

Dear Ms. Renkl,

On behalf of the floral industry, I'm writing regarding your Feb. 15, 2023 article titled, "[I Love You, Too, But Let's Skip the Roses.](#)" As the CEO of the Society of American Florists, I've been to dozens of flower farms in Colombia, Ecuador and the United States. Therefore, I'd like to share a different perspective not represented in your article.

Flower growers – both domestically and in other countries – make environmental and social responsibility a priority. While the U.S. is the largest purchaser of flowers grown in Colombia, that country also supplies products to 97 countries throughout Europe, Japan and Australia where strict phytosanitary, social and environmental standards must be met. Consequently, the majority of Colombian growers are recognized by international certification labels. This requires an ongoing commitment to sustainable farming through the minimal use of agricultural chemicals, approved for use in the U.S. and Europe, and natural ways to control pests and disease, such as biological controls (good bugs eating bad bugs), beneficial fungus and bacteria to enhance soil, or plant extracts that deter bugs.

Energy reduction is another significant component of these labels. These certified farms must document their efforts to improve energy efficiency and replace non-renewable energy with renewable energy sources; monitor and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and substitute cooling equipment that operates with HCFC refrigerants for other equipment which operates with natural refrigerants. Not to mention the many farms that voluntarily go above and beyond to offset their carbon emissions; I can think of one that financially supports a forestry project, and another that supports a wind power facility in India, to name a few. This industry is blessed with hundreds of growers who understand that you can do well, by doing good.

Water conservation practices are also common on many farms. This includes utilizing drip irrigation, moisture monitors, and capturing and storing rainwater in retention ponds for later use.

And this doesn't even include the myriad samples of sustainability-driven innovation happening on the manufacturing side of the industry: paper flower food packets, compostable and biodegradable foam and floral sleeves, and much more.

As far as container shipping is concerned, your article accurately states that most of the South American flowers exported to the United States are shipped via air cargo — although not in "refrigerated jets" as stated in your piece: no refrigeration needed at 36,000 feet. It is worth noting that container shipping of flowers is growing steadily: Flowers by sea from Colombia grew by 13 percent in tons and 12 percent in TEUs (20-foot equivalent) during 2022 and we fully expect that growth to continue.

Flower and plant buyers can also feel good about social sustainability practices at these farms, where labor legislation is strict and enforced. In fact, workers have benefits that many companies in the U.S. don't offer, including paid medical leave, maternity and paternity leave, and universal health coverage — and also free camps for kids, zero-interest loans, savings accounts that are matched, free meals, wellness breaks and more.

Major U.S. retailers continuously inspect and audit their cut flower suppliers to ensure that they meet their high social and environmental standards — and they have no problem finding farms who can meet them.

Should you ever have an interest in visiting farms in the United States or abroad to get an accurate portrayal of the floral industry globally, we would be happy to put you in touch with growers to provide the expertise you need. I can assure you, it is an experience you won't soon forget.

Cordially,

Kate Penn, CEO

Society of American Florists