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FloraCulture International

November-December 2017

Theme

Cooperation

Feature

**The ideology of
cooperating**

Up Close

Christmas is coming

Country

**South Africa:
The flower
business**



Fundamental flowers

Florists and growers sharing knowledge

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Preface

Cooperating in FloraCulture International

For as long as the floral industry has existed, cooperation has been important. Growers worked together and still do to achieve purchasing and sales benefits. They share knowledge in order to improve the quality of their product and their business. Wholesalers and florists have their own ways of cooperating with each other and with other parts of the supply chain. So there is ample reason to create a special issue of FloraCulture International dedicated to cooperation. You'll find articles about the father of many cooperatives, Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, as well as about Royal FloraHolland adapting the cooperative to the 21st century. You'll also find articles about Italian growers who enter the world market through co-operatives and Floral Fundamentals, an organization created for top growers to connect with top florists worldwide.

And there is more with Africa as this issue's continent, South Africa as its country and Stellenbosch as its city. You'll also find previews of events during the Christmas season.

As always, we've tried to make each issue of FloraCulture International worthwhile. Let us know what you think at: info@floracultureinternational.com

FCI Team

Columns



Fred van Tol tells you how he sees cooperation.



John Ingwersen tells you about the advantages of getting older

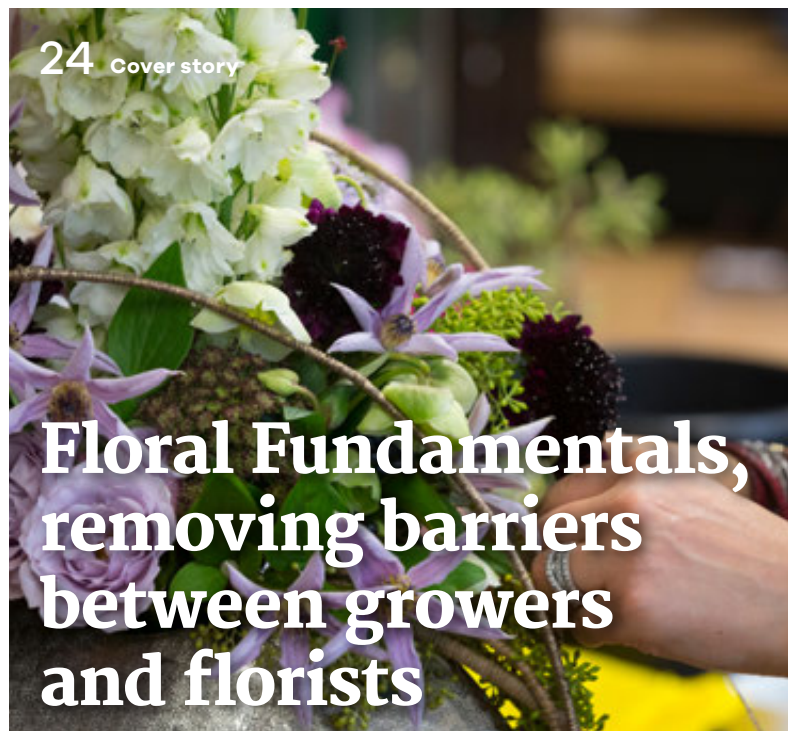


Jack Goossens, Royal FloraHolland's Chairman of the Advisory Board, tells you why he works hard to make his organization stronger.

Contents

Minds

24 Cover story



Floral Fundamentals, removing barriers between growers and florists

Growers and florists influence each other heavily, but rarely do they meet in person. Floral Fundamentals thinks there should be regular contact between the top growers and top florists of the world. So they organize regular meetings between the two.

26 Cover story

Cooperating Italian style

Growers from Central Italy have united in order to reach the world market with their products. Through shrewd logistics cooperation they sell their products at Dutch and German auctions. Carlo Elia tells us how they do this.

28 Up close

AIPH, in the interest of growers worldwide

AIPH, the International Organization of Producers of Flowers and Plants, tries to stimulate flower and plant sales in different ways. On page 28 you can read how they do this.

Meetings

8

Reinventing the co-operative

Members of Royal FloraHolland are adapting their co-operative for the 21st century. How are they doing this and what process is being followed?

12 **Feature**

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen and the cooperative ideology

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen is considered the godfather of co-operatives. Professor Theresia Theurl tells us under what circumstances he worked, what he achieved and why a 19th century system still has value in the 21st century.

38 **Sharing events**

What's hot?

We share highlights of upcoming events that could be of interest to you.

Markets

16

Analysing Africa

African (especially East African) flower production has become huge over the past few decades. How did that transpire and are there any threats to new developments?

16 **Continent**

Going east

Although you might think that flower production would have succeeded all over Africa, it has thrived in Kenya and Ethiopia. We analyse why.

18 **Country**

The flower business in South Africa

South Africa is, of course, an African country with many impoverished residents. But it also contains a relatively large middle class, able to afford flowers. What does that mean for the South African flower industry?

22 **City**

Stellenbosch floristry, African or Afrikaner?

Stellenbosch is a university city in the Cape Province region which looks quite European, but also very African. The question is: how does this affect what florists create? We asked Chris Willemse if Stellenbosch floristry is African or Afrikaner?

30 **Case**

Christmas is coming.

Those Christmas feelings start when November ends and the days get shorter. But garden centres start preparing for Christmas as early as January. How do they deal with the Christmas frenzy?



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Working together is success

“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.” Henry Ford’s quote says it all. Your success will proliferate by cooperating with partners in your supply chain. A century ago, Dutch growers of flowers and potted plants realized they should join forces instead of doing everything themselves. In the early 20th century they started to set up local co-operatives, a business model that was gaining traction in many countries worldwide.

Not only do growers cooperate with product sales, but also in sharing knowledge, marketing, purchasing materials and logistics. I think this is one of the key reasons that the industry is as powerful as it is today. By sharing your expertise with your colleagues, you multiply your potential revenue. Cooperating in logistics makes everybody more efficient. Purchasing materials together improves your negotiating power with suppliers which, in turn, enhances your market share and leads to better margins. Other industries have proven that cooperation creates value. Big competitors like Apple and Samsung have worked together on specific smartphone elements. In the automotive sector, Toyota and BMW have shared knowledge to create the first hydrogen engine.

