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DETERMINING THE DESIRES OF SUPERMARKET CUT FLOWER CUSTOMERS: A SIX YEAR EVALUATION PART II: FLOWER PRICES AND CONVENIENCE, GREATEST BENEFIT OF SUPERMARKET PURCHASES

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Consumers of supermarket cut flower bunches are aware of product quality and apparently purchase them on a regular basis. They indicate price and convenience are factors that determine their buying habits. The wholesale supplier of flower bunches must constantly evaluate the economics of supplying his products.

Part I, establishing a Cut Flower Program *(Colo. Greenhouse Growers Association, Bulletin 421)* determined that the majority of the 1980 consumers displayed their supermarket purchased "Sunshine" flowers in the home, purchased them biweekly or monthly, recut the stems (but did not use preservatives), wanted a greater selection, and liked the prices.

The content of sleeved flower bunches provided to supermarkets in 1981-82, had a greater assortment of flowers and an additional store was included in the marketing program. Flowers continued to be supplied to the stores on a consignment basis so the complete picture of consumer acceptance could be observed.

The 1982 survey was conducted in early June and each store received the same number of questionnaires and assortment of flower bunches. Survey/care cards were included in 60 mixed, 60 carnation and 8 rose bunches delivered to each store. The carnation bunches contained four stems of standard and three of spray carnations. The mixed bunches consisted of two snapdragons, three long stem roses, four standard carnations and two stems of spray mums. The rose bunches were made up of six long stem roses. Each bunch of flowers was bound by a rubber band and clear plastic sleeve. A total of 384 prepaid cards were used in the survey and 18 percent were returned. No advertising, displays or other media forms had been used to promote the sale of the flowers. The bunches were placed in buckets located in the produce section of B and C supermarkets, and by the cashier counter at store A. The prices were coordinated with the supermarket managers.

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Use of flowers

Of these people that responded to the survey, 77% indicated they purchased "Sunshine" flowers on a regular basis and the majority on a weekly or biweekly basis **(Table 1).** When compared to the 1980 survey, the 1982 evaluation indicated supermarket flowers were being purchased more frequently, at least from those supermarkets surveyed. The 1980 survey revealed that 70% of the people who responded did not use a preservative, however, 59% of the 1982 respondents wanted one placed in the bunch of flowers **(Table 1).**

Table 1. The purchasing habits of consumers that purchased bunches of flowers from three Fort Collins, Colorado supermarkets in May 1982.

	Supermarket			
	A	B	C	Combined
Do you regularly purchase "Sunshine" flowers?				
Yes	75%	71%	88%	77%
No	25	29	17	23
How often?				
Weekly	10%	30%	37%	30%
Biweekly	50	20	30	30
Monthly	10	25	15	18
Occasionally	30	25	19	23
Preservative desired in bunches?				
Yes	73%	73%	42%	59%
No	18	4	13	10
Don't care	9	23	45	31

When the survey results were evaluated separately **(Table 1)** a difference among shoppers appeared. Customers at supermarket A did not purchase flowers weekly, they apparently purchased them biweekly or occasionally and shoppers at store B had almost equal types of purchase frequencies. Almost three-fourths of the A and B supermarket flower buyers preferred to have a preservative included in the bunches. The highest percentage of regular flower purchasers were at supermarket C. The majority of those shoppers did not want a preservative included or did not care if it was present **(Table 1).**

Even though the survey indicated cut flower purchasers at store A and B desired a preservative in bunches of flowers, it was clearly stated in their comments, they did not want an increase of price. Because of the sensitivity to prices expressed in both survey 1 and 2, it appears it would be more desirable to sell preservatives separately rather than having them included in flower bunches.

Supermarkets or Florist benefits

Consumers were asked to rank various perceived benefits of purchasing flowers in florist shops compared to supermarket purchases.

Vase life and flower selection were not ranked significantly different for florist shops or supermarket flowers **(Table 2).** The comparable results may be due to the wide variety of spring flowers available at the time the survey was taken or the close proximity of both markets to the source of fresh cut flower materials.

The respondents felt that price and convenience were strong benefits of buying flowers in a supermarket even though special services and atmosphere were totally lacking.

Table 2. Perceived value of benefits purchasing flowers in florist shops vs. supermarkets. Data obtained from a consumer survey conducted at three Fort Collins, Colorado supermarkets May, 1982.

			Benefit Value			
			Weak			Strong
Benefits		0 not a benefit	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8
Vase Life	Supermarket	21%	3%	13%	38%	28%
	Florist	26	2	14	21	37
Selection	Supermarket	14%	7%	23%	33%	23%
	Florist	24	0	2	17	56
Price	Supermarket	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
	Florist	49	41	7	0	2
Special service	Supermarket	67%	23%	0%	8%	3%
	Florist	22	4	2	33	38
Quality	Supermarket	7%	0%	12%	36%	45%
	Florist	21	5	3	29	38
Usable stem length	Supermarket	15%	0%	20%	28%	35%
	Florist	35	3	15	18	42
Atmosphere	Supermarket	73%	15%	0%	10%	15%
	Florist	33	10	12	10	26
Convenience	Supermarket	5%	2%	5%	12%	76%
	Florist	56	31	5	8	0

Next Month Part III: Consumer Choice and High Quality Allows Price Increases.

