi's Garden, Lily's Gardening, and Uncle Wang

PASSIONATE FOR GARDENING

The survey finds that other respondents' loyalty preferences are with the official store or APP of Hongyue. A few purchase from Flowerplus Reflower and The Beast, which are e-commerce platforms featuring fresh cut flowers. When it comes to the purpose of purchasing flowers for the New Year, respondents tell of the importance of creating a special occasion. More than half, 59.65 per cent say

when visiting family or friends during the Spring Festivals. In conclusion for purpose, the survey reveals that families and individuals have become the primary consumer of New Year flowers. The reasons weigh heavily that the sight and fragrance of flowers can improve people's mood. This category also does not hesitate to treat themselves to flowers to celebrate Chinese New Year. This trend shows that the purchase of flowers for personal use is slowly but steadily rising in China.

RED IS THE PRIMARY COLOUR

In terms of consumer preference for flower types, colours and willingness to pay, the market analysis found that Phalaenopsis, Cymbidium, Camellia, daffodil and other traditional Chinese New Year flowers such as Forsythia continue to be firm favourites among the respondents.

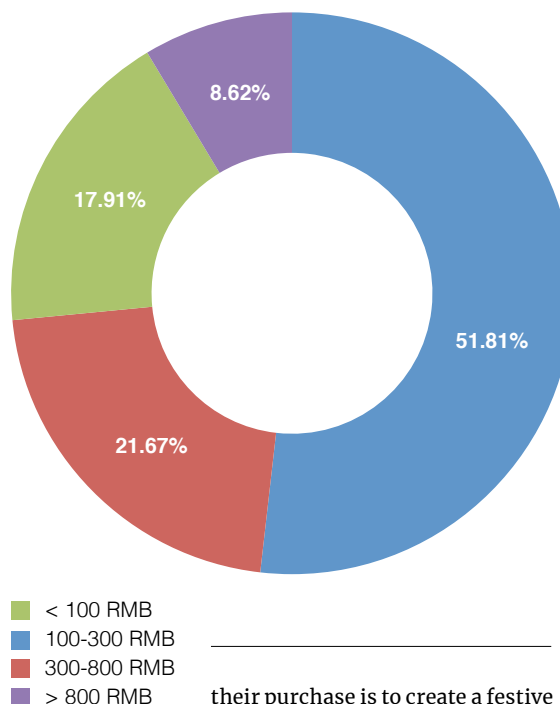
In a multiple-choice survey, potted Phalaenopsis came out on top with more than half, 54.89 per cent, of the votes. Smaller-sized potted bulbs (narcissus), and potted plants such as cyclamen, zygocactus and miniature roses are trendy, with a selection ratio of 42.31 per cent. Arty plant mixes are also popular among consumers. Notably, 41.65 per cent of the respondents choose to buy fresh cut flowers during the Chinese New Year. Boldly coloured, hassle-free cut flowers and branches are important staple products. The Chinese New Year shopper increasingly seeks tulip, hippeastrum, calla, European anemone and other bulb flowers, and some beautiful new products such as bougainvillea, ilex verticillata, and medinilla magnifica.

Many consumers indicate they are receptive to 'exciting new varieties' and personalised marketing in product choices.

PRODUCT SPECS

Regarding product dimensions, the top vote is for products sized between 20 cm up to 50 cm. The second preference is caught between taller products between 50 cm up to 100 cm and small products below 20 cm in height. Respondents cast

Cost for CNY flowers



their purchase is to create a festive atmosphere; 66.57 per cent have a soft spot for flowers and use them to decorate their home, and 23.05 per cent say that they bring flowers

few votes on stems taller than one metre. Consumers agree that small and medium-size flowers suitable for family and indoor are the top choices.

Chinese customers also prefer New Year flowers in festive red and purple. Or for those who seek a difference, characteristic and chic-mixed colours, such as fresh and bright orange or pure yellow, and elegant green/white.

In the survey on Weibo, the question about colours received greater attention. The questions were multiple-choice, and these were the answers:

- 4.57 per cent chose red
- Twenty-one per cent opted mixed colours
- Nine per cent chose green or white

PRICE, SHAPE, AND MAINTENANCE

Price is an important factor for consumers to consider when buying flowers for the Chinese New Year. More than half, 51.81 per cent of respondents, spend within a budget between 100 RMB and 300 RMB; 21.67 per cent spend between 300 RMB and 800 RMB; 17.91 per cent spend less than 100 RMB and 8.62 per cent spend more than 800 RMB. It appears consumers are willing to spend sensibly money on New Year flowers, and the spending per family for mid-price flowers products is gradually growing. New varieties, flower shape, affordable price, easy maintenance, and shelf life were important to respondents too. Many are attracted to products providing tips for the growers, others respond to new, more unusual flowers and plants. High on the list is quality, affordable price, extraordinary plant shapes, innovative merchandising concepts, attractive packaging including flower food, easy-care flowers, delivery services and maintenance tips. Respondents from Anhui province, who almost spends between 100-300 RMB on Chinese New Year flowers every year, suggests strengthening the promotion. They say letting more consumers in medium-sized cities know about flower for the Chinese New Year, attracting them with high quality,

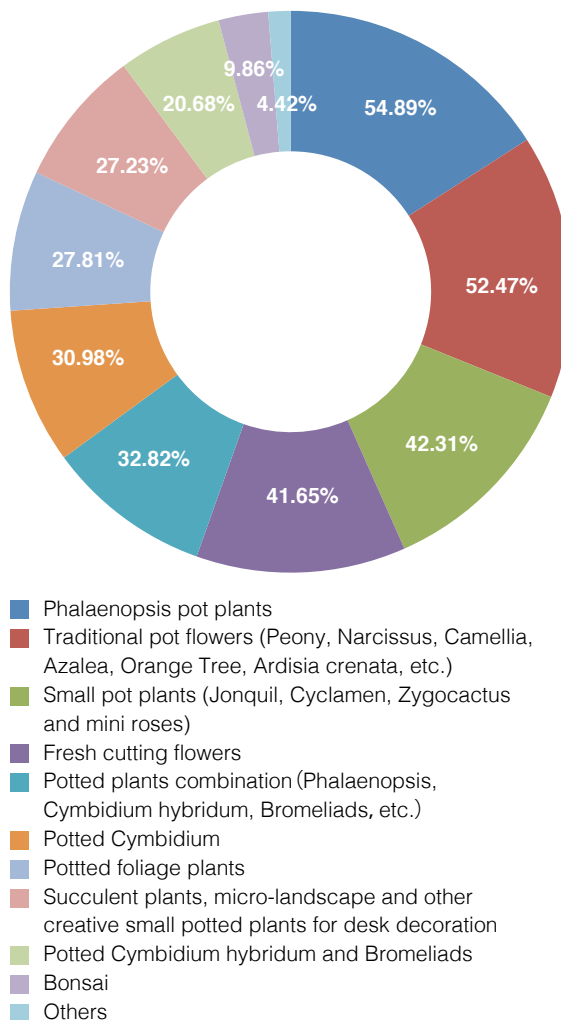
competitive price and good service and creating their demand and habit of flower consumption for this occasion.

Many respondents say that they would visit flower markets and flower fairs during the Spring Festival period. They feel that attending them with their relatives and friends helps make them more aware of the joy flowers. They agree that these fairs are affordable and convenient outlets to buy festive flowers. Many suggest holding Chinese New Year flower fairs in urban parks and shopping malls and combining them with folk festivals. Simultaneously, the respondent consumers believe that floral design shows and educational events help make the country's flower culture even more potent. Their only concern is managing these events: if poorly organised they create too much traffic and too crowded situations.

RETAIL SAFARI

When releasing the questionnaire, one of the magazine's reporters embarked on a retail safari and visited several flower markets in Beijing where he saw an abundance of flowers and potted plants for the Chinese New Year. His reports reveals potted phalaenopsis, cymbidium, and rhododendrons traditionally scatter at the more prominent booth positions. Daffodil, cyclamen and miniature roses are also in prime position, waiting for consumers to buy. He describes small groups of people lingering by the flowers, stopping to ask about the prices. In front of a phalaenopsis booth, two potted phalaenopsis are just sold. Shop owner Ms Lin explains that the plants are farm fresh and come with a stylish and automatic watering pot. The price is between 220 RMB and 500 RMB according to the sizes. She says, "In the run up to Chinese New Year there is more foot traffic, mainly young people. Plants by 200-300 RMB are bestsellers." In a neighbouring stall, an elderly couple pays more than 100 RMB for four small pots of rhododendrons. They say they like the rhododendrons very much and the price was relatively low this

Popular Varieties of CNY flowers



year. They bought two more pots for themselves to enjoy the Spring Festival.