The digital world has created new possibilities. Zalando, for example, is working closely with major brands. Instead of just being a webshop selling products, Zalando opened its platform to partners who can join and improve their business. Together they are creating a whole new ecosystem

where customers can have the ultimate experience; access to a whole world of brands.

If you want to buy new sneakers, you will find Adidas shoes, direct from the factory, in the Zalando webshop. You can also pick them up at Adidas’ Berlin store. But there is more to the ecosystem. Once you have purchased your sneakers, you will be notified about the latest releases or get recommendation from designers as to which kind of jeans goes best with your purchase.

If we were to create a similar ecosystem in our industry, it would present us with great opportunities. Since the industry already has various kinds of cooperation, it is only a small step to move up to the next level. One platform to share our knowledge, advice and recommendations but also to simply connect suppliers and buyers. Being a global marketplace, Royal FloraHolland is already working on this platform: Floriday. Feel free to get in contact and see the possibilities this can bring to your company. Let’s keep on working together!

Fred van Tol

Manager International Development
Royal FloraHolland

Want to know more?

www.royalfloraholland.com/globalization

A close-up photograph of a bald man with black-rimmed glasses and a grey hoodie. He is looking slightly to the right and speaking, with his mouth open. His hands are raised in front of him, with his fingers spread, as if he is explaining something or making a point. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with large windows.

A cooperative with 4,200 smart members



“We were determined to give every member the opportunity to speak his mind.”

(left) Leo Keijzer, (mid) Bianca van Eijk and (right) Richard Kneppers

After an 18 month process, Royal FloraHolland is about to reshape its co-operative principles. On December 7th, members will decide on major changes in regards to membership and a co-operative tariff structure. Next summer decisions will be instituted on co-operative leadership. These changes were prepared by co-operative members, not by the co-operative staff.

In early 2016, Royal FloraHolland formed a Leading Team of thirteen members/growers who had to come up with proposals on two subjects: future leadership and tariffs and forms of membership. Richard Kneppers, co-owner of Maridadi Flowers in Naivasha, Kenya, Bianca van Eijk, a Dutch grower of Agapanthus and Royal FloraHolland's Stakeholder Manager, Leo Keijzer, told us about the process and its outcome.

“We started by defining what a co-operative is and should be. Then we started the process of members speaking with fellow members. During the past twelve months, 1,116 unique members attended the member sessions. Some of them came to several sessions, which meant that, in total, the Leading Team welcomed almost 2,300 members to the sessions. Normally the co-operative and its staff would organize such a process, but this time there was only staff to guide the process. We were taught how to lead these types of discussions but were at liberty to debate as we pleased. The real advantage of this approach was that honest discussions occurred. People learned to listen to the others' points of view. We went back to our co-operative roots. And surprisingly, the differences of opinion weren't as big as we thought they would be. There were meetings in the Netherlands, Africa, Israel and elsewhere. We held discussions with growers of both large and small nurseries. Nearly everyone agreed that there is a need for co-operatives because people see the benefits of cooperating, just as they did one hundred years ago. If people were critical, it was about the co-operative's communication style: sending too much information and too little discussion.

“The Leading Team provided another approach. The members could speak candidly and they did. Co-operative staff weren't even allowed to visit Leading Team sessions, which led to this openness. We were determined to give every member the opportunity to speak his mind. Even members who never speak at meetings had their say. Because it was a Leading Team of members/growers, the proposals about co-operative tariffs were far more numerous than they would have been had the co-operative staff made the proposals. Another result of this process was that we have now started testing a Member's Council that may replace the General Member's Meeting.

“A decision on the new tariff structure will be made in December. In the new structure, unlike the current one, costs will be paid by members who benefit directly from them. This may lead to advantages for growers with higher turnovers. Of course this means that growers with smaller nurseries may have to pay additional costs but in the process we have been able to convince them of the practicality of the new structure. In a way, it is what they suggested themselves when we asked for their opinions, from which we created a proposal which was then discussed with them again.

“Basically our starting principle was simple. Royal FloraHolland has 4,200 members. We knew that these 4,200 members would be smarter than a single co-operative. We used the intelligence of our members to strengthen the co-operative. Now we can adapt the co-operative Royal FloraHolland to the 21st century with the support of our members.”

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The advantages of getting older

One of the advantages of getting older (yes, that's true, there are some positives, however few) is that one tends to gain perspectives that youth does not allow. There's no right or wrong in this, and I haven't the least interest in inciting intergenerational strife. I suppose it's about values, or more accurately, what keeps us going during the times when it would be much easier to chuck it all in, game over...

I think when we're younger it boils down to the money, and the sense of achievement related to making ever more of that necessary evil, i.e., the bigger the number the better I must be doing. Over time however, doubts start to creep in. For most of us (there's always the exception to every rule), the money alone is no longer enough to justify the hard work, the long hours, the sacrifices involved in achieving financial success. I'm not saying money is not important, it is...very.... but it's not everything and at the end of the day if all you're measuring yourself by is your bank account balance I'm going to guess you've got some steep therapy bills...

Rather, it's the relationships we develop and grow over time that (I think) become increasingly important to both our sense of accomplishment and our personal sense of well-being. Regardless of how one is doing personally if those around us in our personal/business orbit are doing ok it lends some semblance of stability. But it takes the worst of times to really understand the value of relationships. For me, this catharsis came during the recession of 2007-2010. For the first time in my life I really found out who my friends were. All I can say is that one tends to remember very clearly when someone was there for them when they most needed it.

But life is an on-going and changing thing, which means that quite naturally and necessarily the structure and content of our relationships must and will change. Many of the 'old guard' who helped this 'kid' out a decade ago are now retiring/retired/or gulp, no longer with us. That's kind of scary.

I almost feel like a junior in high school. All the seniors are exciting about graduating and moving on with their lives, and I'm still stuck going through the motions. So every time I hear about someone selling their business and moving on, it leaves me with a strange empty feeling. Another relationship over and done with...and the very real temptation to say, the hell with it, I've had enough too...

I guess it's a natural enough process, and I just need to adapt to a changing reality, one in which the context of relationships is totally the same, and all that's changed is the names that are plugged into the various roles. And that too will change, soon enough...

About the writer...

