

**COLORADO GREENHOUSE
GROWERS ASSOCIATION, INC.**



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ALTERNATE CROPS — FEAST OR FAMINE REALISTIC OR NOT

Ray Zacharias¹

We are living in a time of constant change, surrounded with mechanization, computerization, standardization, quality control, etc. Nothing stays the same and in fact, the American way of life is change. If you did it that way 20 years ago, you can bet your last dollar that you won't be doing it that way today, *or at least you shouldn't be.*

The American grower is faced with a tremendous number of decisions which must be made posthaste if he is to remain in business and continue to make an acceptable living for both himself and his family. The grower must make decisions such as: (a) do I make the capital investment to put in energy saving devices such as heat blankets, or infra-red heating; (b) should I invest in computerized systems for better environmental control and crop rotations; or (c) should I continue to grow the same crop I have grown for many years or switch to crops that seem to have better sales appeal and a better pricing structure.

All of the aforementioned questions need to be addressed by the grower with the utmost concern and seriousness, however, the last question probably causes the grower the most agony in making an intelligent and *profitable* decision. There are many factors to consider when making the determination whether the crop that you are growing is still profitable and in as high a demand as it was when you initially started growing the crop.

The American cut flower grower hears and reads a tremendous amount of literature on Holland flowers, imported carnations, roses, pompoms, and field grown "this or that" from wherever. He begins to wonder, "Should I be growing these crops?" and "Could I make a better profit growing 'this or that' crop?" The grower begins to realize that he might be able to supply a better quality product to the market by eliminating the *long* initial shipping of the product into the United States. The fact that shipping costs are on the steady rise also hints to the grower that he may be able to get the product to market cheaper.

¹Ray Zacharias is Field Man for the Denver Wholesale Florists.

Before a grower can make an intelligent decision as to whether he should even give thought to changing crops, there is a check list of factors that should be looked into and answered thoughtfully.

YES NO A. Costs of Production

1. LABOR COSTS — Will it cost more or less to grow this crop than the crop I am presently growing? Will it require more or less labor for wires, planting, disbudding, cutting, soil preparation, etc.? The question should read . . .

Can I grow this crop with the same amount of labor or less than the crop I am presently growing?

2. GRADING COSTS and Special Handling Costs — Will it cost more or less to grade and handle this crop? Is it more labor intensive to grade? Does the crop require special pre- and post-handling when going to the market, or special preservatives, special cutting instructions such as cut twice a day, etc.?

Can I grade and handle this crop for the same cost or less than any existing crop?

3. MATERIAL COSTS — Will there be additional costs for materials to grow and handle the crop such as pots, trays, special media, etc.?

Can I grow the crop with no additional cost of materials for growing and handling?

4. ADDITIONAL GROWING COSTS — Does the crop require lighting, blackcloth, special machinery for bed preparation, etc.?

Can I grow the crop for the same or less than what it costs me to grow my existing crop?

5. PLANT MATERIAL — What is the cost of plants, seedlings, bulbs, corms, etc., and with what frequency will I have to replace these plant materials?

_____ Can I keep my plant costs at the same or less than my present crop?

B. ENERGY COSTS — Will it cost more or less to heat and cool this new crop?

_____ Can I heat and/or cool this new crop for the same cost or less than the crop I am presently growing?

C. PERISHABILITY (Durability) — What kind of "shrinkage" can I expect from this crop?

_____ Does this flower have as good a keeping quality or better than my present flower?

D. SHIPPING — Can I or my wholesale house get this product to its destination with good quality and reliability?

_____ Will this flower ship as well or better than my existing crop?

_____ E. INITIAL COST OF ADAPTING GREENHOUSE — Will my existing structure accommodate the new crop without major investment or change? Do benches have to be changed, bench supports adapted, soil removed from benches and changed, etc.?

If the grower has answered no to any of the above questions, he must look very hard at these items and begin to put dollars and cents signs next to each question. He must then make the determination if the price of the product will compensate for the additional costs. All of the cost factors mentioned above must be weighed against the *realistic* and *average* market price of the crop being considered.

It all boils down to the fact that the grower does not have any easy decisions awaiting him in the future. He needs the help of sales and marketing people, extension and research people, as well as input from the wholesale and retail individuals in the industry. The grower is the beginning, and in many ways, the end of many product lines in our industry. Give them all the support you can give. Maybe the bumper sticker should read "Have you hugged your grower today?"