In the market, cyclamen, daffodil, and miniature roses sell between 15 to 30 RMB each. Three or four pots are packed in a cane basket with fantastic ornamental effects, attracting many customers. In addition to the mainstream Chinese New Year flowers, one can also find smaller numbers of much higher priced novelty flowers in the market. *Medinilla magnifica* or *skimmia japonica reevesiana* including pots fetch around 1,000 RMB. Smaller one's price between 300 up to 500 RMB. *Amaryllis*, *callas*, *curcuma alismatifolia* (lotus ginger) and *calathea crocata* sell for about 300 RMB.



PERFUME **Princess®**

Daphne

- Earliest and longest flowering Daphne
- Produces a profusion of large soft pink flowers covering each stem mid-winter to late spring
- Unmistakable daphne fragrance with citrus undertones

Coming Soon!
Perfume Princess® White

For more info go to
www.tesselaar.com



VISSER
 horti systems



Filling



Seeding



Transplanting



Grading



Pot handling



Packing



Internal transport



Irrigation



Second-generation Turkish Dutch takes iris nursery to the next level

Based on quintessential Turkish family values such as ‘mutual love and respect’ and ‘helping each other’, the Dutch-based cut-iris nursery Middenweg Flowers is run by father Murat Kaya and his son Can. Their complementary skills make the business work; Murat is more of the collaborator and very technically oriented, while Can is not afraid to be told no, and continuously comes up with innovative ideas to create happier customers. Their straightforward approach helps them cement long-lasting business relationships. However, this does not mean that colourful iris sepals sprinkled their path to business growth.

In a large packing shed with plenty of natural daylight and some upbeat Turkish music playing in the background, five workers keep the production stream going. Standing at a conveyor belt, they carefully prepare hundreds of cut-irises for dispatch. With all eyes continually quality checking, they introduce the flowers stem by stem into the bunching machine, checking whether each bunch is uniform, doing a quick trim to remove some occasional brown leaf tips, then packing and loading the flowers into buckets or boxes. This assembly happens in the Dutch town of Poeldijk, but grower Can Kaya explains that today's harvest is sold through the auction to ship to wholesalers and flower factories in the UK, Germany, France and even as far afield as Russia.

MOVING AHEAD

Twenty-one year old Can represents a second-generation Dutch Turk, whose parents have been growing and serving the ornamental horticulture industry for many years. The family's passion for the iris is firmly rooted in the company's mission and values. "For my dad growing irises is a labour of love. My mother may probably not want to hear this but he probably gives more love to his flowers than to his wife," jokes Can. His father is Murat Kaya, who moved to the Netherlands in 2003 to work in the iris nursery with his two brothers Mehmet and Sam. They were both kind and hardworking entrepreneurs, but they also found it difficult to resist living a lavish lifestyle when their side-business – a horticultural temping agency – was booming. The venture went bankrupt in 2005. However, Murat decided to keep his energy focused on moving ahead. Two years later, he and one brother

set up a new iris nursery, with Murat being the sole owner of Middenweg Flowers from March 2019. While growing irises is the core business, Middenweg Flowers can provide temp workers with work including planting, harvesting and packaging.

MANY CHALLENGES

According to Can, bouncing back, cleaning a somewhat tarnished reputation, and rebuilding trust is not an easy task. He says, "My father faced many challenges. One of them was the lack of success at the beginning, and the feeling he wasn't getting paid fairly for his hard work and that the competition was taking market share."

Then Can finished law school in 2017, and joined the nursery. He recalls, "From the onset, I was convinced we needed to overhaul our business model with branding being an important tool to usher growth and more profitability. We changed our logo, ordered new sleeves and took to

'FROM THE ONSET, I WAS CONVINCED WE NEEDED TO OVERHAUL OUR BUSINESS MODEL WITH BRANDING BEING AN IMPORTANT TOOL TO USHER GROWTH AND MORE PROFITABILITY'

social media to promote our flowers. Subsequently, I started addressing the key questions such as: Who are our buyers, what and when do they buy? I soon found out that there was little customer loyalty with buyers typically calling us during the peak season sales for last minute orders while being absent during the slower seasons. This wasn't the path forward. I explained our customers I was striving for long-term business relationship combined with year round deals."

Can is aware that his direct business stance on things may have come as a surprise to buyers, but his heart-felt beliefs were worth the effort. "I am not afraid to take an unpopular

position and be told 'no'. It is always better to get down to actually solving issues and moving the needle of discussion forward. I think that the majority appreciated my honesty and transparency. At the end of the day, it's simply about business. Whether you sell gold or irises, the same basic principles apply. Today, we are proud to have a strong customer base of 10 to 15 regular buyers, ready to reward our quality flowers with a few cents more than our competitors. What also helps is that at auction and the buyer's level you can see an influx of younger people starting with whom it is easier to make new bonds with. Some have become really good friends."

PROVING YOURSELF

The Kaya family originates from Elazığ, a city in Eastern Turkey, and are among the 4,301,272 people with an immigrant background that now live in the Netherlands, which equals 24.6 per cent of the Dutch population. In 2020, Turkey was the most common country of origin for migrants (421,542) in the Netherlands. Of this group, 52.7 per cent were born in the Netherlands and today represent the so-called second-generation. (Source: Dutch statistics office CBS). The Turkish and Moroccans

were the first migrants to arrive in the Netherlands in the 1960s and have largely contributed to Dutch horticulture growth. Can believes that, although the situation has improved, migrants still need to prove themselves, particularly the older generation for whom Dutch is their second language. This group of people will never sound as eloquent as native speakers, and as such, it is sometimes hard to have their voice heard, also because as an immigrant they were taught to be obedient and hardworking. Can notes, "When my father and uncle restarted their business as Kaya Flowers, they worked day and night,

growing flowers of top quality. Yet, it seemed that only typical Dutch names such as Groenewegen or Wagenmaker were rightly rewarded. Until the moment we changed our name into Middenweg Flowers. Then things started to change for the good, instead of paying for the name buyers started to pay for the quality."

MARKET SIZE AND PRODUCT RANGE

Determining the market's size, Can says that the Netherlands hosts four year-round iris growers and an additional 15 seasonal growers who together occupy a production area of 20 hectares. Year-round growers produce several crops per year, and their output added to the harvest of seasonal growers accounts for approximately 80 million Dutch grown Iris stems per year. In Europe, France is the only country that hosts some cut iris nurseries with Kaandorp in Plomeur (Brittany) involved in both iris bulb farming and cut flower forcing. From a more global perspective, Iris 'Telstar' is one of the stars at Sunvalley Group's Oxnard division in California which specialises in seasonal crops such as irises.



Left to right Can and his father Murat Kaya.

Shipping area: Russia is a country of Iris lovers. These boxes are ready to be trucked to 7Flowers.

Middenweg Flowers operates from two rented greenhouses in Poeldijk and Monster (2ha), with an additional 1ha dedicated to field production from April to October. The company has a full-colour range of 5 million irises available all year round.

The Kayas grow the traditional Dutch iris styles (see text box), including classics such as 'Prof. Blaauw', 'Blue Magic', 'White Magic', and 'Hong Kong'. Depending on the season, Beerepoot in Wijdenes provides fresh Dutch bulbs between October–April and the so-called rem (retarded) irises between August–September. These bulbs are prepared and stored for one year. Iris bulb growers are in North Holland's province in areas with sandy soils and a marine climate with cool summers. Fresh and costly Iris bulbs from France have a special status as these fill in the very short between ending rem bulbs and fresh Dutch bulbs.

Can elaborates, "The greenhouse production cycle starts with 'Blue Magic' and 'White Magic' plus the heavily blue 'Prof. Blaauw'. In February, we start harvesting the first 'Hong Kong', gradually expanding our portfolio into summer when the full range is available."

Pondering over the available range of cultivars, Can says the iris industry is not the most shining example of innovation except breeding companies Maveridge and Iris Nova. "There is still a

lack of variation in colours. There is a new yellow cultivar but only the three falls are yellow while the heart has a touch of cream and ivory. Unfortunately, the market for breeding companies to develop new iris varieties is small. Producing a marketable variety can be the product of many years development so you need a certain scale."

