

## **CUT FLOWERS – IS THERE A MARKET IN RURAL AREAS?**

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It is a commonly held belief that the market for specialty cut flowers is limited in rural areas. Lack of outlets and weak consumer demand are often cited as reasons for poor sales. It is true that every area is different with its own nuances and buying preferences; what I have found out is that with a bit of education and exposure to the flowers rural populations can constitute a solid cut flower market. For the past two years, vases of cut flowers from on-going research were placed in 12-15 public areas (libraries, town halls, etc.) throughout the towns of Norway and South Paris Maine. (Total population of both towns is under 10,000 and represents the densest population of Oxford County). An information card listing the names of the flowers in the bouquet accompanied each vase. The vases were replaced approximately every two weeks. The purpose of the vases was to educate the public about the benefits of locally grown cut flowers and to familiarize them with specialty cut flowers that can be grown in Maine.

The public response to the flower displays was impressive. Questions about how the flowers were grown, where they were from and more importantly, where could they be purchased were common. People called my office wondering if I “did weddings” or asked if I sold the plants as seedlings. At the various flower locations, people were surprised at how long the flowers lasted without any special treatment (no floral additives and oftentimes not even fresh water). Surveys at the end of both years kept the public involved in the project and let them voice an opinion on their favorite flowers.

Here is what we learned:

- In general, the public is not familiar with flowers bred to be long-stemmed cut flowers. They are familiar with bedding plants and are surprised at the difference between a “cut flower snapdragon” and the one they grow in their garden.
- Women between the ages of 41-60 are most interested in cut flowers.
- The majority of survey respondents would like the opportunity to buy locally grown flowers and are willing to pay \$15.00 or more for a 20 stem bouquet.
- Very few respondents (eight out of 380) were only willing to spend \$5-\$7 for the bouquet and almost all were men.
- Over 50% of survey respondents both years had purchased flowers in the past 6 months.
- Lisianthus is a must. People are unfamiliar with the flower, but are impressed with its exotic look, long vase life and variety of colors. They especially like the fact it is an annual and does not have the pest problems that roses do.
- Bold, bright colors are preferred and, despite what magazine covers and Martha says green flowers were not terribly popular.

Some questions I hope to answer in 2008 are: Would consumers really pay \$20+ for a bouquet? Where are they most likely to purchase the flowers? How often would flowers be purchased? What would make a buyer choose locally grown flowers over ones available at large supermarkets? The answers to these and other questions will help growers penetrate rural markets.

### TOP FIVE FAVORITES 2006

Name	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	Total
Zinnia, 'Zowie'	25	28	34	11	22	<b>120</b>
Rudbeckia, 'Prairie Sun'	14	22	23	23	17	<b>99</b>
Craspedia	2	1	10	6	7	<b>26</b>
Trachelium	2	1	1	9	5	<b>18</b>
Snapdragon, 'Attraction Yellow'	5	14	18	12	8	<b>57</b>
Gomphrena, 'QIS Mix'	7	10	9	21	16	<b>63</b>
Lisianthus, 'Grand White'	61	23	15	12	11	<b>122</b>
Sunflower, 'Strawberry Blonde'	28	29	15	24	15	<b>111</b>
Agrostemma, 'Purple Queen'	8	13	17	21	19	<b>78</b>
Dianthus, 'Amazon Duo'	4	7	8	20	19	<b>58</b>
Godetia, 'Grace Pink'	19	27	25	16	32	<b>119</b>
No Answer					4	<b>4</b>

### TOP THREE FAVORITES 2007

Name	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Total
Lisianthus 'Blue Rim'	108	34	28	170
Lisianthus 'Buttercream'	30	49	32	111
Aster 'Florette Mix'	29	60	50	139
Zinnia 'Benary Giant Lime'	4	13	21	38
Larkspur 'QIS Carmine'	30	34	47	111
Godetia 'Grace Salmon'	13	24	31	68

### VALUE OF BOUQUETS

Dollar Value	2006	2007
\$5.00 – \$7.00	8	5
\$7.50 - \$10.00	34	21
\$10.00 - \$15.00	59	66
\$15.00 - \$20.00	49	70
\$20+	21	53
No answer	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>215</b>