

# Consumer Label

One consumer label for the worldwide ornamentals industry remains a dream of the Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP) organisation. The FFP label has, however, managed to capture the sales imagination of 4,300 retailers across 10 countries in Europe over the last three years. In fact, the supply of FFP products is not keeping pace with the continuously increasing demand: a strong signal of the sales pull, and a motivation for more growers to become an FFP participant.

by Regina Dinkla,  
Fair Flower Fair Plants

## “There is enough demand, but only a few growers”

Consumers who buy flowers and plants with a clearly visible FFP sticker or click label in a shop, can rely on a product that has been produced not only in an environmentally friendly way, but also in a socially responsible way, which means without exploiting or underpaying employees. As an international non-profit organization of producers, traders, trade unions

and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), FFP was founded in 2005, partly as an answer to negative publicity about the production of flowers and plants throughout the world.

In the meantime, the demand for flowers and plants cultivated in an environmentally and socially responsible way continues to increase steadily. Besides the florists, retail

chains like supermarkets and garden centres also have a range of products sourced from growers who choose cultivation methods that are biological, organic, ecologically and socially responsible. We also see on an international basis that various retailers sell flowers and plants with the Fairtrade Certification Mark, where the objective is to give agricultural sectors in developing countries a better price for their products and to guarantee better labour conditions for their employees. FFP differs from Fairtrade because it is a consumer label for flowers and plants *only*; the environmental standards are higher; and, very importantly, growers worldwide can participate, including Europe, which enables a wider and more varied supply.

### Standards and costs

In the first three years the FFP participant records consist of 160 growers (of whom 65 are cut flower growers), 190 traders and 4,300 retailers. The major part of the FFP growers are companies in the Netherlands, Kenya, Ecuador and Ethiopia and in relation to the uptake of the FFP label by retailers, the number of growers is too small. This lack of growers is experienced as a big problem by FFP. The level of the MPS certificate MPS-A and the International Code of Conduct (ICC) are the basis of this international consumer label while other social and environmental schemes are in the process of being benchmarked against the FFP

FFP and FloraHolland have recently introduced the “FloraHolland Fair Trade” packaging concept whereby retail chains can present the sustainable FFP products in a distinguishing manner: exhibited here by Regina Dinkla at the FloraHolland Trade Fair Aalsmeer.





standard; for example, Fiore Giusto in Italy (recently approved) and the Kenya Flower Council Code of Practice. FFP participation means only minor extra costs for those growers who already satisfy the aforementioned FFP standard: the FFP participation costs vary between €50 per company when smaller than 2 ha up to €200 for companies larger than 5 ha. The costs remain low because FFP is a non-profit organization supported by the Dutch Horticultural Commodity Board (Productschap Tuinbouw) for the coming two years.

### Potential supply

Growers can be assured that there are traders waiting for a larger range of products to meet the demand from retailers. Life & Garden, a Dutch garden centre chain with 25 retail shops, has put FFP orchids in its program and is expanding the range of products. Living Colours, an Irish wholesaler, has started to supply FFP products to 34 points of sale. In Sweden 1,500 florists have become FFP participants and the large German supermarket chain Rewe (2,000 branch-stores) sells FFP plants. In mid-September, 50 shops of the Norwegian supermarket chain REMA1000 commenced sales of FFP rose bouquets from Ethiopia. FloraHolland is also responding to the increasing demand for "fair" products. Apart from the identification of FFP products on the auction clocks (using an F), in cooperation with FFP, the auction has recently

introduced the FloraHolland Fair Trade concept: a packaging concept whereby retail chains, looking for a sustainable answer, can present the FFP products in a distinguishing manner.

### FFP market share

FFP flowers and plants now have a market share of around 4% of the worldwide production volume. If this percentage grows to nearly 10% in the coming three years, we can talk about an established label, which is fully integrated into the production and trading environment for flowers and plants. The FFP grower does not receive extra money for his/her products, but it does serve his/her strategic interest. In particular, with FFP, growers make a statement about their professionalism and reduce the risk of their products being displaced from the market in the future due to the fact that they are not following developments and cannot respond (or respond too slowly) to the future basic condition: "produce in a socially responsible and sustainable way". Just consider the governments in Europe; they oblige national and local authorities more and more to buy 100% sustainable products. ■

by Kerry Herndon

# Stuff

## Unthinkable Resilience

I just finished a book titled, 'The Age of the Unthinkable'. The author, Joshua Cooper Ramo, has brought together various ideas to try and look at the world a bit differently, not in our usual manner. The Age of the Unthinkable refers to things like the terrorist plot on 11 September to fly jumbo jets into the World Trade Centre. A previously unthinkable act was carried out and, therefore, is no longer unthinkable. But this is just the beginning of a wide ranging romp around the world using his experience as the Time magazine foreign editor.

Some subject areas are taken from the world of natural sciences where Ramo describes the creation of sand piles in controlled experiments, adding one grain of sand at a time. It turns out to be mathematically impossible to predict when the pile will collapse. What does that have to do with flowers? It is impossible to predict economies and market collapses into the future. How many of us predicted the financial collapse and a sudden change in consumer behaviour, along with the collapse in pot plant prices? This was driven in Europe by extreme over production of phalaenopsis orchids.

Ramo looks at the tactics of Hezbollah and how they adapt to the actions of the Israeli army to survive. Ramo is not in any way condoning their action, but rather studying them to learn something about the world we live in today. Ramo's book also features the most successful leader of the Israeli Military Intelligence, on how to collect information in unlikely ways, which will give a clearer picture of the challenges facing us.

Like I said, it is a wide ranging book. While being fully conscious of the unthinkable bad things people can do, Ramo has many ideas about the unthinkable good things people can do and in many cases are doing. These people don't make the news because toiling for the good of humanity is not a selling headline (or news report). Some of the information Ramo shares is quite inspirational in terms of the great things that committed individuals are doing around us, but which we never hear about.

The most important idea for me is the idea of resilience. Here Ramo uses Israel as an example again. After a terrorist attack the society resumes normal activity quickly. They have built resilience into the fabric of their society. I cannot personally imagine this way of life, but Ramo says that we must all learn to be far more resilient in order to adapt to the inevitable and unpredictable, the unthinkable, changes that will buffet us constantly in our future daily lives. Many of us wonder how it is possible with collapsing prices and shrinking margins to find the kind of resilience necessary to survive. I also wonder about this. Then I remember that I have two of my children currently at University and the third will expect to attend next year. Like most of us, I have no choice but to find the resilience to succeed.

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