More Roses at the Holidays

How To Do It

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Recently, there has been much discussion, especially in the retail segment of the florist industry, about the inadequate supply of Roses at our major holidays. Many retailers are complaining that they are unable to secure the quantity of Roses they could sell on these occasions.

Periodic shortages and oversupplies have been the history of the Rose business since its inception. It is not significantly different from the pattern of production and marketing of other perishable products.

Rose production, in terms of our current technology, is a project requiring substantial capital investment. Its costs and income must be evaluated in terms of the productive life of rose plants (3 to 5 years) with provision for the amortization of the growing structures.

The producer, with his eye on the market, will of course use every skill at his command to produce larger quantities for periods of demonstrated stronger demand. The facts of life, however, are that roses bloom in response to amount of light, and that the total number produced in the high light intensity months—June, July, August and September—is several times the quantity produced by the same plantings in the low light intensity months.

The rose producer cannot pay his bills with average prices. To decide whether he will continue to produce roses, reduce or increase his production, he must compare his total dollar sales with his expense for the whole 12 months period, yes, for a 3-5 year period.

Any successful marketing system must return to the producer enough dollars per square foot of production to encourage him to maintain or increase his production. The unit price is of little significance except as it contributes to the total dollar income per square foot year. At the wholesale level, with varying supply and varying demand, the common denominator is price. We use this marketing tool with the result that 1000 blooms one day may sell for what 100 will on another.

At the consumer level, we have directed our promotional effort toward increasing the demand at periods when the consumer was already receptive, and little has been done to promote sales when supplies are plentiful. This philosophy has plenty of support from professionals in the advertising and promotional fields. The impact of our promotion is most effective when the prospect is already softened up by custom, season or other emotional influence.

Perhaps our unit of sale is wrong. Perhaps we should figure our holiday requirements in dollars instead of numbers. Then we could gear our sales effort to get the indicated dollars by the considered sale of the numbers available.

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A dozen (12) in an arbitrary quantity. True, it is supported by custom and tradition. But we all know that there are times when a single bloom is worth more than a dozen is other times. Perhaps there are times when we ought to sell roses by the each, and at other times by the 100.

It seems unlikely that we shall significantly increase the supply of roses for the holidays until more rose plants are placed in production. We must remember that when this is done, the supply between holidays will increase proportionately.

There is just one way to provide a greater supply of roses at holidays, *make it economically advantageous for someone to produce them.*

This solution offers alternative courses of action. 1. Build up the holiday price until the producer can afford to throw away much of his off season production. 2. Develop more profitable markets for the off season production, to the end that rose production on the year around basis will earn enough to warrant substantial capital investment.

These alternate courses of action are not an either – or proposition. Both courses may be pursued and will be. No agreements in restraint of trade are required. In the free market in which cut flowers move, results will be noted in spite of, rather than because of, the action of any select committee.