DYED IRIS

As in nature, the Dutch Iris is limited to a handful of colours – in which blue dominates – Can started to look for ways to increase the colour palette artificially. A year ago, Middenweg Flower was one of the first growers to introduce a range of dyed irises selling under the brand names 'Scarlett' (red falls and standards and a central yellow stripe), 'Céladon' (green falls and standards with yellow stripes), 'Sapphire' (light blue falls and standards and a central yellow stripe) and 'Magenta' (magenta fall and standards and a central yellow stripe). Can has it on good authority that an iris painter's job requires a lot of patience and practice. "The first three months created headaches with many flowers ending up on the compost heap. The secret lies in 'less is more'; when using too many colourants, there is a risk of buds dying off. Conversely, when you use too little you hardly see any colouring effect. The dying job should also be done under the right climatic conditions."

Outsourcing the dying process is no option. "You can hire a specialist who will easily charge you 25 cents.



To keep the flowers upright and increase the number of straight saleable stems, they use chrysanthemum mesh netting and typically hand-plant three ('Prof. Blaauw') to four, pre-disinfected bulbs per opening.



In a large packing shed with plenty of natural daylight and some upbeat Turkish music playing in the background, five workers keep the production stream going.

But with an average selling price of 27 cents at the auction this is not a profitable undertaking. Do it yourself flower dying is also easier these days because the natural pigment colourings are readily available at horticultural wholesale supplier Royal Brinkman." The availability of irises in a rainbow of colours does not grow from a golden pot, but a 'dazzled' clientele are nevertheless ready to pay a premium. "When our dyed collection made its debut, it received an overwhelmingly positive

response. The first batches of 'Scarlett' achieved a peak price of 40 cents. Next, we saw how in the more regular iris range, average prices were between 13-14 cents, while dyed iris yielded 25-30 cents and even more in peak periods."

THE CULTIVATION

The Kayas follow several steps to successful iris growing. First, to keep the flowers upright and increase the number of straight saleable stems, they use chrysanthemum mesh netting and typically hand-plant three ('Prof. Blaauw') to four, pre-disinfected bulbs per opening. The planting of bulbs are done with care and immediately follow the planting with watering to ensure that the soil nice seamlessly fits around the bulbs, which will encourage hassle-free rooting. The soils in Poeldijk and Monster are perfect in that the clay is not too compact and is well-draining. Upon completing the last greenhouse harvest, soil steam sterilisation happens once a year to keep weeds and some soil born pathogens out of the greenhouse. Ideally, the greenhouse temperature is between 12°C and 17°C, and 15°C up to 17°C when growing outdoors. As irises are a salt-sensitive, the growers must keep a sharp eye on the EC levels. Middenweg Flowers is an MPS A+ certified nursery. "Iris is by very its very nature an ecological crop as it hardly requires chemical treatment. Problems with Fusarium

can happen but mostly occur in the bulbs", says Can.

The first harvest typically occurs eight to ten weeks and 15 to 20 weeks after planting in the greenhouse and field respectively. Can outlines that irises should be harvested in the 'pencil tip' stage when a line of colour projects out of the sheathing leaves. "Pre-treatment with Chrysal BVB helps to avoid post harvest problems such as leaf yellowing and extends the vase life, which is typically five to seven days."

SALES

As a member of Royal FloraHolland, Middenweg Flowers sells its flowers through the auction from which exporters truck them to key markets such as the UK, France and Russia. "The latter is a country of flower lovers with wholesalers paying a premium for genuine quality in the run up to International Women's Day. By contrast, the UK is more of a mass floral market with extremely tight margins. The UK is also the country where large players such as Flamingo Ltd, a core supplier to the leading UK multiple retailers, dominates the market," says Can. Can is a member of Royal FloraHolland's Product Committee for Bulb Flowers and is not shy rocking the boat when necessary. He notes, "Compared to cut tulips, irises are a tiny little market. But being the smallest boy in class does not mean I will sit silently in a corner. We gather every three months to discuss production matters and market dynamics. The auction's latest acquisition of three leading transportation companies De Winter Logistics, Wematrans and Van Zaal Transport is currently the subject of heated discussions. When talking to my peers in Decorum, almost all agree that the auction's latest business venture Floriway is a bridge too far. Discontent is growing. In my view, if you really want to support your grower members as an auction, why not reign in all the additional costs that are increasing year over year? Paying 70 euro per month for having market insights may not seem much but they add up to other levies and costs which are often overlooked



because as a grower what interest you most is what you have earned.”

2020: A SINGULAR YEAR

With the lockdowns affecting many cut flower businesses, 2020 has been a singular year full of harsh new realities. “But there is a discrepancy between the first and second coronavirus wave. In spring 2020, we were forced to compost one million stems, while we had to offer 400,000 flowers at cost, forgoing our profits.”

Conversely, the wage subsidy scheme from the Dutch government worked quite well. “But the lost revenue claims made under the country’s aid package are still a work in progress. We are now in the middle of a second wave, and fortunately it is more ‘business as usual’ than in spring last year. Prices continue to be good, and I guess that the Russian market is largely contributing to our positive sales.” Another explanation can be that the air cargo market for flowers is still anything but normal. Can knows that “A very tight air freight capacity and soaring rates goes hand in hand.” Iris is sometimes called the ‘Eye of the sky’ in homage to its typical blue colour, which experts say is a rarity, seen only in around ten per cent of the earth’s flowering plants. “The iris faces competition from other blue flowers such as cut clematis, which are grown in Africa. Sending them to

Europe has become a costly exercise. Meanwhile, imported irises from Israel do not really harm our business as they belong to the group of iris germanica or bearded iris, a species which Israeli growers only sell at the Dutch auction during two months in winter.”

In the Victorian age, a blue iris was a symbol of good news. So Can thinks there is enough reason to be confident for the near future. “February 2021 will mark a new membership of grower’s alliance Decorum. As a result we will start to pack all our flowers in the recognisable Decorum sleeve featuring the Middenweg Flowers and MPS A+ logo, plus care tips. Decorum’s membership brings us instant benefits as it entitles us to discounts when purchasing for example flower boxes or horticultural supplies plus a more prominent presence at trade fairs and Decorum events. Another exciting venture is the opening of a new production site in Almeirim, Portugal which will allow us to auction off an even wider range of outdoor irises. Our Portuguese irises are already sure to wow our buyers as they will feature bold colours and sturdy stems for which Mediterranean production is known for. Our Portugal branch will bring our total area of iris production to 3ha with around an estimated eight million harvested stems per year.”



A clean and tidy nursery is part of Middenweg Flowers’ company culture.



(PHOTO CREDIT: RENE FAASI)

THE DUTCH IRIS

The iris is a perennial that originated in Mediterranean Europe. Traditionally, it is symbolic of faith, valour and wisdom. According to Wikipedia, the iris takes its name from the Greek word for rainbow. Iris was also the name for the ancient Greek goddess of the rainbow.

There were more than 200 different species of iris plus thousands of varieties at the last count. For most of us, when we say iris, we are thinking of the bearded or iris germanica. These are the tall flowering plants, often with blue or violet flowers and fuzzy growth on the three petals (actually sepals) which hang down in front. The fuzzy growth gave them the name ‘bearded’ iris.

The iris grown by Middenweg Flowers categorises under the horticultural group of Dutch Iris, bulbous herbaceous perennials with narrow, channelled leaves and blue-yellow or white flowers in late spring and early summer, when grown in the garden. ‘Professor Blaauw’ is a cultivar that stands 60cm tall, with erect, narrow leaves and deep violet-blue flowers 8-10cm wide, the rounded falls with a yellow central mark.

The Dutch iris history began in 1564 when the Belgium horticulturist Clusius travelled through Spain and discovered two varieties of iris in the wild. He called them Iris xiphium (blue) and Iris lusitanica (yellow). He sent bulbs of these iris strains to several of his friends in Belgium, who planted them in their gardens. Through hybridising, they acquired new varieties, most of which disappeared through the years. Hundreds of years later, at the end of the 19th century, several of the foremost bulb growing nurseries in Holland started hybridising on a larger scale, using these original Spanish iris species and Iris tingitana. They attained a new iris type, which produced larger and broader flowers than the Spanish iris and bloomed earlier. This type was called Dutch Iris.

