

Theme: sustainability & sector

Q What is floriculture actually doing in terms of sustainability?

- The sector is firmly committed to innovation and sustainability and therefore takes its responsibility, in addition to the already existing strict laws and regulations that apply to domestic and imported flowers and plants
- Both trade (buyers/retail) and growers are moving towards 100% sustainability certification. This makes it clear how growers care for the environment and the people they work with. Already, 73% of the flowers and plants traded at Royal FloraHolland are 'FSI compliant'. This means they meet requirements for certification set by this international sector initiative. The requirements apply to both domestic and foreign grown flowers and plants. For exports from Africa, certification is a prerequisite for an export licence and many retail companies also set strict, often above-legal, requirements for their flower and plant suppliers.
- The sector has committed to the ambition of working with organic cultivation systems by 2030 in which chemical crop protection is hardly needed.
- Throughout the supply chain, we collaborate with research partners and others on sustainability, such as transport smart combining and sustainability of transport packaging like bucks.
- More and more trading companies and growers calculate the environmental footprint of their products using the so-called FloriPEFCR, an EU-recognised standardised calculation method accepted by the entire supply chain. This was developed from various sector organisations together with Wageningen University & Research. These are calculation rules that can be used unambiguously when calculating the environmental impact of a product. This allows buyers to compare Roos A with Roos B on the basis of the life cycle of a product, including the CO₂ emissions of, for example, production and transport. A score that will be applied uniformly across Europe, providing the transparency consumers demand.

- Theme: crop protection

Q: How many of the flowers traded in the Netherlands come from countries that use crop protection products that are banned in the EU?

A: About 35% of the flowers sold in NL are not produced in the Netherlands. They come from countries inside and outside Europe, especially from Africa. The authorities in the country of production determine the rules for the use of crop protection products. This is based on effectiveness (does the product successfully combat a pest) and safety (is the product safe when used as prescribed). The country of origin must therefore be considered.

- Crop protection products and their active substances are assessed for human, animal and environmental safety. For flower and plant production in Europe, this is done in two steps. First, the active substance is assessed at European level. Upon approval, member states then assess the final product and authorise it or not. Furthermore, it is determined which active substances and products may be used in which crops and against which diseases and pests. Any crop protection product (containing the active substance) is prohibited unless it is authorised within the EU and by the Dutch Ctgb. Data on approved substances and authorised agents are generally reviewed every 10 years on the basis of the latest scientific insights.

Now the question about production outside Europe: In e.g. Africa, different pests and diseases occur under different conditions than in Europe. This does NOT mean that the rules are less strict there; the climatic conditions and thus the pest pressure are different. Crop protection there therefore requires different active substances or a different composition of those

substances in a different environment and climate. This is also why crop protection authorisations are determined per country.

Q: How does crop protection approval work?

A. Assessment of products is done by the national authorities of the member states. This means in the Netherlands by the Ctgb and in the EU by the European Food and Safety Authority (EFSA). After approval of the active substance, the producer can submit an application for authorisation of a product based on this active substance to the European member states. These assess the dossier and then make a decision on whether or not to authorise it. An authorisation obtained is only valid for crops in combination with diseases and pests specified in the legal instructions for use and on the label.

Q Why are agents being approved that are demonstrably bad for the environment, humans and ecosystems?

The European Commission approves an active substance only after a thorough and comprehensive scientific assessment to ensure that the substance is safe for use. A complete dossier must be submitted with results of studies that meet EU requirements. This includes data on physicochemical properties, human and ecosystem toxicity, residues, behaviour in soil, water and air, and efficacy. If approval follows, there is no risk to humans and the environment in the supply chain under normal prescribed use.

Q: So how does enforcement of crop protection use take place?

A. The person applying crop protection products is responsible and liable for correct use. In our country, the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) is the enforcer of the regulations. It checks whether agents are applied correctly and whether illegal agents are used. Inspectors carry out physical and administrative checks. They may also take samples of the crop, soil or harvested product. Authorities in other countries also check for correct application and the use of substances that are not permitted the country of production. *add here also the importance of mandatory environmental registration in certification! Auditors from MPS also take samples to check if the grower has used what he has registered.*

Q. What is the difference between approval and enforcement of floriculture vs food?

Approval of crop protection is based on laws and regulations in which the authorities of the country of production determine what is and is not permissible.

The procedure is basically the same for ornamental and food crops. For food crops, only as additional maximum residue levels" (MRLs) apply because these products are eaten. Therefore, food crops have a safety period between treatment and harvest in addition to a re-entry time. This time limit ensures that the MRL is not exceeded in the final product. See: <https://royalbrinkman.nl/kennisbank-gewasbescherming/veiligheidstermijn-gewasbeschermingsmiddel>

Q: Why are growers who use crop protection products banned in the EU still allowed to sell their flowers in the Netherlands?

Laws and regulations vary internationally. Therefore, crop protection availability is also different internationally. In countries outside Europe, different diseases and pests occur under different climate conditions. That is why different crop protection products are sometimes authorised than here. Crop protection products and their active substances are assessed for safety for humans, animals and the environment.

Q: Surely the flowers consumers can buy are bunches of poison: what is your reaction to this?

Belgian toxicologist Jan Tytgat says high doses of crop protection can cause problems, but that there is zero danger in a possible residual concentration of pesticides on cut flowers.

A. The framing as a bunch of poison is really factually incorrect:

- Figures show a visible decline in crop protection use in general by growers in Europe and Africa in recent years (source MPS)
- There has been a sharp decline in environmentally damaging crop protection products (source MPS); also, the environmental impact of current agents in use is lower than those used in the past
- CBS figures show that 90% of flower growers now already use biological control agents - such as predatory mites, parasitic wasps, hoverflies, fungi and other natural controls - to control diseases and pests. The floriculture sector is thus successfully pursuing innovation and sustainability.
- For all countries, crop protection products and their active substances are assessed for human, animal and environmental safety.
- Some like to call all crop protection products poison. From the authorities' point of view, there is a clear distinction between environmentally harmful and less environmentally harmful products. On top of that, active substances are assessed for human, animal and environmental safety.
- By 2030, crop protection use is expected to be minimal, instead growing the use of greenery, natural products and biological control agents. The latter is more feasible under glass than in open cultivation.

Q: What is your reaction to PAN-NL's findings that residues of crop protection products were found in all the bouquets studied, many of which are banned in the EU?

A: We will study the report and discuss a possible response with PAN from the floriculture sector.

Q: Are there any plans to move to stricter sustainability criteria and a greater focus on organic or pesticide-free flowers in the future?

A: By 2030, crop protection use is expected to be minimal, instead growing the use of greenery, natural products and biological control agents. In addition, there are initiatives such as 100% Greenery that aim to create a sustainable and resilient cultivation system.

Q: Are you seeing an increasing demand for organic and unsprayed flowers? And artificial flowers are on the rise. How do you guys look at this?

A: Flowers are in demand all year round. Organic and unsprayed flowers are not available all year round. There is apparently a market for artificial flowers. We characterise real flowers as carriers of emotion, artificial flowers are decoration.

Q: Why are there no maximum pesticide limits for cut flowers like there are for fruit and vegetables? Should that change?

A: Traces left by crop protection products in treated products are called "residues". The "maximum residue level" or MRL is the maximum allowable value of a residue in food. Because flowers are not eaten, MRLs do not apply to flowers. Under normal use, the risks of residues on flowers are negligible because flowers are not eaten.