John Ingwersen graduated with a degree in marketing from Georgetown University in 1990, and founded Jungle Jack's, Inc. in 1995.



Friedrich Raiffeisen and the ideology of cooperating

Basically there are two ways to get societies out of poverty, both rooted in 19th century Germany. One goes back to Karl Marx, urging proletarians to conquer the state to strengthen their economic position. The other goes back to Friedrich Raiffeisen (1818–1888), the Mayor of a village near Cologne. On the basis of his Christian beliefs he taught poor people to help themselves by cooperating. Raiffeisen's ideas strongly influenced agricultural and horticultural industries.

“I can only help people if they learn to solve their problems themselves.”

Friedrich Raiffeisen



Professor Theresia Theurl, Head of the Department for Co-operatives at Münster University (Germany) tells us how Raiffeisen's ideology has influenced co-operatives both then and now.

“Raiffeisen lived in the mid-19th Century when many Europeans were poverty-stricken. He cared about their problems, but unlike Marx he didn't believe the state should improve their fate, rather, people should find their own solutions. He never stopped explaining his ideas and succeeded in innovating society. He was convinced that you can achieve together what you cannot on your own. All those small German farmers were weak on their own, but strong together. When there was a famine, Raiffeisen wouldn't buy bread for the poor. Instead he founded a co-operative so they could buy flour and bake their own bread. He also used the co-operative model to establish banks thus giving poor farmers access to credit with which to invest.

“Co-operatives go back to medieval times (Hanse cities, guilds). But Raiffeisen was the right man at the right time, because he understood their potential. He said, ‘I can only help people if they learn to solve their problems themselves.’ Co-operatives are not a form of altruism but rather ‘well-defined self-interest’ as people would say in those days.

By constantly writing and speaking about his ideas and founding co-operatives whenever and wherever he could, he became the founding father of co-operatives in Germany and worldwide. Nowadays there are co-operatives (agricultural and others) in more than one hundred countries.

“In Raiffeisen's co-operative model, many small owners have a vote. Co-operatives are successful if they are not too large and members agree on key issues. But I also know examples of extremely well-functioning co-operatives with over 40,000 members. Still, a good co-operative needs good organization. And of course it has to be profitable. To be successful it should have existing assets.

If the members of a co-operative think the co-operative has outlived its initial goals, they should ask if it is still relevant and what alternatives exist. It often appears that the alternatives are less attractive than the co-operative itself. Then people are back on track of talking again which is vital for any co-operative. In order to be economically successful you have to solve your group problems together.

“One shouldn't establish a co-operative if the only goal is a high yield. The achievements of a co-operative and the relations with its members are vital for any co-operative. A co-operative is not about tomorrow's yield; it is about long-term achievements for its members.

“Since Raiffeisen's day his ideas have spread worldwide. You also find co-operatives in Latin America and Africa, established to strengthen people's stake in their vocation. People have realized that you may move fast on your own, but you need to cooperate to reach the finish line. I think that is the foremost idea Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen taught us.”



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Continent
Country
City



Creating floral awareness in East Africa

Being aware of opportunities has been vital in developing the East African floral business.



In the past four decades East Africa has grown into a flower production region of global importance. How did this happen?

An abundance of available labour coupled with low wages has influenced the development of East African flower production. But there are lots of African countries that have low wages so that cannot be the sole reason for success. So what is?

Certainly stability is an important factor. Both politically and economically, Kenya and Ethiopia have had a relatively stable investment climate compared to other African countries. Although Kenya has a more liberal economy and Ethiopia has a more Marxist one, both governments have tried to stimulate floral production because of its positive influence on employment and exports. In contrast to the benefits of this stability, there have been negative aspects. Politics in Kenya haven't been that stable lately and there were riots in Ethiopia when angry rebels burned down nurseries. But no doubt political and economic stability has been a plus for the region.

On top of that, both Kenya and Ethiopia already had relatively strong regional economies when their flower industries started. This means there already existed well-established trade networks and usable logistics. This made it easier to export flowers from Nairobi or Addis Ababa than it was from Accra or Harare.

Both in Kenya and Ethiopia emergent companies were soon strong and wise enough to form trade associations. Early

on there was cooperation to invest in greenhouses, fertilizer, etc. Cooperation also developed quickly in logistics so that flowers could be flown from Nairobi and Addis Ababa airports to destinations worldwide. It is remarkable that unlike Latin America, East Africa has embraced the cooperative principle. Many growers, both with and without Dutch backgrounds, joined Royal FloraHolland. Not that this is an easy process. Organizations like Royal FloraHolland should do their utmost to be cognizant of what African growers need from their cooperatives.

A good example of cooperating is the Flower Business Park near Lake Naivasha where growers from Kenya and abroad joined together with Dutch breeders to create a robust production area. Although growers in Kenya came from different backgrounds (Kenyan/British, Kenyan/Indian and Dutch), they managed to create a floral awareness in the region thanks to organizations like the Kenya Flower Council. And although Ethiopian floristry has a different history, this floral awareness arose there, too. Governments see the added value of the floral business for their economy. Growers themselves have started to train their staff and take care of health care and education for them.

Being aware of opportunities has been vital in developing the East African floral business. Kenyan production started at low altitudes like Lake Naivasha

and led to the production of so-called 'supermarket roses'. The Equator, for example, boasts exceptional conditions for growing roses: steady temperatures and twelve hours of sunlight per day. Soon growers in Kenya and Ethiopia discovered the advantages of growing at higher altitudes, allowing them to cultivate long stem, large bud roses for a high-end market.

Where there are positives there are also potential negatives. We already mentioned possible political instability which could lead to economic instability. Additionally, growers in East Africa have to deal with four or more currencies (Euro, US dollar, Asian and Australian currencies in addition to local currencies). This point is well worth considering.

Another possible threat lies in sustainability. Most East African growers try to cultivate with as little damage to the environment as possible. But you don't have to be clairvoyant to predict that someday consumers in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia will start asking questions about flowers transported halfway around the world that only last one week.

Still, East Africa has become a major, steadily growing player in global flower production due in part to a well-established infrastructure. With good logistic connections, not only to Europe but also to regions like the US, Asia and Australia, East Africa is here to stay as a leading floral producer.