(SOURCE: D. HENRY, ZONE10.COM)

Champions of Green Cities

AUTHOR: DR AUDREY GERBER, TECHNICAL ADVISOR, AIPH

At a time when nature around the world is being threatened, recognition of the value of nature in cities is probably at its highest.

Profiling city success stories and the innovations, policies and people that narrate these stories, the AIPH Green City conference 2021 has the theme “Champions of Green Cities”. The evidence behind the ways that nature makes cities liveable is no longer possible to ignore. The new digital resource, AIPH 2020 Green City Guidelines, collates this evidence and delivers it around 6 key areas: economy, health, climate and pollution, social interaction, ecology, and water. However, it does take decisive action and commitment to bring this into practice, and starts with a change in the way city planning is perceived.

“Streets form 80% of the public space of cities and I have often stated ‘If you design good streets you will design a good city’”, says Prof Rob Adams, keynote speaker at the conference on 22nd April, 2021. Rob, City Architect at the City of Melbourne is referring to Melbourne’s Urban Forest and Grey to Green strategies that have transformed the city. The city has responded to various shocks over the past four decades, changing patterns of city structure to adapt to shifting consumer habits, climate change, and Covid-19, and always bringing in more trees and more greenery. The change started in 1985, with a few small projects that widened footpaths, added bike lanes



and open space, and increased tree plantings. When this was shown to lead to increased business in these areas, it became easier for the City Council to be more ambitious.

CITIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE ADAPTING

Also reconfiguring streets for improved city liveability, the case study of Barcelona describes how creating 503 superblocks that will eventually connect to one another will deliver over 160 hectares of new green space by 2030. The basic idea behind the superblocks plan is to take urban space that is currently devoted to one use (automobile traffic) and open it up to multiple uses (walking, cycling, playing, social interaction). A recent study carried out by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health estimated that the city could prevent 667 premature deaths every year if all

503 superblocks envisaged were indeed created.

The story of Barcelona illustrates that it is possible to reconfigure heritage cities and make them greener. Creating new green cities that balance the dynamics of access and nature is demonstrated in the Netherlands, with the new development of the City of Almere. The masterplan is based on a grid pattern that divides the site into 192 developable plots of 1,500 square meters surface area on average. Each plot incorporates a four-meter wide strip along its perimeter that is dedicated to plantings. This long-term, structural planting is referred to as the “Green City Arboretum” and is being designed as a plant collection.

Along with these case studies and other urban greening initiatives from cities around the world, The AIPH Green City Conference on 22nd April 2021 also sees the launch of the AIPH World Green City Awards 2022 which recognise and celebrate cities around the world that have made impressive progress in enhancing the ‘living green’ content of the city, providing evidence of how this makes the city more liveable and more resilient.

AIPH 2021 GREEN CITY CONFERENCE

Register for the AIPH 2021 Green City conference to hear about innovations and advances in city greening from the Champions of Green Cities. Free to attend.
aiph.org/event/aiph-2021-green-city-conference/

Royal FloraHolland

Headline Sponsor of the ALPH Plant Health Conference

We connect parties in the floriculture industry
and create opportunities for sustainable growth
and success on the global market.

ROYALFLORAHOLLAND.COM



**Royal
Flora
Holland**

HOW DIFFERENT IS THE SITUATION IN CHINA ONE YEAR LATER

As I write my column, the fire cracker celebrations for the Chinese New Year are through, heralding the beginning of the Year of the Ox.

How different is the situation in China one year later. We all remember how Covid-19 first engulfed this country, followed by a major lockdown. Currently, the pandemic here seems to be well under control. Most Chinese cities and businesses are open, but they vigilantly keep watch. Once virus outbreak is detected, the authorities take strict measures to lockdown and secure the area without fuss. China's extreme enforcements prove successful, mainly because residents strictly follow precautions.

In 2020, the Chinese economy witnessed a positive growth of 2.3 per cent, with an increase in demand for flowers. As we all know, China represents a big consumer market with a significant portion of its cut flowers grown in its territory, and Kunming is the country's epicentre of cut flower production. Simultaneously, China sources cut flowers from other countries in Asia, such as Thailand (orchids), Taiwan (orchids) and Vietnam (carnation, alstroemeria). There are several regions in Asia where the climate, water sources, availability of labour and altitude allow year round production of a wide range of cut flowers.

Over the past decade, European breeders and greenhouse builders have found inroads to trade in the East. They support the local initiatives with custom-made greenhouses and varieties.

Currently, there is a wide range of locally grown cut flowers available. In addition, some locally developed varieties have their places, (potted) orchids, for example, are produced in all kinds of colours and shapes, and roses, carnation, alstroemeria, eucalyptus are getting stronger. There is an improvement in quality standards in production, and from the perspective of logistics, the movement of supplies is becoming a lot smoother into main cities.

China is experiencing growth in local demand for local production. More and more people are accustomed to buying flowers for special occasions in the office or at home. And this leads to extra demand for imported flowers when local productions are low in terms of quality and quantity.

In conclusion, this large population of 1.4 billion people has a continuous demand for international flowers from other markets such as The Netherlands, Ecuador, Colombia, Kenya, Thailand or Vietnam.

This appeal is in evidence by the increasing demand for home/and office decoration flowers (especially ilex and forsythia) during this year's Chinese New Year period (11-17 February) and imported red/or pink quality roses for Valentine's Day. The logistics industry managed distribution and ensured adequate capacity was available to supply the Chinese market.

Fred van Tol
Manager of International Development
Royal FloraHolland



A photograph of a woman in the foreground, smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a green headwrap and a green shirt. In the background, another person is visible, also wearing a green shirt, working with plants. The setting appears to be an outdoor or semi-outdoor horticultural area.

South Africa's Together We Bloom charity is built to last

Together We Bloom is a not-for-profit charitable initiative started by the horticultural industry in South Africa in association with the country's leading potted plant grower, LVG Plants playing a pivotal role.

The newly established network caters for the immediate hunger relief in schools and local communities, which is particularly needed as the country continues to fight Covid-19. But ultimately, the goal is to be 'future proof'. That is why the organisation is keen to partner with local and international horticultural businesses, bringing in different skillsets and supporting education for young students in ways that benefit both society and the country's ornamentals sector.

GREAT NEED

Since the first wave of coronavirus engulfed South Africa in March 2020, lockdowns and layoffs continue to fuel great need. A need mostly felt in the country's horticultural sector with many day-to-day workers. "The lockdown opened our eyes even wider. There was a lot of immediate need for hunger relief. In a South African context, it is evident that children and single-parent families with 11- to 12-year old family aides who support their younger siblings are among the most vulnerable. So, we started to put out food in as many schools as possible. Giving children the nutrition they need to concentrate in lessons and develop scholastically. The latest statistics tell us that pre Covid-19 there were about 11 million people who were unable to feed themselves daily. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc, the number went up to 33 million. The number of children affected is just enormous," says Together We Bloom's spokesman and project manager Stefan Zeelie.

BRINGING TOGETHER THE INDUSTRY'S ROLE PLAYERS

Zeelie went on a live stream with FloraCulture International (FCI) to share his experience and thoughts. Krugersdorp-based potted plant grower LVG Plant has 'empowering people and local communities' as one of its core values and planted the first Together We Bloom seed. However, Zeelie stresses that the charity is keen to retain independence. "I do not work for LVG Plants. Together We Bloom is



The sticker, featuring the multi-coloured flag of South Africa, continues to play a prominent role in Together We Bloom's fundraising.

independent from LVG. Although it is the Van Geest family's initiative, we would want the entire horticultural industry to be part of it."

Zeelie is proud to work with a network of talented colleagues, bringing together directors from different areas, an accountant, and a lawyer, looking after all the trademarking and ensuring that all paperwork is in order and there is an effective disbursement of funds. Equally on board are industry professionals Geert van Geest and Dutch-based horticultural consultant Ton Groot. Zeelie himself has a background in outreach ministries of the church, and that is how he and Geert van Geest connected. "My task is to ensure that the initiative is sustainable and strengthens the philanthropic infrastructure

and capacity of existing Covid-19 emergency funds."

