

Suppliers See A Greener Horizon

Confusion in the marketplace about what constitutes green flowers and plants has floral buyers and retailers in a bit of a spin. Most people would consider any living thing green, but some consumers also want to know if growers are organic, local or sustainable or maybe even some combination of all three. Adding to the confusion is the fact that not all sustainable farms are organic, nor are all organic farms certified sustainable. The local label can also be confusing because it can mean different things to different people. It remains to be seen how this labeling will influence consumers in the near future.

While much of the nation remains puzzled from all these buzzwords, California consumers may be looking for locally grown flowers. According to the Sacramento, CA-based California Cut Flower Commission industry survey, 55 percent of California consumers would buy local flowers if given a choice.

Not every region has locally grown flowers available, and some growers are betting that in the future, consumers are going to be looking for flowers and plants

that have earth- and worker-friendly credentials instead, such as the VeriFlora certification. B and H Flowers, located in Carpinteria, CA, has obtained the VeriFlora certification to demonstrate to buyers that its farms meet VeriFlora requirements for sustainable farming practices, labor relations and product quality assurance. Scott Fulton, vice president of sales and marketing at B and H, which markets VeriFlora-certified Gerbera daisies, lilies, tulips and irises to supermarkets across the country, observes that consumers are discovering the benefits of sustainably grown flowers. "Our quality is competitive, and retailers are getting savvy to the idea that consumers are requesting and buying products that are sustainably grown."

Sharon Mikulinski, marketing manager at Passion Growers, a Miami, FL-based supplier to Schnuck's, has noticed a similar change. "Customers ask if we are sustainably certified. This seems to be the foremost thought of retailers now." Passion Growers has a number of sustainable certifications including GlobalGAP, VeriFlora, as well as the newly acquired Rainforest Alliance Certification. **pb**