A different African country

South Africa is different from other African countries. It has a different history and because of that, it has always had a relatively large upper and middle class capable of buying flowers. On the other hand, South African wages cannot compete with those in East Africa. How does this influence the South African flower business?

Approximately 50 million people live in South Africa, most of whom are poor. Some 8% of them enjoy the highest incomes and some 25% belong to the up-and-coming middle class. This means the majority cannot afford to buy flowers but there is a growing number of people who can. This is good news for the floral business. Although you will find the largest number of flower buyers in the highest

tax brackets, the middle class are gradually starting to purchase, as well. The local market is growing although it is difficult to convince young South Africans to buy flowers. This is a world-wide problem, but the added challenge for South Africa is that it has no equivalent to the Flower Council of Holland. Although there is some flower promotion, it is only done on an individual basis.

SPECIAL DAYS

Flowers in South Africa are mainly purchased for special occasions. Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Secretary Day, birthdays, marriages, funerals and other special occasions are popular, but far fewer flowers are bought for normal day-to-day use.

Roses, Chrysanthemums, Lilies, Lisianthus and Gypsophila are among the most popular flowers in South Africa. Summer flowers, mainly grown in the Johannesburg region, are also popular and locally grown Proteas and Fynbos foliage are desirable, as well.



GROWING IN GREENHOUSES

The South African production of flowers and foliage is doing quite well. Flowers nowadays are mainly grown in greenhouses. The water being used comes from wells or rainwater. The Johannesburg region is ideally located for greenhouse flowers. Johannesburg has an auction, Multiflora (South Africa's only flower auction), that encompasses 20% of local sales. Many growers also choose to sell directly to wholesalers and supermarket chains. Although its business is relatively healthy, South African floral production has its challenges. South African rose growers have strong competition from their East African counterparts who benefit from lower wages and better climate for the cultivation of roses. Production in South Africa is roughly 30% lower than in Kenya or Ethiopia. South Africa has a wide range of floral exports, traditional flowers grown in the northern territories and Protea and Fynbos foliage, mainly grown in the Cape Province. But these products need a Mediterranean climate with warm,

dry summers and damp winters. However, in recent years the Cape Province has suffered from long, dry periods. The only considerable production of *Leucospermum* is in the eastern part of South Africa, in KwaZulu Natal.

South Africa really is different from other African countries in that it has a floral history and people have been cultivating and buying flowers for decades. It has a real, local flower market and considerable local production. Though not without its issues, South African floral production does appear to have a solid future.

The South African production of flowers and foliage is doing quite well.

Africa, an expanding continent

In previous decades, Africa emerged as a leader in the production of cut flowers and young plants. In East Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia, in particular, have developed significant floral industries. Initially, this success was due to favourable temperatures and low wages. But these days there is more to it. Africa has developed a burgeoning floral business of its own, though European-initiated and oriented. Africa boasts successful companies and improved logistics and will undoubtedly strengthen its market position in the coming years.

Export Africa cut flowers

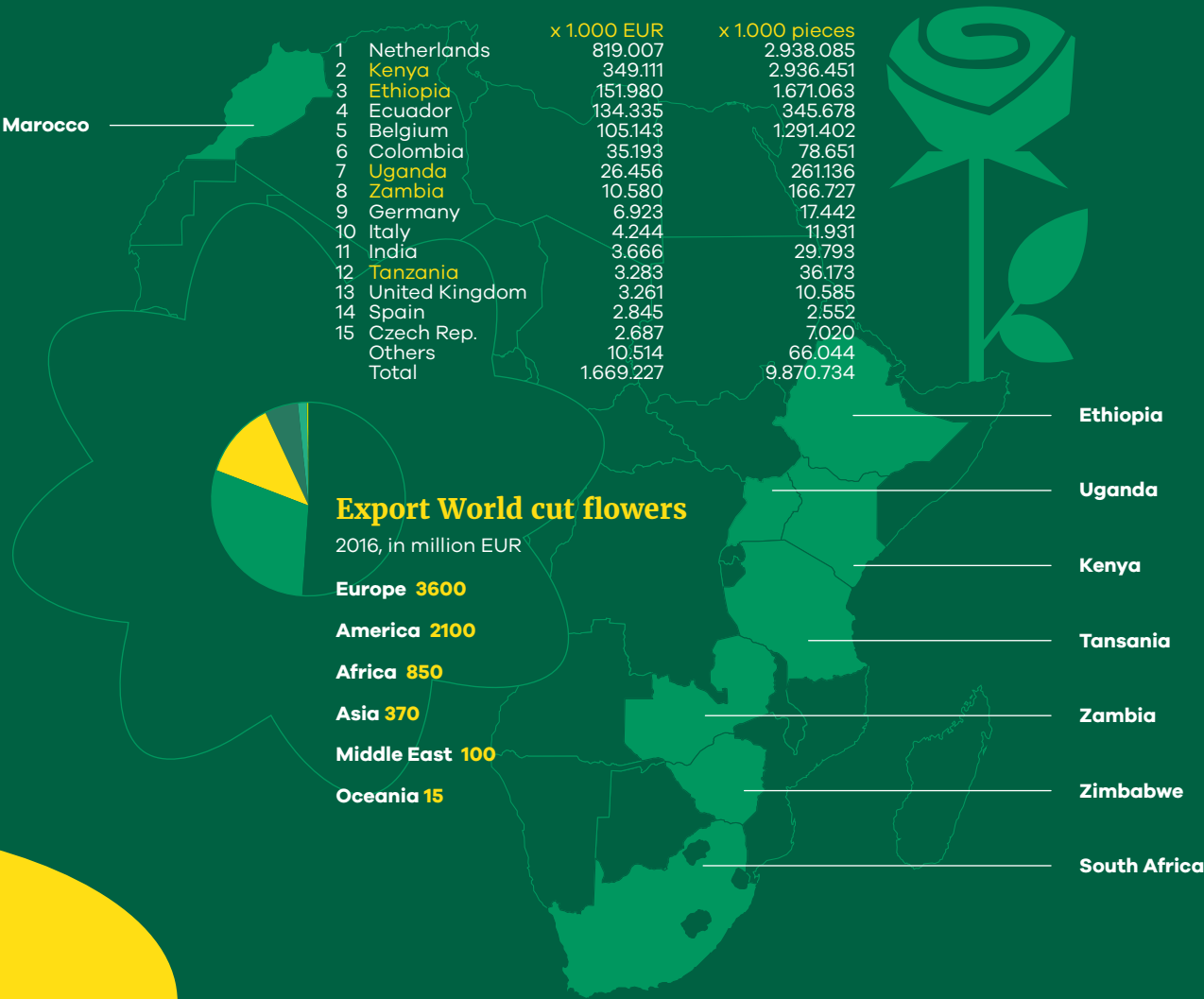
2016, in million EUR



Source: AIPH International. Statistics
Flowers & Plants Yearbook 2017

Top 15 Countries Exporting Roses

fresh cut to EU-Countries in 2016



Export of live plants

2016, in million EUR



Export of cuttings, slips and unrooted

2016, in million EUR



Okasie Stellenbosch, African or Afrikaner?

