April 2020

Alternative crop factsheet: Cut flowers

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CUT FLOWER PRODUCTION

The value of both flowers grown in the open and protected flower crops has increased in the UK in recent years (see table below), despite strong competition from imports from the Netherlands, Africa and South America. Research from Flowers and Plants Association shows that the average consumer in the UK spends £28 on flowers per year, a healthy increase from £8 per years 1984.

The most popular cut flowers in the UK are roses, lilies, tulips, daffodils, sunflowers. Although many of these can grow in the UK, historical market reasons (such as industry investment and costs of production) have meant that 86% of the UK's cut flowers are now imported. Other popular flowers that are commonly grown in the UK include freesia, iris, delphiniums, pinks, carnations and chrysanthemums, and peonies have recently seen a resurgence in popularity.

Consumers are increasingly interested in the sustainability and provenance of what they buy, and daily shopping choices show these trends. Interest in reducing emissions, buying locally and seasonally, and concern about water use and labour exploitation in the cut flower industry, indicates that there may be scope to develop British cut flower production for the domestic market.

The main markets for cut flowers are:

- Own consumer market – consumers buying flowers and plants for their own use
- Gift market – consumers giving cut flowers as gifts, possibly with other items included (e.g. a vase)
- Business market – companies that buy flowers regularly, often on a subscription basis (e.g. restaurants and hotels)

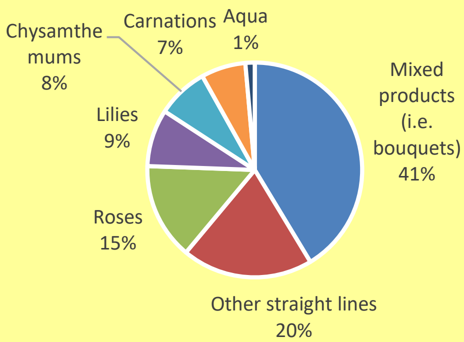
The main outlets for cut flowers in the UK are as follows, with supermarkets being the principle outlet:

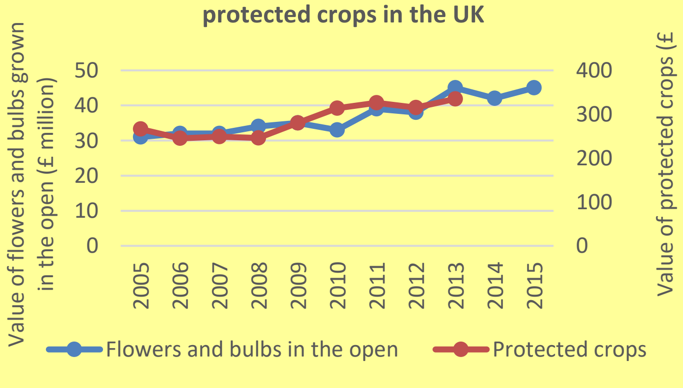
- Supermarkets – 56%
- Florists – 23%
- Market gardens, garden centres and nurseries, markets, DIY stores and other outlets make up the remaining amount.

Some businesses may sell directly to customers on farm or to local businesses. Supplying markets such as these often demand a wider variety of flowers and therefore increase the complexity, labour and skill requirements, and product design elements of floriculture.

MARKET DATA

This data is drawn from the NFU's 2016 report 'Backing British Blooms: The State of the British Cut Flower Industry'.





CROP ESTABLISHMENT AND PRODUCTION

LAND, SOIL AND CLIMATE SUITABILITY

Climate tolerance will vary between flowers, and whether grown protected or outdoors.

Soil should be well-drained and aerated, and as free from perennial weeds as possible.

If growing flowers in the open the choice of site will be important, and should be LCA 3.1 or lower. If growing protected flowers the land suitability is less important as suitable growing material can be brought in..

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Alstroemeria	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tulips	x	x	x									
Hyacinth	x	x	x									
Daffodils	x	x	x	x								
Iris		x	x	x	x	x	x					
Delphiniums			x	x	x	x	x	x				
Freesia			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Carnations				x	x	x	x	x				
Lilies				x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Peonies					x	x	x					
Roses					x	x	x	x	x			
Pinks					x	x	x	x	x			
Chrysanthemums						x	x	x	x	x		
Sunflowers							x	x	x	x		

INPUTS

Aphids, red spider mites and slugs are common pests in flower production. Crops may need a small amount of fertilisation. Specialist horticulture consultants will be able to advise on this**.**

MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT

Tunnels or greenhouses give more ability to manage the environment, and can offer some protection from wind, rain, frosts and some pests, although field production is possible for many British flowers. Covering the crop in the field with wire hoops and netting can also provide some outdoor protection from pests and weather. Polytunnels or greenhouses would be required for more exotic and less hardy plants, such as orchids

Some flower crops benefit from support, such as strings or horizontal wire fencing, to encourage straight and strong stems. Flowers, whether indoor or outdoor, will require Irrigation systems.

A packing house and cold room on-farm is essential, to store cut flowers as soon after harvest as possible and maintain optimum quality.

TIMINGS

Growing a range of flower varieties throughout the year will enable the grower to optimise the market and the growing infrastructure, but adds complexity to planning and skill requirements. The intended market and buyers should be considered when deciding which crops to choose to maximise the annual output, and the relative competitive advantage to imported crops. The table above gives an indication of the seasonality of popular British cut flowers in the UK.

If cut correctly, many flower plants can continue producing flowers for several months; other crops may require succession planting, with germination and planting out of new material throughout the season to maintain a continuous crop for the market and extend the season for that crop as long as possible.

PROCESSING AND SUPPLY CHAINS

- All processing and transportation after the packing house stage requires refrigerated transport, and will be reflected in haulage costs.
- After leaving the farm, cut flowers usually go to flower markets, then to distributers and retailers, before being sold to the consumer.
- If aiming for an international market proximity to international flower auctions important. The New Covent Garden Market in Battersea, London, is the UK's largest wholesale flower market. There are smaller regional markets in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Further information

- Backing British Blooms: The State of the British Cut Flower Industry, a report by the NFU.
- SCP Evidence Base: Sustainable Commodities Case Studies: Cut Flowers. A report for Defra.
- Sustainability in floriculture; a report by Wageningen University and Research.
- British flower power: how home-grown blooms can compete with cheap imports. A report for the Guardian.

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