Flower quality and usable stem length were given high benefit rankings in supermarket sales and a lower ranking for florist shops. Nearly one-third of the respondents felt they could not receive quality and usable stem length from florist shops **(Table 2).**

The consumers, 43%, felt the atmosphere of a florist shop was either of minor or no benefit. However, special services were considered a strong benefit of the florist, but convenience and price were not **(Table 2).**

The majority of the respondents were probably return customers of "Sunshine" Fresh flowers, and while the questions did not ask the customer to compare "Sunshine" flowers to florist shop flowers specifically, it is most likely that comparison was made. The consumers were also probably biased toward supermarket flower sales and, therefore, the results cannot be considered representative of all flower users.

It would be beneficial to conduct a similar survey in both florist shops and supermarkets using "typical" flower bunches supplied by the same wholesale organization. Such a comparison would determine whether people who purchase florist shop flowers, predominately place high value on the emotional benefits of atmosphere and "implied" quality. It would also be interesting to determine if the "typical" supermarket flowers would receive lower rankings in most of the benefit areas due to lower quality, higher prices, or restricted selections.

Evaluating product costs

Due to the expressed importance of "good prices" by the consumer at the time of purchase, an evaluation of the economics involved in making the bunches was undertaken. Both the 1980 and 1982 survey responses had such comments as "keep the price low", "price is the determining factor" and "if prices continue to rise, I will quit buying."

The cost of each type of bunch used in the marketing evaluation was evaluated. Computations indicated that all bunches had two common costs, delivery ($.05) and plastic sleeve ($.01). Labor, type of flower and number of flowers per bunch created the variables. Individual wholesale flower prices were set at a constant year around price.

Snapdragons (high grade)	$.40
Roses	.30
Carnation (std)	.22
Chrysanthemum (spray)	.30
Carnation (spray)	.22

The carnation bunches contained either 4 standard or 3 spray stems or combinations ($1.50 wholesale). The mixed bunches contained 2 snapdragons, 3 roses, 4 carnations and stems of spray mums ($1.70 wholesale). There were 6 roses in a bunch ($2.00 wholesale). Greens were not included in any of the bunches. Upon completion of the survey, it was apparent the consumer realized they were obtaining an abundance of high quality products at very reasonable prices. In an effort to retain the lowest prices possible, it was decided to alter the content of the bunches by eliminating the roses and one carnation in the mixed bunches plus lowering the grade of the snapdragons. One standard flower was taken out of the carnation bunches. Six flowers were kept in the rose bunches.

The change in the content of the bunches was in cooperation with the management of the three supermarkets and initiated in June following the survey. Many regular customers immediately noted the decrease of flower stems in the mixed bunches and expressed their disapproval to the supermarket managers. All of the complaining customers indicated they would be willing to pay more for the bunches, but wanted to retain the abundance of flowers in the mixed products.

Conclusions

The survey revealed an increase in the purchase frequency of "Sunshine" flowers during the last two years. The 1982 consumers, even though no specific educational efforts were undertaken, apparently used preservatives more often and were aware of the need to recut flower stems as compared to 1980. The customer perceives price and convenience to be the greatest benefits of buying supermarket flowers and they desire bunches with an adequate number of stems.

The analysis of the composition of the bunches indicated that the wholesale supplier has to constantly screen the personnel making bunches and evaluate the cost of the flower products. The addition of an extra flower, poor quality products, or a package of preservative without including them in the wholesale selling price, could soon create a negative profit margin for the supplier.

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PENETRATING AMERICA

Grower 103(20), 1985

Cut flower imports into the US in 1984 rose by 10% over the previous year, to nearly 1.5 billion blooms. By far the largest quantity came from Columbia — 854 million blooms, an increase of 9% over 1983. The Dutch maintained third place in the league, behind Mexico, sending in 161 million stems.

The growth of Dutch imports into the US over the last few years is striking. In 1979 the Dutch exported only 8 million blooms to the US. They now take 11% of the market and their position is still strengthening. They claimed the biggest rise — 35% — of any supplier from 1983 to 1984.

Israel is also working to increase its market share in the US although on a much smaller scale than the Dutch. They sent in 21 million stems last year, an increase of 5 million over 1983.

Carnations still represent the bulk of Colombian exports, at 67% of total sendings to the US. Most of their remaining blooms are roses and chrysanthemums, a few statice and gypsophila.

The Dutch have a much wider spread. Similar quantities of tulips, lilies, freesias and iris make up two thirds of the total, followed by smaller numbers of carnations, roses and chrysanthemums. Israel's total is made up largely from carnations and roses. Most flowers have gone up in quantity from 1983 to 1984. In particular though, statice are up from 35 million to 63 million and orchids from 7 million to 10 million.

PICK LATE FOR LIFE

Grower 103(20), 1985

The stage of picking anthuriums has a major effect on their subsequent vase life. Eight strains of anthuriums were used in trials at the Aalsmeer Experimental Floriculture Station carried out in both winter and summer conditions to identify seasonal effects.

The later the blooms were cut the longer their vase life, with flowers cut when the central spadix was almost completely white performing best. The average vase life of all strains cut at this stage was 21.5 days for winter-grown blooms and 25.2 for summer crops. There were big differences between strains, with the best types recording a vase life of up to 31 days irrespective of the time of year.

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