CHARITY AUCTION AT JOHANNESBURG'S MULTIFLORA

Coinciding with South Africa's partial reopening of the economy on 1 May 2020, Together We Bloom's first fundraising success was a massive plant auction held at Johannesburg's Multiflora, raising R100,000 (rands). "For the auction proceeds, we selected four NPO's in the Westrand area. LVG Plants donated the potted plants, which are easily recognisable by a sticker on the sleeves and features the multi-coloured flag of South Africa." The sticker continues to play a prominent role in fundraising. "The flower grower buys these stickers at R2.50 (rand) each and puts it onto the

potted plants. So, whenever a person goes to one of the big retail stores and see this Together We Bloom token, they know that the grower of the product has donated on their behalf. It's completely up to the farmers to decide for what amount of money he will buy the stickers for, smaller growers may opt for R2,000 (rands) while large scale companies for R50,000 (rands)." The charity quickly took their dream – assisting less privileged people through supporting feeding schemes, education and healthcare initiatives – further. For Mother's Day, the charity donated 2,500 cyclamens to mothers across Gauteng while handing over cheques to Tower of Life men's shelter, Cradle of Hope (place of empowerment for destitute, vulnerable, and abused women) in the poor suburb of West Krugersdorp and the Bethany House children's home. Together We Bloom also teamed up with the Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital, a general hospital in Johannesburg. Healthcare workers were gifted flowers and plants as a token of appreciation for their incredible efforts during the coronavirus pandemic.

Zeelie says the organisation has built a relationship with beneficiaries that will last. "It is not just a quick fix that we want to provide."

Together We Bloom's long-term vision is about investing in educational programmes to train horticultural students. The idea is also to alleviate a potential constraint on the horticultural sector's growth in the future by investing in education. "Ideally young students come in through a bursary and follow the training programme. And maybe we can send them over to the Netherlands for an apprenticeship," says Zeelie, who would be pleased to discuss the issue with Dutch flower and plant nurseries. Together We Bloom's Dutch roots may help to speed up things as there are long-lasting relationships with Dutch breeders and propagators such as Anthura, Van der Knaap, Nolina Woubrugge and Kapiteyn. He adds, "We also would like to team up with



By now everyone will know about Meals on Wheels, thanks to Sen. Bernie Saunders who supported the charity with sweatshirt (featuring his iconic hand-crafted, brown and white mittens) sales. In South Africa, Together We Bloom made a valuable donation to the charity.



Healthcare workers at the Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital in Johannesburg were gifted flowers and plants as a token of appreciation for their incredible efforts during the coronavirus pandemic.

universities to further take up the training."

THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK

Zeelie genuinely believes it is important to give back. "When you work with people and visit their homes, see the despair there is in many families you automatically want to assist in whatever way possible. It all boils down to encouraging, supporting and giving back to communities and helping them to become sustainable. The last thing we want to do is to become another NPO that drops something off and leaves instantly." Zeelie freely admits that choosing from an overwhelming number of applications can be a daunting task – who do you help first? "Here the importance of a board of directors comes in. Naturally, funds that are donated should not end up just somewhere. Therefore, we strive to be as open as possible regarding the incoming and outgoing of funds. We look at the track record of any new partner community. If they comply with all regulations, and facts and figures are correct, the next step is a partnership. We will always try to stay involved. If there is a blanket drive, we try to be present at the handover. Just to get a sense of the story instead of just handing



over a cheque and forgetting about where it went. We prefer to work with relationship organisations that have the same values. And we expect accountability.”

INSPIRED BY

One of the most significant sustainability concerns for Together We Bloom is income. “The more money there is, the more we can assist. From a South African perspective, whenever you walk out of the front door there is going to be a need. The question is if you are sensitised to this need or do you really want to see that need fulfilled,” says Zeelie. He adds that it was the sight of an old lady in a poor suburb thanking him repeatedly for the Mother’s Day flowers that she had received for the first time in her life that moved him to do more. And he equally recalls how he visited a care home with many sick residents experiencing extreme loneliness during the lockdown. And yes, he is also inspired by God. “However, having no belief would not discredit any of the places that we want to assist. But we are inspired by Jesus who worked with the sick, wounded, elderly and children. That gives you a better idea of our background.”

DRACONIAN LOCKDOWNS

At the height of the first coronavirus outbreak in spring 2020, the country’s flower and plant industry had its fair share of problems. Under one of the world’s most draconian lockdowns, all South Africans had to stay home for 21 days. All shops and businesses were closed except

Stefan Zeelie (right), project manager of Together We Bloom.

for pharmacies, laboratories, banks, supermarkets, petrol stations and healthcare providers. Zeelie recalls how Covid-19 created a spirit of togetherness. “We are all realistically in the same boat, although the storm looks different to each of us. Flower and plant nurseries had at the time an excess of stock and decided to give it away for the good cause.”

With a new variant of Covid-19 that may be more contagious than the virus that drove the first wave of infections, the rainbow nation is currently again under lockdown until the rate of infections decreases. “There continues to be much uncertainty. Business-wise things look different than one year ago. During the first wave, many growers had to destroy their flowers

even if the situation for the more upmarket potted plant industry was somewhat different as people are taking considerable interest in decoration and home styling. We trust that post Covid the industry is resilient enough to catch up. There are no fireworks yet, but we are heading into the right direction.” At the same, flowers are a luxury that many South Africans cannot afford, especially when the concern is for the next meal for themselves and their families. Zeelie hopes that horticultural companies in South Africa will continue to be as generous as they were during the first wave of Covid-19. And he would be more than happy to discuss how international horticultural businesses and institutions can join Together We Bloom.



LVG PLANTS

Lourens van Geest was born in 's-Gravenzande, the Netherlands. After a brief career in the navy, he joined his father’s cut flower nursery and dedicated himself to growing carnations, freesias and lilies. He emigrated to South Africa in 1983, where he established LVG Plants two years later. Today, his three sons Bart, Geert and Ivo-Jan run the South African farm, which encompasses 11 hectares of houseplant production including fully automated greenhouses in Oaktree, Krugersdorp.

LVG Plants offers an integrated value chain, from growing indoor plants through to marketing and sales. The Van Geest family

aims to bring quality products to the market cost-effectively and sustainably to get maximum shelf life and value for both the retailer and end-user.

In January 2020, when the company marked its 35th anniversary, LVG took to the stage twice to receive awards at the AIPH International Grower of the Year (IGOTY) 2020 awards ceremony, which celebrates excellence and best practice in ornamentals production. LVG Plants was awarded Bronze in the ‘Finished Plants & Trees’ category, presented by the Mayor of Hatay, Dr Lutfu Savas, and Bronze again in the ‘Sustainability’ category, bestowed by a representative of Pöppelmann.

'Phytosanitary ambitions succeed or fail with the capacity of the weakest link'

Ralf Lopian is the Chairman of the international steering committee for the 2020 International Year of Plant Health (IYPH), which extends beyond 2020 due to Covid-19. He will be the keynote speaker at AIPH's virtual International Plant Health Conference on 24 March. In this interview, Lopian highlights plants' economic, social, and environmental value while sounding the alarm over an ever-increasing threat from pests and diseases. To minimise further introductions and spread of devastating pests and diseases, Lopian urges governments to invest more in surveillance, monitoring and capacity building.

AUTHOR: RON VAN DER PLOEG PHOTOS: ILVO/PHILIPPE VANOUTRIVE

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) has made massive progress from the first international agreement describing measures to be taken against plant pests and diseases in the Convention on *Phylloxera vastatrix* (grape phylloxera) of 3 November 1881. Following this agreement, the International Convention for the Protection of Plants developed by the International Institute for Agriculture was signed in Rome on 16 April 1929, but failed because only twelve countries ratified it and World War II stopped all international collaboration. With the creation of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, the IPPC was developed in 1951 and ratified in the following year. The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations (1986-1994) and the subsequent establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 led to the revision on the IPPC in 1997. This revision established an IPPC governing body, the Commissions on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), and the mandate

for the development of international phytosanitary standards.

GLOBAL PROBLEM

Protection for our plants is more critical than ever as insect pests and pathogens are attacking them globally. The problem is growing as a result of globalisation. "Plant pests and diseases can more freely move around the world with the international flow of goods. International travel and the subsequent movement of people have also radically increased the spread of pests and diseases over the past decades," says Ralf Lopian, who, next to his role as IYPH steering committee chair, also works for Finland's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. New pests and diseases appear now in territories where people had never spotted them before, with negative consequences on local ecosystems, agriculture, and food security. "What is more, once established in a new area, plant pests are often impossible to eradicate," notes Lopian. When it comes to climate change,

there is the indisputable fact that a change in weather patterns affects plant pests' epidemiology, distribution and impact. "Due to global warming, more pests are not only appearing earlier in the season; but raising temperatures also create new pathways for pests to thrive and spread. Climate change influences the movement of trade flows for agricultural commodities, and threatens both the quality and quantity of crops", says Lopian.

