

RAINFOREST ALLIANCE CERTIFIED™: Sustainable Flowers and Ferns in Bloom

When you brighten someone's day with flowers, chances are that the source of those flowers was a Latin American nation. Since the mid-1980s, growers in that region have been increasing their production of roses, carnations and other blooming species to meet the growing demand in the United States and Europe. Ninety percent of the cut flowers and ferns imported by the US come from Latin America — those roses you bought for your valentine were probably raised in a hothouse in Colombia, Ecuador or another rainforest country. And many of the ferns that envelop flower bouquets are grown in Costa Rica and Guatemala.

The rapid growth of the floriculture industry has contributed to job creation in Latin America. For example, sales of the smooth, dark green fern known as “leatherleaf” bring \$52 million annually to Costa Rica, where fern farms employ 6,000 people at salaries above the rural average.

But there is a downside: the cultivation of crops such as leatherleaf has often come at the expense of healthy ecosystems and the well-being of workers and surrounding communities.

Flower and fern growers tend to use liberal doses of agrochemicals — and because flowers are not food, governments employ much looser standards when regulating pesticide use. A flower or foliage hothouse typically uses 50 different pesticides, threatening workers' health and the drinking water used by neighboring villages.

Cultivating Earth-Friendly Flowers

To meet this challenge, the Rainforest Alliance and its partners in the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), a consortium of leading conservation groups in Latin America, embarked on a four-year-long process of research, experimentation and field trials. The result: a new set of stringent standards for responsible flower and fern farm management.

The standards protect ecosystems and wildlife habitats, conserve water and soil, promote decent and safe working conditions and ensure that the farms are good neighbors to rural communities and wildlands. And by following the standards, a growing number of leading flower and fern companies have earned Rainforest Alliance certification.



The Sustainable Agriculture Network spent four years developing standards for responsible flower and fern farm management.

Lizzy Montero, marketing manager for Sunfresh Flowers in Tecpan, Guatemala — the first rose farm in Central America to earn certification — says, “We became certified to add value to our product, maintain good practices among the employees and help conserve the environment.”



OUR MISSION

The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.

www.rainforest-alliance.org

Two Success Stories

In Costa Rica, Plantas y Flores Ornamentales, a leading tropical flower and fresh fern producer, recently earned Rainforest Alliance certification. Plantas y Flores cultivates tropical flowers, ferns and lilies in three regions of the country, exporting close to 500,000 boxes (4,500 tons) of flowers each year to the US and Canada for the “special occasion” flower market. The company uses innovative methods to minimize chemical use and protect the environment, including the use of organic compost and other biologically-derived methods.

And Floreal S.A., Costa Rica’s second largest foliage exporter — Floreal farms represent 17 percent of the total acreage used for fern planting in that country — has recognized the benefits of certified ferns. Nine of Floreal’s Costa Rican supplier farms were the first fern or flower farms to receive the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal of approval. Since then, all of Floreal’s 29 suppliers have achieved certification.



Workers on Rainforest Alliance Certified farms receive decent wages and housing, clean drinking water, sanitary facilities and a safe work environment.

Elsewhere in Latin America, Elite Flowers, a member of the Association of Colombian Flower Growers and Exporters (ASO-COFLORES) was certified in 2007 — a first for that country — and flower and foliage producers in Mexico and Ecuador have also been certified. Their combined acreage has helped increase the combined total area of Rainforest Alliance Certified flower farms around the world to 2,755 acres (1,115 hectares).

Montero speaks for many certified flower producers when she says, “We are proud to have the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal



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on our product because it takes a lot of dedication to obtain it. Having the seal gives you a vision and different expectations for the company. It’s a plus not only for the product but also for the business.”

About the Sustainable Agriculture Network

The Rainforest Alliance is the coordinator of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), a coalition of leading conservation groups. The SAN awards the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal to farmers who meet certain guidelines for sustainability. The seal assures consumers that the products they are buying are produced according to criteria that balance ecological, economic and social considerations.

Members of the SAN are Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (Belize), Institute for Agricultural and Forestry Management and Certification (Brazil), Colombia Nature Foundation (Colombia), Conservation and Development (Ecuador), SalvaNATURA (El Salvador), Interamerican Foundation of Tropical Research (Guatemala), Institute for Cooperation and Self-Development (Honduras) and ProNatura Sur (Mexico).

The SAN seeks to transform the environmental and social conditions of tropical agriculture through the implementation of sustainable farming practices. The conservation and rural development groups that manage the certification program understand local culture, politics, language and ecology and are trained in auditing procedures according to internationally recognized guidelines.

Photos: Elite Flowers

For more information about the Rainforest Alliance’s sustainable agriculture program, please visit www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/agriculture



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