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The Status of Standard Mums in North Carolina

Roy A. Larson

In the May, 1976 issue of Florist, published by Florists' Transworld Delivery Association, Truman Fossum discussed the decline in cut flower sales in the United States. In his role as president of Marketing Facts for Floriculture he has access to the latest marketing figures and the ability to analyze these facts. He listed several reasons why cut flower sales had dipped in the period of 1970 to 1975 -- reduction in the number of growers in some areas, particularly the Northeast; a drop in the volume of imported flowers; decision by growers to switch from cut flower production to foliage plant production. I was particularly curious about the decline in sales of standard chrysanthemum flowers -- almost 8 million fewer mums sold in 1975 than in 1970. (Table 1). Fossum stated that an additional reason for this reduction was that standard mums had become "stereotyped" as "sympathy flowers"

and customers had lost interest in the unimaginative cut flower funeral arrangements.

Table 1. Number of standard mum flowers sold wholesale 1970-1975.

	Quantity of standard mums sold in U. S.	Average wholesale Price per unit
1970	147,000,000	18.3¢ each
1971	144,706,000	19.0
1972	137,144,000	21.2
1973	138,243,000	21.6
1974	144,042,000	20.5
1975	139,340,000	21.9

Source of data = USDA Statistical Reporting Service, based on survey in 23 specified states.

I have generally been impressed with the quality of the standard mums I have seen in greenhouses in North Carolina, and I have seen some very imaginative arrangements emerge from the florist shops. I wondered if our mum growers were feeling optimistic or pessimistic about the present and future status of their crop, what their marketing and cultural problems were, what their cultural practices were. I contacted ex-mum growers, new mum growers, and growers who had been growing this crop for over 30 years.

Two former growers told me they quit growing standard mums for a simple reason -- economics. Jimmy Melton, New River Nursery in Hubert, said it was either feast or famine with mums. Jimmy sold direct to the florist and said he was satisfied with the price he received when the flowers were selling. He finally decided, however, that he could make more money per square foot if he grew geraniums, poinsettias, hydrangeas and gloxinias on a rotational basis, in that greenhouse area.



FRED HENDERSON
SWITCHED TO ROSES

Fred Henderson, Henderson's Greenhouses in Wilkesboro, quit growing mums several years ago. It was a matter of economics. He was only able to sell on consignment and he found roses to be much more profitable. He believed it required 25 to 30% more labor for standard mums than for roses, and the return from mums was less.

Oscar Maier, Maier's Greenhouses in Asheville, had been a carnation specialist for many years. The domestic carnation market prompted Oscar to try some other crop. Oscar, a very astute analyst, wanted to replace carnations with a cut flower that had less mobility and could stand an increase in production. The standard mum seemed to meet those requirements. Oscar has not had any difficulty selling the mums he has grown.



OSCAR MAIER -
FORMERLY
CARNATIONS
ONLY



RAY ELLER - CLOSE
ATTENTION START TO
FINISH

The reputation of the high quality of Ray Eller's standard mums in Norlina is well earned. Ray considers proper preparation of the beds and close attention to the crops from start to finish are the keys to the quality of his crops. He believes the standard mum market in North Carolina is a sound and stable one. He does not fear South American mums as his customers have assured him that they prefer local mums if they are of good quality.



HENRY FEENSTRA -
LOCAL QUALITY SELLS

Henry Feenstra, Feenstra's Greenhouses in Wilmington, agreed with Ray Eller that good local quality has a real advantage over mums being shipped in. Henry has no trouble selling his mums - his biggest problem is trying to choose some good summer varieties. He doesn't grow mums in the summer because his customers don't seem to want Nob Hill varieties and he can't find suitable substitutes.



ERIK INGWERSEN
- STRIVE FOR
QUALITY

Erik Ingwersen, Patterson's Flowers in Montezuma, is a couple of hundred miles west and several hundred feet higher than Henry Feenstra, so he doesn't have a summer variety problem. He has no trouble selling his mums because he strives to grow premium quality flowers. Erik began growing mums just a few years ago, when the carnation situation began to get shaky. As so often happens, "new" growers try new things and Erik practices some innovations with his mums - such as treating the Shoemith varieties with gibberellic acid in the winter to reduce the number of long days needed for adequate stem length.