ECONOMIC LOSSES

Pests and diseases are responsible for losses of 20 to 40 percent of global food production; and trade losses in agricultural products exceeding USD 220 billion every year. "Balancing the impact of climate change, pest occurrences and food production is an unprecedented global challenge for the scientific community as we aim at producing more with less resources and degrading soils to feed 9 billion people by 2050", continues Lopian. He points to pests and diseases transposed from their endemic ecosystem to a completely new one and have had catastrophic economic impacts using the Fall Armyworm (FAW; *Spodoptera frugiperda*) as an example. "In 2016, the FAW was introduced into West-Africa and can now be found in almost every African country. Analysis of its economic damages are still investigated, but preliminary assessments find that it can cause USD 6.2 billion worth of damage in maize production alone." One of the most dangerous plant bacteria worldwide is *Xylella fastidiosa*, which emerged in Southern Italy in 2013 and



subsequently spread to several other EU countries in the Mediterranean basin.

An EU economic analysis projected that *Xylella* could cause an average annual economic impact of €5.5 billion in direct production losses, €0.7 billion in resulting trade losses and could cost 300.000 people their jobs in the agricultural sector alone.

THE GLOBAL INCREASE IN PESTS AND DISEASES

Global scientific research finds that the growth of phytophagous insects is exponential with 9.5 new species found each year compared to 4.5 per year between 1950- 1975, and most new insects link to nursery stock products. In Europe, Italy, France and the UK, are the most heavily impacted countries. China is now taking the lead in terms of the origin of imported 'exotic' insect pests into the EU.

In Lopian's view, the situation better describes as 'an increase in polyphagous pests and diseases'. An increase, he says, is logical. "Because we involuntarily create a beneficial environment for polyphagous species. International trade has become so diverse and manifold that the possibilities for introducing new pests and diseases

have been increasing substantially. A polyphagous pest or disease has more potential pathways to be distributed. There are many more hosts to live off, complicating the early detection, surveying, monitoring and eradication of pests and diseases. This is an evolutionary advantage over monophagous pests and diseases who are much easier found in inspections and can be much easier eradicated once found." As to why China is such a hotspot for novel plant pests and diseases, Lopian invites us to look at the bigger picture. "More frequent interceptions of quarantine pests from China does not necessarily mean that the plant health regime in China is weak, but may be a mere result of the explosive increase of trade between China and the EU. And that the EU has, because of this increased trade, analysed and regulated more pests and diseases from Asia."

SOCIETAL VALUES

Again in a broader perspective: protecting the world's plants for the future means protecting crops' economic value and protecting our eco systems and physical and mental health. Plants are the building blocks of life, they provide food, oxygen, medicines and shelter,

Ralf Lopian:
"I expect that the 12 May will be announced as the International Day of Plant Health by the United Nations General Assembly later this year."

and are deeply anchored in many populations' culture and traditions. People in the Mediterranean basin, for example, strongly identify with olive trees. For them, *Xylella fastidiosa* wreaking havoc in the region's olive groves is an epic drama in an iconic landscape. Not only does the dreaded bacteria jeopardise the region's signature olive industry, the eradication of affected trees frequently leads to eruptions of public protests as locals attach strong cultural meanings to olive trees.

These trees are deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian faith and culture. Lopian says: "Olive trees are intrinsically linked to the Mediterranean landscape for thousands of years. Take the olive trees of Vouves (Crete) and Gethsemane (Israel), which are among the oldest of the world and may have been witness to historical figures such as Socrates, Cicero or Jesus Christ walking between them. Entire social and commercial structures have developed around olive production and are at risk of being destroyed. The EU study on the economic impacts of *Xylella* also mentions the societal impact and found that apart from many job losses *Xylella* will severely impact 18 UNESCO World Heritage sites

within the EU. The loss of traditions, cultures and rural social structures are hard to measure.”

PLANTS AND POLITICS

Political implications of pests and diseases can also be disastrous. Lopian references the case of potato blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) in Ireland, demonstrating how the introduction of a single disease resulted in the great famine in the country. “Hunger not only killed about one million Irish it caused also the migration of a further million Irish to primarily the USA. There are predictions that the current outbreak of the FAW in Africa, coupled with an apocalyptic locust plague and logistical disruptions amid Covid-19 may result in serious food insecurity in Africa. Social unrests and possibly more African migrants to Europe may follow.”

Lopian believes plant health must be higher on the agenda of politicians. “This notion is one of the reasons why Finland, the IPPC and the FAO promote the concept of an International Year of Plant Health. We need to make the public and political decision-makers aware of the serious consequences pests and diseases can pose for the environment, economies and societies.”

Are we waiting for the next crisis?

Staying ahead of damaging plant pests requires constant vigilance at every level. Growers, traders, gardeners, foresters and farmers all need to be on the lookout in the field for the first signs of disease. How can the IPPC community, finding itself on top of the pyramid, give the issue the prominence and priority it deserves, permanently and without waiting for the next crisis?

“This is also one of the main objectives of the IYPH 2020. Raising awareness among the public to make them aware to the dangers of bringing uninspected plants and plant products from abroad. In addition, the cooperation between the public and the private sector to make more efficient phytosanitary regulations which can be applied by professionals and can convince them that they are necessary for

their own economic benefit. The IPPC community is composed of 184 contracting parties that provides an international framework for protecting plant resources from pests and diseases and promote safe trade among all countries. Here we have the unique opportunity to adopt International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs), and thus provide advice to people and operators on harmonised and more efficient ways to carry out safe trade and act responsibly,” notes Lopian. He warns against the online delivery of plants and plant products since postal packages can easily bypass the normal phytosanitary controls vital for keeping our agricultural industries safe from external threats.

THE WEAKEST LINK DESERVES ATTENTION

In a well-oiled plant health control chain, authorities responsible for screening imports and exports are efficient, diligent, well-staffed and resourceful. However, IPPC has identified phytosanitary capacity and resource limitations as being one of the most significant barriers. “It is unfortunate that many countries do not have the resources available, the lack of political will or simply a lack of sufficient political structures to build up a competent and efficient national phytosanitary system. In such a dangerous situation, pests are easily introduced because they don’t respect borders. Our global or regional phytosanitary ambitions succeed or fail with the capacity of the weakest link. The IPPC has tried to counter this by developing an international evaluation tool, the



Staying ahead of damaging plant pests requires constant vigilance at every level.

To minimise further introductions and spread of devastating pests and diseases, countries should invest more in surveillance and monitoring, being the pillars under a well-functioning plant health regime.

Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE), which helps support IPPC contracting parties in identifying weaknesses and providing suggestion to improve its capacity.” To minimise further introductions and spread of devastating pests and diseases, Lopian urges countries to invest more in surveillance and monitoring, being the pillars under a well-functioning plant health regime. Moreover, governments should invest in an extra phytosanitary research capacity to deliver fundamental knowledge of ecosystem dynamics and the role of pests and diseases in their ecosystems. “Ultimately, this would help establish sustainable and environmentally friendly ways of controlling plant diseases including the use of pest and disease-free starting and planting material. It would also deliver knowledge on the impact of climate change on pests and diseases and their hosts. An important subject for the immediate future of our biosphere.”

PHEROMONE TRAPS AND SENTINEL PLANTS

Pheromone traps are standard practice in countries such as New Zealand and Australia to detect tropic fruit flies near the point of entry. These can undoubtedly play a more prominent role in European countries, particularly in the south. The potential role of sentinel plants in surveillance for pest

introductions is much newer. Lopian calls the planting of sentinel European trees in, for example, China very promising. "One of the primary observations in plant health is that many 'exotic' pests and diseases are not important in their area of origin. There they co-evolved with their hosts in the ecosystem and achieved a balance. When these pest and diseases are transposed into new ecosystems they do not have the balance with their new host species and quite often devastating damages occur. The idea to plant highly susceptible plants near points of entry or risk areas is very appealing since it is a cheap and effective way of detecting small populations of introduced pests and diseases, which then allows for rapid eradication measures."