“Giving our customers the opportunity to choose is what distinguishes us from a supermarket.”



You want to see the Dutch-European roots of South Africa? Go to Stellenbosch, a city filled with history. But make no mistake, Stellenbosch is not just historical. It has a large university, is an important business town and the nearby wine area produces great wines.

HOW ABOUT FLORISTRY IN STELLENBOSCH?

We asked Chris Willemse, one of the owners of Okasie. Okasie is a Stellenbosch flower shop which has a separate department for wedding and event decorations, leasing décor and furniture.

MULTICULTURAL

“Our staff is multicultural which is a reflection of South African society. The majority of our customers prefer flowers with softer hues so we train our staff to work with these colours and create a consistent product. When a floral arrangement leaves our shop, I cannot tell which employee created it. I think we have a very accomplished team now.”

WE TRY TO DISTINGUISH OURSELVES FROM A SUPERMARKET

“We always have a number of ready-to-go bouquets in store in various price ranges. We deliver a true European style but we also make more

modern, loosely tied bouquets. Giving our customers the opportunity to choose is what distinguishes us from a supermarket. The nearby Woolworth has a giant floral department with good stuff, so if a customer enters our shop, we should thank him. He can buy flowers anywhere but he chose to come to us. This means we have to distinguish ourselves. Our shop has to look bright, clean and sophisticated. It has to make a customer happy. He should find flowers and vases here he won't find elsewhere. That is why we import vases from the Netherlands and Germany.

In South Africa most of the year you cannot present your flowers outdoors like European florists do because of high temperatures. It is rather difficult to acquire a solid wide assortment of flowers. We get flowers from wholesalers that buy at the Johannesburg Flower Market and there are growers from the Cape region that come to us to sell their flowers. But you are never guaranteed that you'll get what you ordered,

which can be tricky if you need certain flowers for a wedding or an event. That's why we bought land on which we grow classical Roses, Hydrangea and greens. We are even building a greenhouse for the cultivation of Dendrobium. The consistent availability of quality flowers gives us an advantage.”

OUR FLORISTRY IS MAINLY EUROPEAN

“Our main source of income is from prosperous clients, both individuals and businesses. Many famous vineyards near Stellenbosch have their reception areas decorated with our floral arrangements. Despite African elements, our floristry is mainly European. At least three times per year we go overseas for inspiration. We follow trends on the internet and peruse magazines. And when we see something of floral interest, we take photos to send to our staff in order to inspire them.”

The importance of being a family

Before reading this article you should watch this:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d83Q3zDYk4&feature=youtu.be

In less than eight minutes this film gets to the heart of Floral Fundamentals, an organisation in which all parts of the horticulture chain work in tandem to strengthen the industry. Here's the story.

“This is a meeting of floral styles worldwide.”



At its core, Floral Fundamentals brings together florists, wholesalers and growers to share their passion for flowers. By doing so, people see what the other contributes to the industry. It is about creating mutual understanding and mutual trust.

It started with people realizing that the established method of floral promotion was insufficient. It missed the true target group by placing too much emphasis on lifestyle and forgetting that it's the florist who eventually sells the product to the consumer. Things sped up when wholesalers Marius Dekker and Piet van Kampen and grower Steef van Adrichem met with Alison Bradley, who is both a floral designer and a floral journalist. "We wanted to do on a low-budget what others with more promotional money failed to do; get florists back into the limelight. So we developed the idea of Floral Fundamentals. In Floral Fundamentals growers learn to see the industry from a florist's perspective and florists learn to see the industry from a grower's perspective. We planned to organise Floral Fundamentals weekends in which top florists from all over the world would come together, visit nurseries of top growers and have two whole days to create top floristry. This is not extremely expensive. You need some airline tickets, hotel rooms and wholesome food. When we revealed our plans, we found a group of growers and suppliers to finance it. Initially, we held the photo shoot weekends at various growers but then found a location at the Aalsmeer Boerma Institute in Holland where these top florists like coming to, to network with others in the industry."

Floral Fundamental weekends have a simple objective. After having done a growers' tour, they start working with flowers. Every florist makes at least three hand-tied bouquets for a variety of prices with approximately 150 arrangements being completed over the course of the weekend. All of these arrangements and bouquets are photographed and described professionally. The

results end up in a Floral Fundamentals e-magazine, which everyone can see at www.floralfundamentals.com. Three times a year we have a group of top florists create commercial floristry to inspire their colleagues worldwide. At the beginning of the weekend, we make a hand-tied, low-cost bouquet, a mainstream bouquet and a bouquet to the florists' own taste. This is a meeting of floral styles worldwide. But it has to be commercial so commercial florists can find inspiration to be used in their shots in Lucerne, Cape Town, Vancouver or Kuala Lumpur."

"One of Floral Fundamentals major spin-offs is that florists and growers meet each other. They get to know each other, become friends and exchange information. Both florists and growers learn the other's passion. Growers learn what florists do with their products. Florists learn the breadth of the floral assortment and the stories behind it. Both florists and growers are always eager to participate in Floral Fundamentals. These are weekends full of revelations. "I never knew it took twenty years to develop a new *Gloriosa* or a new *Tulip*," a florist told us.

Maybe the essence of Floral Fundamentals is the family aspect. Being connected to Floral Fundamentals means being part of a group of top florists and top growers who share knowledge and information. For a whole weekend they work alongside each other, seeing each other's work and being influenced by it. They learn to use other flowers that are not often available at home that they can order. They are inspired by each other's styles and they inspire colleagues worldwide by the beauty of flowers and floristry.