"No marketing problem with standard mums" is the assessment of Bill Hardin, Hardins Wholesale Florist in Liberty. They have their own trucks making delivery to florist shops, and their own retail store. They sell all the mums they grow, and apparently could easily sell more.



BILL HARDIN
NO MARKETING
PROBLEM



D. B. Oliver, Cyn-Mar Greenhouses in Pine Level, estimates that they sell 94% of the mums they grow. Doc seems pleased with the mum market in his area.

DOC OLIVER - SELL
ALL BUT 6%

Up in Pineola, Andy Vaughan III and Austin Buchanan grow large quantities of pinched and single stem mums. They expressed the belief that the market for mums will be improving in the immediate future. They felt South American growers can't produce quality without investing in greenhouses and more equipment, which means increases in cost.



AUSTIN
BUCHANAN -
MARKET FOR MUMS
WILL BE IMPROVING



STANDARD MUMS AT SALLY MAC FARMS GREENHOUSES

Dick Pierce once grew both standard mums and carnations at Sally Mac Farms Greenhouses in Monroe but now he has confined his production to mums. He sells everything he grows. When he raised the price of his mums the retailers went to the smaller grades. Dick believes that retail florist shops could sell four to five times more cut flowers if they tried, and if they improved their marketing techniques.

Dave Webber, Holly Bay Nurseries in Tabor City, thought the North Carolina markets should be "steady to increasing". He underlined the statement "Local quality will sell". Jim Weaver, manager of the greenhouses for Fallon Florist in Raleigh, probably grows a wider assortment of mum varieties than anyone in the state. Most of the flowers are sold through the two Fallon Florist shops in Raleigh. Jim said they have no trouble selling the mums they produce.

John McCormick is a veteran mum specialist, growing the crop hydroponically at Carolina Wholesale Florist in Sanford. The firm is a grower-wholesaler operation. Again the quotation could be made that "Local quality sells". John's cultural procedures are somewhat different from those of growers who use soil in conventional benches, but his marketing approach is similar to that of other growers.

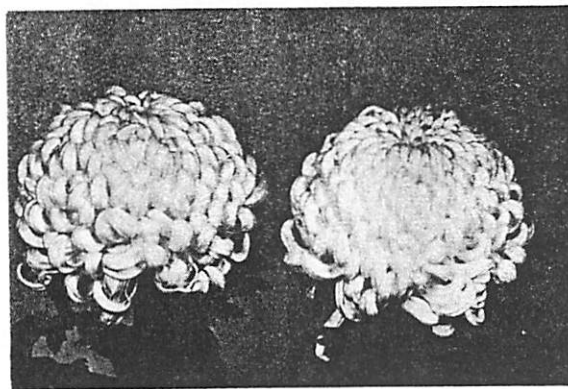


VETERAN GROWER
JOHN MCCORMICK

I thought the views of a non-grower would be of interest so I contacted Bill Peeler, manager of Raleigh Wholesale Florist, Inc. Bill ranked the cut flowers, based on economic importance at Raleigh Wholesale, and standard mums were tied with spray mums in second and third place (carnations were first, roses fourth). Bill said he would much prefer locally grown quality mums. He estimated that it costs as much to fly in one mum flower as it does to fly in 8 carnations. He reported that florists didn't complain about good quality mums, but they preferred the medium-sized flowers to the very large ones.

One key phrase kept being repeated independently by the growers and wholesalers -- "Local quality sells". Almost all of our growers thought the 21.9¢ figure quoted in the table was too low but some were above it by a very small amount. Pinched versus single-stem crops seemed to be equally divided. Spacing for pinched plants ranged from 24 to 64 square inches while single-stem plants were given 24 to 30 square inches. The duration of a crop, from plant to harvest, ranged from 12 to 16 weeks, but most growers listed 15 to 16 weeks. The Nob Hill series in the summer and the Shoemith series in the winter were most popular, while Promenade was grown the year-around by several growers.

Botrytis was by far the most frequently mentioned disease problem while thrips, red spider mite, worms and aphids were given votes as the major "insect" pests. Heat delay in the summer was a frequently stated complaint, particularly in the central and eastern portion of the state.



THE FINAL CONCLUSION -
LOCAL QUALITY SELLS !