IYPH 2020 NOW EXTENDS BEYOND 2020

To conclude, the International Year of Plant Health 2020 has officially drawn to a close. What is achieved, and what is still in the pipeline as IYPH follow up events?

"The IYPH 2020 has been a rollercoaster of emotions and activities. We started the IYPH 2020 well with a flurry of activities and initiatives. We have had over 600 events worldwide connected to plant health and the IYPH. Some of the highlights are undoubtedly the minting of a 2 Euro IYPH coin in Belgium and the printing of specific IYPH stamps in over 20 countries. However, in March 2020, Covid-19 struck international and national travel and caused many countries to lock-down. This situation affected IYPH 2020 activities, substantially cancelling a multitude of events were physical participation was planned. Instead, the IYPH 2020 activities went virtual, and plant health received significant attention on social media, with several million views on popular platforms, despite the pandemic. Many policy dialogues include plant health, particularly in connection with the One Health Approach and the UN's Food Systems Summit's current activities.

One of the major legacy initiatives has been the efforts to declare an International Day of Plant Health. The government of Zambia has made a proposal to FAO. I expect that the 12 May will be announced as the International Day of Plant Health by the United Nations General Assembly later this year. Much to Lopian's regret, is the cancellation of the first International Plant Health Conference, which should have taken place in Helsinki in October 2020, then moved to the end of June 2021, before being cancelled at the beginning of February this year. We are now trying to organise a conference in May 2022, but need to find a new host country for the event. We will schedule several webinars before the IYPH 2020 closing ceremony on 1 July 2021. One of the webinars will be held on 1 June and will be the official publication of the IYPH study on "Climate Change Impact on Plant Health". This study will contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

AIPH's International Plant Health Conference on 24 March is a shining example of IYPH involvement, even if 2020 is over. "The year is over, but not the mission of IYPH 2020! The closing ceremony is on 1 July 2021. So, the AIPH's International Plant Health Conference is very welcome by the International Steering Committee and fits perfectly in the timing of IYPH 2020 events. With regard to my keynote speech, I don't want to spoil the excitement for the participants ahead of the conference. I can tell you, however, that considering the presence of many industry participants, I will especially focus on better public/private cooperation to advance plant health. Only if the public and the private sectors cooperate well together can we achieve great results in protecting plant health and preserving our biodiversity."

For more details and registration for AIPH's International Plant Health Conference click here:

AIPH International Plant Health Conference • AIPH



ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION TO EMBRACE HORTICULTURE

David Higginson joined the Sedgeborrow-based New Leaf Plant nursery in 1995 and took over the business with his wife Nicole in 2013. New Leaf Plants is a producer of 2 million clematises and climbing plants per year and sells these to garden centres across the UK. David is a new member of HTA's Ornamental Management Committee.

UK Horticulture has an excellent support body in the HTA (Horticultural Trade Association). I was recently invited to join the HTA's Ornamentals Management Committee and readily accepted as I feel that it's important to be involved.

The committee's mission is to set policy on strategic issues such as peat and the environment. It aims to collect views from a cross-section of the industry in order to present a broad and balanced viewpoint.

Horticulture in the UK is widely varied in terms of product, size and type of nursery and location, and the HTA aims to represent all of these.

The global pandemic has affected all aspects of life and industry, and horticulture is no exception. However horticulture has shown how resilient it is to these external forces. Consumers have become more aware of the environment and the impact of industry upon it. As we go forward, plants and especially plant protein will play a major role in how the world moves away from animal sources of protein to mitigate against environmental impact.

Horticulture is key to this, and in order for it to continue to thrive, young people must consider it an attractive and viable choice of career. We must encourage the next generation to embrace horticulture if the industry is to effect essential changes. Horticulture is, and will continue to be, an essential UK industry, providing food, jobs and beautiful gardens for the benefit and wellbeing of all.

A final word on the impact of Brexit so far! Suffice to say it has not been an easy transition and we are still discovering the impacts it is having. More on this in my next column.

Preparations for OPF Mexico 2021 are well underway

In the autumn of 2020, the federal government ordered Mexico's premier horticultural trade show OPF Mexico to postpone due to the second wave of coronavirus cases. However, organisers JMT Consultores, OPF Mexico's Consultative Council and IPM Essen are now gearing up for the 2021 edition of the show. FCI sat down with Enrique Arias who spoke about the show's format, its exhibitors and visitors, educational programme and safety measures.

AUTHOR: RON VAN DER PLOEG PHOTOS: OPF AND RON VAN DER PLOEG

In 2019, the world's premier show for ornamental horticulture, IPM ESSEN, announced another expansion of its international network by opening a new trade show in Mexico. The inaugural Ornamental Plants and Flowers (OPF) show took place between 18–20 September 2019, attracting 118 exhibitors from 11 countries. In the Citibanamex convention centre more than 9,600 industry professionals saw cut flowers, cut foliage, potted plants, trees, shrubs, perennials, horticultural supplies, and everything in between.

FOUR MAIN CATEGORIES

Entitled Ornamental Plants & Flowers MEXICO (OPF), powered by IPM ESSEN and endorsed by Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture, OPF 2021 will again be held at the Centro Citibanamex convention centre in Mexico City November 17 to 19, a time of year when the international trade show calendar is not too packed.



OPF Mexico President Enrique Arias Velazco.

Planning and preparation of the trade show and accessories are well underway. "We have segmented the exhibit hall into four main categories: Plants and Flowers, Innovation and Tech, Floral Design and Floristry, and Landscaping and Gardening. Attendees can opt for three formats: face-to-face with digital support, physical booths with remote attention exhibitors and a virtual exhibition. The Netherlands is the partner country of OPF 2021 with the show floor hosting a Dutch country pavilion," says Arias.

COVID-19

Organising a flower trade show isn't something new, but organising a flower trade show during a pandemic is something

none one of us has experienced before. How is the Covid-19 situation in Mexico?

"Covid-19 heavily battered Mexico's ornamentals sector between March and August 2020, causing a considerable drop in sales and job losses. However, Mexico continues to be a sizeable consumer market for plants and flowers. In the run up to Christmas and Valentine's Day, sales of poinsettia and cut flowers respectively were significantly up. Following a spike in Covid-19 cases in winter, the infection rate is now decreasing, reactivating the ornamental industry and other professional sectors that are gradually returning to a new normal without severe restrictions. All necessary precautions and sanitation measures remain in



place,” ensures Arias. Currently, Mexico has no international travel restrictions. However, in terms of travel regulations, it complies with health and hygiene measures within complexes such as hotels, convention centres, restaurants, and tourist sites. OPF Mexico’s venue is a world-class exhibition centre, complying with all international regulations on prevention, sanitation and care of its attendees. Mexico is governed by an epidemiological control system based on traffic light colour ratings. The meaning of these colour ratings can be seen on the following web page: www.bit.ly/3uudLKT In December 2020, Mexico launched its vaccination programme and it is expected to have a considerable advance of the vaccinated population by the time OPF opens. Arias adds, “Exhibitors or international visitors who cannot travel due to the pandemic situation in their country can make use of packages tailored to their requirements and possibilities. Digitalisation of the event has been a priority to make the exhibition available to everyone and for which we are relying on our technology partner, the e-B2B Connect platform.”

PROMISING OUTLOOK

OPF Mexico acts as a platform for strengthening and creating new trade relations with international companies, fuelled by the renewal of T-MEC. “The T-MEC Treaty between Mexico, Canada and the US

is a major opportunity to establish international alliances with Mexico. The three countries have pledged to simplify custom procedures along with other rules to facilitate trade. Thanks to its proximity to the United States, Mexico is a strong business partner, just think of the low transportation and lower labour costs,” notes Arias. OPF Mexico’s preliminary estimates in terms of number of exhibitors, visitors and show floor size look promising. “We have booked a 8,500 m² show floor, based on both in-person and virtual attendees, and taking into account the experience of 2019, in which we received more than 9,000 visitors. OPF Mexico 2021 expects to have more than 10,000 visitors attending both in person and virtually or remotely through videoconferencing, in addition to being a paperless event.”

HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of the 2021 show include the inaugural novelty contest, which will give growers the opportunity to exhibit their new flower and plant varieties. The winner will be determined according to a vote cast by those attending the event, which will be nurserymen, growers, representatives of self-service stores, floral designers, among other industry players. Vying for the highest honour will be orchids, anthuriums, roses, potted plants, cut foliage and bulbs. OPF has the added bonus for international attendees of being able to visit some of the country’s leading flower and plant nurseries

Mexico continues to be a sizeable consumer market for plants and flowers.

