

## Some Thoughts on Floral Marketing

A leading retired wholesale-shipper recently said, "There is a shortage of flowers." Don Bonebrake, floral merchandiser for Ralph's supermarkets also recently said that there is not a consistent supply of good quality floral items.

Most industry experts seem to feel that the U.S. market potential is much greater and is showing healthy signs of expanding. Our capacity to produce is unlimited. The market is there. So what's the problem? Does anyone really know? Is it distribution? Or poor quality product? The wrong product? Price too high? Difficult to purchase? Low satisfaction?

For sure, we don't have many statistics on specific flower sales. We have few consumer surveys, properly conducted to find out what people really think, or want.

The industry can't decide what to do to improve marketing. The industry doesn't seem to work together except in crisis situations and small groups. Good flowers could be 500 different items. Good potted plants could be 1000 different items. Floral consciousness can only be developed by a national program of promotion with supply and quality of product consistently available in easy-to-purchase situations. Regular buying habits can be created. "Friday flowers" was a good idea, but what happened to it? Was it just another special promotion of short duration?

Thank the Colombians for increasing the supply of many flowers. Thank the Dutch for showing us a greater variety of products and high quality. Thank ourselves for what? If we Americans really believe in free enterprise, why do we lobby to restrict imported flowers? Why don't we grow all the crops the Dutch are sending us? Why don't we do some retooling of our own production system? We complain about labor costs, yet agricultural labor is less expensive in parts of the U.S. than it is in Europe. Why don't we become more capital-intensive and less labor-intensive in the floral industry? Why don't we use all the available technology to increase productivity, and move floral products in better condition to the consumers? Why?, why?, why?

Another matter - the supermarkets. They, and other chain merchandisers, are obviously where most American consumers now buy their goods. If we need decorations for a party or life event, a floral designer can be hired. "Floral design studios" might be more appropriate than "retail florist shops". Traditional retail florists are not generally interested in merchandising large quantities of fresh flowers and potted plants where consumers can help themselves.

Supermarkets and other chains are still doing a lousy job of merchandising. Mother's Day 1984 was a good example. Two large super stores I visited had lots of merchandise on Friday, but it was jammed so close together under the overhanging produce bins that consumers couldn't see what individual plants and bouquets looked like. Customers were stepping over lily plants, breaking those in front. Many plants were already over-mature and broken on Friday. Carnations in bouquets were already asleep on Friday. Some fresh flowers were in buckets without water.

How come produce clerks can make neat pile of apples, trim lettuce, remove rotten fruit, but they can't take the time to trim a plant or remove the bad flowers? Why can't producers and wholesalers supply fresh flowers? We can't blame everything on the supers!

Besemer 1984

If the supers really believe that flowers are one of the top income items per space unit, why can't they put more effort into display and selling? Why do producers keep selling to supers while claiming they don't make any money? Why do the supers get a lot of second quality? Why don't they have more "specials" on flowers and plants?

In case you don't understand my "thoughts on floral marketing," perhaps you will agree that more floral products could be sold in this country if we could just figure out how to do it.

### Diverse Floral Crops (S. Besemer)

At the recent "CORF" Short Course in San Diego, I presented an idea talk with a rather weird list of floral crops that I believe could be grown in greater quantity here in southern California. For what it is worth, here are the three groups of items that I suggested.

#### OLDIES BUT GOODIES (Group I)

1. Aconitum - (Monkshood)
2. Agapanthus - new postharvest treatment for flowers
3. Asters - several kinds
4. Alliums - several types
5. Bouvardia - preservative required in Holland
6. Dahlia hybrids - many forms
7. Echinops - at least two types
8. Gladiolus - particularly the miniatures, but also some *G. nanus* hybrids and other species possibilities
9. Helianthus - (Sunflowers)
10. Helichrysum (Strawflower) more could be sold fresh
11. Hippeastrum (Amaryllis) used as a cut flower in Europe
12. Limoniums (Statice) *L. latifolium* and *L. suworowii* still not grown much
13. *Liatris spicata* or *L. callilepsis* - market likes it
14. Nerines and Amerines - several types
15. Scabiosa - several kinds
16. Solidago (good old Goldenrod)
17. *Viburnum opulus roseum* (Snowball)
18. Yarrows - yellow, pink and white

#### NEW, BUT HERE (Group II)

1. Anigozanthus - (Kangaroo Paw) - several species and hybrids
2. Brodiaea - good bulb flower
3. Native Fern - cool growing in hills of Israel
4. Ixia - another good bulb flower
5. Kalanchoe - one grower harvesting a cut-flower type in Israel
6. *Ruscus hypoglossum* - excellent glossy green foliage grown in Israel for export
7. *Camassia leichtlinii* - another bulb flower
8. Vallota - another bulb flower
9. Cotton - for dry arrangements