If you read this article before you watched the video, we still recommend that you see it. The emotional effect will make it clear what Floral Fundamentals is about; creating an international floral family.

Cooperating Italian style

“If you produce a better quality product, your price will be better.”



In Italy cooperatives have a long history. But cooperatives aren't a thing of the past. This is proven by United Italy, a cooperative of small growers in Latina, south of Rome. General Manager Carlo Elia has the story.

“Twenty years ago a number of growers realised that together you could develop more market power. My father was one of them. I was a young man then, having just left university. The growers had a marketing problem. They sold their products directly through a Dutch wholesaler, but it was a troublesome relationship. There were pricing problems or quality control problems or both. The growers asked me to do something about their situation. I started talks with representatives of Royal FloraHolland. In 1998, as a consequence of these talks, we founded United Italy. United Italy started gathering the products of some forty Latina growers, transported them to Northern Europe to have them auctioned at Dutch, Belgian and German auctions. After six years the cooperative expanded its services. Next to collecting and transporting we also started with sorting and packaging. Since then United Italy offers more and more services to its (approximately forty) growers/members. Growers can buy a tractor or young plants or fertilizer. If a member asks us, we can even do (part of) the growing and

harvesting processes. There is no obligation to do so. But there are older growers, who do not have a successor for their nursery. They want to keep the nursery but want to get rid of the work. That's where United Italy can help.

“It is not the cooperative that tells the members what to do. Our direction as an organization is determined by our cooperative system and by our members. The only real obligation members have is the obligation to have all their products sold by United Italy. Our main achievement is that United Italy makes life easier for its members. They don't have to discuss price politics anymore, their price is the clock price, made at auction. If you produce a better quality product, your price will be better. It's as simple as that. We are in regular contact with Royal FloraHolland and also visit Holland. The Dutch visit us and our members on a regular basis. We keep our members well-informed about Royal FloraHolland developments. We want our members to participate in United Italy. Thus, since every member is well-informed and we have a personal, flexible relationship with every

individual member, there is no discussion about our policy.

“What we did is similar to what Dutch growers did a hundred years ago: gaining market strength by joining forces in a cooperative. We feel supported by Royal FloraHolland and we remain strong supporters of the clock system. In the Netherlands many growers do increasingly more direct sales. But the auction clock gives us steady and solid prices because our buyers always know where to find us. We only sell at the clock so our buyers know that even our scarcest products will be available there and nowhere else. Our relationship with Royal FloraHolland, and the certainties this gives to our members, enables United Italy to think ahead. We have a project in which we want to double our Eucalyptus production within ten years. And year by year we enlarge our flower supplies by twenty percent. With new varieties (for instance, Ranunculus) but also with existing varieties (such as Lilium and Paeonia). So by servicing our members, cooperating in United Italy gives them every reason to be happy.”



Five ways to stimulate flower and plant consumption

Sharing knowledge is important for AIPH, visionaries of the future of worldwide production, trade and marketing of ornamental plants.



“AIPH, Association Internationale des Producteurs de l’Horticulture, is the international organization of growers of flowers, plants, bulbs, shrubs and trees. Its members are comprised of growers worldwide. With a very small team of employees, AIPH tries to stimulate the consumption of flowers and plants in five different ways. What’s their strategy?”

AIPH:

1. Promotes the industry by organizing horticultural exhibitions worldwide.
2. Stimulates the greening of urban environments.
3. Combats international developments that obstruct the blooming of the industry.
4. Shares developments and knowledge which help entrepreneurs to flourish.
5. Promotes best practices thus promoting the industry’s exceptional entrepreneurship.

World Expos

World Horticultural Expos are important to get people acquainted with the industry. These events are being organized worldwide and often governments are taking the initiative to be a partner organizing the event. These expos provide an opportunity to show the capabilities of the industry.

Greening the city

Greening cities can be a spin-off of world expos. A park environment is often the product of a world expo. Moreover, greening cities is a real game changer. A greener city can help combat global warming because it combats the urban island effect. In urban areas average temperatures are higher than rural areas because cities lack an abundance of green areas and permeable surfaces. In green environments the urban island effect is reduced and AIPH is organizing conferences and sharing knowledge about green cities. This issue is gaining popularity because the industry can create real solutions for a serious problem. Besides the fact that a green environment combats crime, it is good for our health and enlarges social coherence within urban societies. Greening the city can be of commercial importance, provided the industry is willing to cooperate with governments and fellow companies.

Helping the industry bloom

There are certain issues that can prevent the industry worldwide from blooming. Take for instance aspects of plant health, phytosanitary regulations and breeders rights. AIPH is aiming to create a worldwide level playing field. Not by lobbying but by researching these aspects thus giving ammunition to national organizations for their national lobbying efforts.

Sharing knowledge

Sharing knowledge is important for AIPH, visionaries of the future of worldwide production, trade and marketing of ornamental plants. Which countries will gain relevance in horticulture? Which countries will become less relevant? At formal and informal meetings, AIPH shares its knowledge on this and other issues with its member organizations. Affiliate members like Philips Lighting and MPS help AIPH acquire knowledge it can share.

Promoting best practices

To showcase top entrepreneurs amongst growers of ornamental plants, AIPH, together with founding partner FCI, developed the International Grower of the Year award which will be given out at the next IPM in Essen (Germany) on January 23, 2018. There are three categories in finished plants (cut flowers, plants and trees) and two new categories for sustainable companies and small companies. Companies that win this award have become good national and international ambassadors for the industry.

For more info on AIPH visit: www.aiph.org.



Christmas begins in January



“Differences in celebrating Christmas have commercial consequences.”

Those Christmas feelings start when November ends and the days get shorter. But garden centres start preparing for Christmas as early as January. How do you deal with the Christmas frenzy? Christian Rauser has the answer. He is the Head of Marketing at Ernst Meier AG, a Swiss, family-owned garden centre not far from Zurich.