In the run up to Christmas, sales of poinsettia were significantly up.

in the states of Morelos, State of Mexico, Puebla and Mexico City. Growers will walk visitors around their properties while sharing their knowledge.

Another OPF specialty the Remote attention stand. “This service entails the presence of a booth with the corporate image of the company, which will have QR codes that will give access to product views, technical data and supplier profiles thanks to the technological support of the e-B2B Connect platform.” OPF Mexico will have a host of international exhibitors from countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Colombia, in addition to the presence of exhibitors from countries such as the United States, Spain, France, South Korea, Japan, among others. Arias says that the organisers will constantly update their audience about new exhibitors through our social networks and digital platforms.

The expo’s educational programme is jam-packed and includes conferences, product launches and workshops discussing innovation, Green City, circular agriculture, and trends in landscaping and floral design.

ONE OF WORLD’S MOST TECH SAVVIEST HORTICULTURAL TRADE SHOWS

OPF Mexico is known for being tech-savvy as it has created digital matchmaking for growers under the B2B Conecta brand. Arias expounds, “The idea is that all attendees, staff and exhibitors will download the app or enter through



the web platform to contact remote exhibitors, attend conferences, and take virtual tours. Exhibitors will have both in-person and on-site presence thanks to the development of the Events section within the virtual business centre."

This tool allows people to register for the expo, exhibit their products, data sheets and company profile before, during and after the event. The exhibitor package includes a one-year membership in the platform and the expo information will remain accessible throughout the year. On the platform, available on pc and apps on Android and IOS, visitors will be able to take virtual tours, attend forums and conferences and also engage in business meetings with exhibitors through real-time chat, email and video calls.

Thanks to the platform, in-person and virtual attendees will be able to communicate with remote exhibitors through videoconferencing, real-time chat or emailing through the platform. There will also be virtual access to the exhibition, where they will be able to find the entire catalogue of products and suppliers, register to the forums and conferences of their interest and be able to observe them remotely and timelessly, as well as take the virtual tour in 3D, as if they were inside the expo, which we are sure will attract many more visitors and will give much dynamism to our event.

AIPH STAMP OF APPROVAL

OPF has been granted AIPH's D category stamp of approval, which is a great honour, says Arias. "We know that the AIPH association watches over the benefit of the horticultural industry and strives to connect all parts from the value chain including breeding, production, trade and marketing in order to be a friendly and profitable business platform for the entire industry of plants and flowers. We are also very pleased to represent Mexico at a global level and to be able to inform our colleagues around the world of the progress that our country has at productive, technological and economic levels." Arias concludes by saying that ornamental horticulture in



A lush display of orchids at the 2019 OPF Mexico show.

Mexico is an industry for which a promising future of expansion lies ahead. "Mexico has the benefit of international trade agreements and alliances that allow the Mexican ornamental industry to seek business abroad. The T-MEC treaty provides our workers, farmers, ranchers and businesses with a high-quality trade agreement that will result in freer markets, fairer trade and strong economic growth in our region. In addition, Mexico's geographic position is attractive to the North American market given our country's low transportation, logistics and labour costs. The country's benign climate, its different altitude and temperature zones, facilitate the production of almost all ornamental species and varieties in Mexico."

If OPF is a barometer of how the Mexican flower industry is performing, Arias thinks that despite the extremely challenging business environment everyone can be a winner. "It is evident that the winners are producers who work according to the rules, respect intellectual property and are in permanent search of new markets. The most affected producers are those who do not make an effort to innovate and improve their quality, who prefer to remain in their comfort zone servicing traditional markets that do not demand quality and formality. OPF's purpose is to help professionalise

OPF MEXICO QUICK FACTS

- Farm tours: 15-16 November 2021.
- Trade show dates: 17-19 November 2021 (10am to 6pm)
- Virtual Business Centre through e-B2B Connect (365 days 24/7)
- Novelty Competition: November 17 to 19, 2021 (10:00 to 18:00 hrs on November 17 and 18 and from 10:00 to 16:00 hrs on November 19).
- Horti-Innovation Forum (November 17 to 19, 2021)
- Green City Forum (November 17 to 19, 2021)
- Master Creation Forum (November 17 to 19, 2021).

People interested in being exhibitors can get information through these links:

Presencial Stand Application Form

<https://zfrmz.com/DDzh2zcKpWD8voXYkBV>

Remote Stand Application Form

<https://zfrmz.com/hHY1hplPUomtA3tvSEH3>

Apply to be an exhibitor

<https://opfexpo.com/aplica-para-ser-expositor-2021/>

Mail: info@opfexpo.com

and internationalise Mexico's plant and flower industry, landscaping and floral design industry; to create a robust and transversal green business platform with local and global vision using the latest digital technologies; and to bridge the gaps between production and trade to create a friendly and profitable business platform."



SAVE THE DATE

NOVEMBER
17th, 18th y 19th 2021

Centro
citibanamex
Mexico City

NL Netherlands
Partner Country 2021

event approved by  **AIPH**

www.opfexpo.com

info@opfexpo.com

Tel. +52 (777) 317 8286

+52 (55) 1249 1063 / +52 (442) 721 1073

e-B2B CONNECT
AGRI-OPF

Virtual Business Center Specialized
on Agriculture and Ornamental Sector

b2bconecta.io





Left to right Henk Groenendijk, Leo Kapiteijn, Giuliano Magnani, standing is Giacomo Bruni.

LEO KAPITEIJN DIES AT 84

Leonardus, Henricus, Johannes Kapiteijn - better known as - Leo Kapiteijn died in Anna Paulowna (Netherlands) on 21 January 2021, aged 84. Arturo Croci, one of FCI's Italy correspondents, pays tribute to a dear friend and one of the 'most Italian' among Dutch horticultural entrepreneurs.

"With Leo's passing, another legendary industry icon has gone. I always considered him to be one of the most prominent Dutch Italians. Not only did he speak Italian fluently, but he also knew many dialects, including complicated ones such as Piedmontese, Milanese and Piacenza. He would often address me in my own dialect.

The Kapiteijn company is one of the most renowned flower bulb farms in the Netherlands and has a proud 115 years of history. Leonardus (Leen) founded the company in Lisse in 1898.

Two of his sons, Jan and Cornelis, added a second company in Breezand in 1926, which they further expanded in 1937.

The first time I met Cornelis Kapiteijn was in November 1970. We first shook hands in Cantù, near Como, at the premises of Raites, a wholesaler of floristry items and flower bulbs, owned by Giacomo Bruni. Cornelis was a nice chap who travelled in a black Citroen, which at that time was a huge car (I would later have two).

In a much smaller car, a Simca, Cornelis' son Leo had also started visiting Italian companies. I visited Holland with Giacomo Bruni. And each time we concluded our trip in Breezand to say hello to Leo.

Bruni has collaborated with Kapiteijn since 1969 and this collaboration/friendship continues to this day.

The year 1975 marked the inaugural edition of the Flormart trade exhibition in Padua. Kapiteijn was among its first exhibitors. Meanwhile, the market

for bulbs in Italy was booming. Leo was then joined by Henk Groendendijk (Enrico) who for all of us became 'an adopted son of Kapiteijn'.

Kapiteijn was the first to invent the bulb display box, which made a great business contribution to van and garden centres. Kapiteijn was the first bulb supplier in Italy, the largest producer of hyacinth bulbs in Europe and today is the most specialised Calla producer.

The Kapiteijn family has always been closely-knit; today, there are several cousins who are taking the company to the next level. Leo gradually introduced his son Kees into the business. Following Leo's retirement, Kees became responsible for the Italian market.

Leo, his wife Riet and Enrico were all part of the great family of Italian floriculture.

Flower growers, wholesalers and garden retailers always welcomed them with open arms when visiting Italy. They had lunch with customers and collaborators. And I had the pleasure to have them as guests in my home.

Leo, we will miss your smile and friendly style. Goodbye Leo, and grazie from all of us.

Colleagues and long-time industry friends have expressed their shock and sadness at the news of Leo's death. He leaves behind his wife Riet and three children, Lisette, Kees and Stendert.

Viva La Vita,
Arturo Croci