“It all starts with visiting Christmas trade fairs like Christmasworld and talking to suppliers, both of decorative and green materials. In the first six months of the year we buy our Christmas goods. In May, a special project team starts preparing for our Christmas presentation. By August and September everything has been delivered and temporarily stored in one of our halls. By the end of September the presentation framework is ready. Then it is time for decorators, florists and gardeners to fill the shelves with product. In the subsequent weeks our normal merchandise is removed so that our central hall is free to create our Christmas presentation. This year our opening date is October 23.”

“Of course the weather plays a role. It’s hard to get into the Christmas spirit when temperatures rise above 20°Celsius. But sales really take off when they get below 10°. Until that point we offer our clients our regular selection of products. When temperatures drop, it’s time for Poinsettia and Hellebore. This year our presentation is a classical one. The theme is ‘Our Christmas,’ sharing the warmth of olden days; more natural colours and less bling-bling than in previous years. But it’s not only about ‘the good old days.’ We will also showcase new international trends and surprising accessories. It’s connecting tradition with innovation and about the love for detail when decorating for Christmas. Although our Christmas presentation is huge, it only fills a quarter of our garden centre. If you want to visit us for our regular products, you’ll have every opportunity to do so. But you will find the spirit of Christmas pervades our entire garden centre.

“Being a family-owned company, we are passionate about

being in touch with our customers. Members of the Meier family are here on a day-to-day basis so we get lots of direct feedback from customers. So it’s easy to get reactions to our Christmas presentation. It makes us happy when customers are happy with the quality and aesthetics of our assortment. When that’s the case, we can count on healthy sales, satisfied customers and a commercially successful Christmas season.”

CHRISTMAS: IN-BETWEEN RELIGION AND FAIRY-TALE

There are differences in the ways various countries celebrate Christmas. There is the midwinter theme and the story about the Christmas child. But differences in celebrating Christmas have commercial consequences says garden centre expert Oliver Mathys.

“In Europe, the religious heritage of Christmas is more alive. The Americans started storytelling, turning Christmas into a fairy-tale. Central European Christmas is about celebrating with family with a relatively modest Christmas tree. Anglo-Saxon Christmas is about Santa Claus. In Germany and Switzerland, the emphasis is on the product. In Britain and the US it’s on the story.

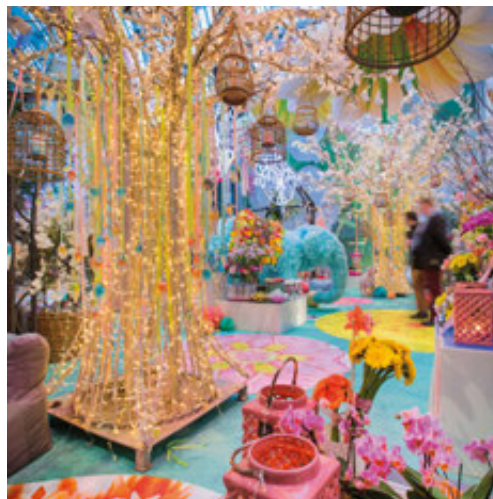
In English garden centres (and other countries are following), the entire selection revolves around Christmas. Not only in the Christmas presentation and assortment, but also in the Christmas treats you find in the garden centres’ restaurants. It is also typically British that older people get discounts on their Christmas purchases. This is clearly an expression of the social function that garden centres have in the UK. Flowers and plants are popular during the Christmas season. When the British or Americans decorate their homes, they use Poinsettias, Hippeastrums and Orchids and also artificial decorations. Celebrating Christmas is increasingly an opportunity to impress others.”

EIGHT FATHER CHRISTMASES

“For UK garden centres, Christmas is very important,” says Tammy Allen of Millbrook Garden Centre in Kent. “Most will have a Santa’s grotto which opens during the autumn holidays and they organise breakfast or tea with Santa. There are also live reindeer and all sorts of other entertainment. Some centres have eight Father Christmases to cope with the demand. It is generally accepted that garden centres offer the best Christmas experience of all retailers. Some centres have a bigger turnover in December than in May.”



The most commercial holiday of the year



“Flowers and plants are easy tools to use in creating a distinctive atmosphere.”

During the weeks of Advent, homes worldwide are full of Christmas decorations. Do these decorations influence the use of flowers and plant during this period or other holidays? This was the question we asked Pascal Koeleman and Rudi Tuinman. Each year at Christmasworld, the leading holiday trade fair in Frankfurt, their company 2Dezign showcases the union of Christmas decor and flowers and plants.

“Christmas is by far the most commercial holiday of the year. Whether people are Christian or not, worldwide they celebrate the end of the year. These several weeks account for a disproportionate amount of revenue for the calendar year. This is true in food, home decor and flowers and plants.”

“Flowers and plants are easy tools to use in creating a distinctive atmosphere with their endless colours and shapes. There is little excitement in celebrating Christmas with only ornaments and a tree topper. But by combining the decorative hardware with the software of Christmas trees, flowers and plants, comes to life. You can make any design, including one that’s over the top.”

“Christmas is the time to add value. Thirty five years ago my father had some branches of holly, some greens, a candle and some red and white mushrooms. With these he created a

Christmas arrangement that would bring serious money. The combination of natural and non-natural materials is strong. So use both in your arrangements.

Women use lipstick, makeup and hairspray to accentuate their beauty. So why not emphasize the beauty of Roses or Hyacinths by embellishing them with glitter at Christmas time? The small succulent with a light spray of glitter will fetch more money than an ordinary one.

Innovation isn’t in the product. A Gerbera will always be a Gerbera. Innovation (especially at Christmas time) is what you add to a Gerbera. Gerberas are colourful to begin with, but when you add glitter to them they radiate Christmas. And never forget: millions around the world celebrate Christmas but every region has its distinct taste. What you can’t sell in Italy might be popular in Sweden or

Canada. So come up with something! Stand out and attract people!

If you add value to your flowers and plants, this will benefit your clients, but most of all it will benefit your pocketbook. When adding value, you need to be a shrewd buyer and a skilled seller. If you’re good at that and are creative, you could even beat Lidl and Walmart because of the emotion you add to your product.”

“At Christmasworld and Floradecora (January 26–30 at Messe Frankfurt, Germany) we show the power of combining hardware and software. With a huge display of flowers and plants at Christmasworld and a special flower fair, we show both existing (retailers, florists, garden centres) and new sectors (event planners, furniture shops) the endless possibilities of flowers and plants for every holiday.”

4,000 trucks of Christmas trees

“It takes ten years to grow Christmas trees yet we have less than twenty days to harvest, transport and market them. But we know when it’s Christmas and we know how many trees to sell.”

Still Hans Schultz and his team have a huge challenge: producing, selling and transporting 4,000 truckloads of Christmas trees, produced and delivered all over Europe to make people happy in the darkest days of the year.

BEING IN CONTROL

The Denmark-based Green Team Group, a large player in the European Christmas tree business, has a strict strategy. Schultz: “We want to control breeding, growing, trading and transporting, from producing seeds to delivering mature trees. Producing all over Europe means producing close to our markets and spreading our climate risks. Our main weapon against price pressure is delivering a better tree. This requires an exceptional operation and rigorous preparation. If a location is wet because of heavy rains, you have to secure trucks to reach the trees at harvest time. In our end phase, timing is everything. After felling a tree, it has to lie for four days in order to acclimatise to having been cut to its roots. Otherwise, it will lose its needles later at the customer’s house. After

this period there are only a few days to pack, transport and deliver the trees.”

NORDMANN IS KING

By far the most popular Christmas tree is the Nordmann fir. Schultz: “Since it’s cheaper, the Norway Spruce used to be more popular, but since we reduced the price difference between the two, consumers more often choose Nordmanns. Still, we track consumer preferences continuously. Christmas tree preferences differ per region. In Germany and Denmark, for instance, Christmas decorations are hung under the branches so they need an airy tree. The British and the French prefer using garlands so they ask for a more compact tree.”

FROM SEED TO TREE

Green Team Groups trees come from self-sown seeds out of which young plants are grown at seed harvesting plantations in Denmark and Georgia. These young plants are brought to maturity at production locations in Denmark, Poland and Scotland. “Our production is sustainable,” says Schultz. “Our trees are not in competition with the rest of nature since they are grown at special locations. We use minimal chemicals in fertilization and disease control so we can produce under the standards of GLOBALG.A.P. We check every tree three to four times per year so that they grow into the correct shape. Our business proves that growing Christmas trees is more than just growing any other type of tree.”

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Because I care

Some people spend lots of time volunteering at their co-operative. Jack Goossens is the Chairman of Royal FloraHolland's Supervisory Board. He tells us why he invests so much time.

"Why do I spend more than eighty percent of my time at Royal FloraHolland? The first answer is quite simple; because I can. We have a family business and my brother, Charles, makes sure I can devote my time to the co-operative. Thanks, Charles!

Second, Royal FloraHolland is as much a part of our company as our company is a part of Royal FloraHolland. We grow bay trees; that is what we do. We also know how to sell them, but we cannot develop, or afford, all the tools we need to do this in the best possible manner. Royal FloraHolland can and they should. But this promise is not yet fulfilled. That is why we, as a company, want to make sure that Royal FloraHolland stays on plan and does its utmost to enable us growers to bring value to our products. That is why we invest in the cooperative.

Third, it takes us on average about eight years to grow our bays which is a big investment in time and capital. Yet most costs accrue in the final 24 hours of production; selecting,

cleaning, special trays or boxes, custom swing tags, custom stickers, custom sleeves, pallets/CC trolleys/auction trolleys/euro trolleys, transport, etc. Obviously, this is not a problem with full loads, but it does apply to single trays, plants or buckets. You name it, we have to do it. Royal FloraHolland is in a position to standardize some of these money consuming issues thus making life better for everyone.

Besides all of these business reasons, the main one for me is 'because I care.' I very much enjoy visiting those spotless nurseries with huge amounts of identical plants or flowers. I appreciate the way my colleagues have elevated efficiency to an art. Equally my heart is full when meeting growers who are passionate about their own product and know everything about it. And I am always amazed how some growers can transform their products into value-added gifts by collaborating with marketing experts and consumers. The sheer diversity of our members does not make life easy at times but it is impressive and the backbone of our industry. It is also something we need to cherish and nurture in the new digital era.

I hope this will convince you to stand up for YOUR cooperative. It's worth it."

What's hot?

We would like to share highlights of upcoming events that might be of interest to you.



JANUARY 17-19 2018

TPIE Fort Lauderdale

The Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE) at the Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Centre (Florida, USA) showcases recent trends in foliage, florals and tropicals. TPIE's trade show is more than an exhibit area – it's nearly five acres of living, breathing plants creating a virtual indoor garden of show-stopping displays. TPIE is the smart way to start your 2018 business year by being inspired by ideas and profitable connections.

With nearly 400 exhibitors in more than 800 booth spaces, TPIE offers wholesale buyers the widest array of resources for foliage and tropical plants in the country. Connect with vendors in person and see and feel their plants and products.

For more information go to:
www.tpie.org



JANUARY 26-29 2018

Floradecora Frankfurt

For the second year in a row, Floradecora will be held at Messe Frankfurt. Floradecora has approximately the same dates as Christmasworld, which means Frankfurt offers a perfect mix of decorative items for holidays and flowers and plants for special occasions. At last year's event there was a high turnout of both exhibitors and attendees. Floradecora is the perfect show for new buyers of ornamental plants (such as furniture shops and hotels) wanting to inform themselves about the floral industry. If you are looking for new trade shows, don't hesitate to attend Messe Frankfurt.

For more information go to:
floradecora.messefrankfurt.com/frankfurt/en



JANUARY 23-26 2018

IPM Essen

IPM Essen is the world's leading exhibition for the floral industry. Last year's edition drew nearly 1600 exhibitors from 45 countries and 57,000 visitors. In Essen you'll see every aspect of the floral business. Leading companies will be present

and a variety of seminars will inform you about the latest developments in the industry. If you are in the floral business, you don't want to miss IPM Essen.

For more information go to:
www.ipm-essen.de/world-trade-fair

Colophon

FloraCulture International

is an independent international trade magazine gifted to the floral industry by Royal FloraHolland. FCI shares knowledge within the industry by bringing together markets, people and cultures because we believe this will make us all bloom.

FCI team

Katja Bouwmeester (Editor in Chief), Piet Kralt (Editor), Rianne Nieuwenhuize (Editor), Angie Duffree (Traffic & Sales) and a number of highly talented journalists and photographers.

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