

CONSUMER POWER: Buying “Fair” and “Sustainable” Flowers

Numerous certification and labeling initiatives have emerged to meet consumer demand for fairly produced flowers. These programs have the potential to change conditions on the ground and signify a step in the right direction, but many labels/certifications need reforms to be able to adequately enforce improve and enforce standards.

Consumers play a crucial role in improving the lives of flower workers as they demand fairly produced flowers but buying a “fair” product is not the only solution.

A flower with a “fair” or “sustainable” label may claim excellent standards, but consumers must look closely at the details of each standard and the processes designed to enforce those standards when deciding which flowers to buy. Both Fair Trade and Veriflora are the stronger of existing labels. Florverde should be avoided. Continue reading or click here for more analysis. Read ILRF’s roadmap to fair products to learn what certification programs must include to improve the lives of workers.

Fair Trade

www.transfairusa.org/content/flowers/index.php



The Fair Trade standard is strong on freedom of association, maternity leave and protection from pesticides.

Fair Trade is the only initiative that puts a 12% premium on products to support development and community projects.

The program’s support for worker-cooperatives has been effective in sectors that have had history of small producers such as coffee and chocolate.

Note, however, that the flower sector does not have a history of small producers and worker-owned cooperatives, making it more difficult to determine how workers control the development premium. Consumers should understand the difference between independent, democratically operated worker-owned cooperatives and “labor cooperatives” that operate as subcontractors. These institutions are often controlled by large companies and have been used to replace unions in the workplace.

Look for Fair Trade flowers at Giant, Whole Foods or online at 1-800 Flowers.

VeriFlora

www.veriflora.com

ILRF has worked with the Veriflora sustainable flower initiative to ensure that its’ labor standards are strong and comprehensive. The standards’ strengths include its ban on pregnancy and HIV testing as a condition of employment and specific adherence to ILO (International Labor Organization) standards on freedom of association, collective bargaining, contract labor and discrimination. Veriflora provides a path for workers to earn a higher than average wage.



Veriflora is also the only labeling flower label that certifies flower farms in the US, particularly in California. Veriflora has a strong environmental component, as well. Scientific Certification

Systems contracts with Veriflora to independently audit farms and develop Veriflora’s standard.

Look for Veriflora flowers online at <http://www.organicbouquet.com> or ask for them at your local supermarket. If you are a wholesaler, contact annie@veriflora.com.

The Truth behind the Florverde Label

The Florverde, or “green” flower label, claiming environmentally and social responsible standards may be most common in your local supermarket or floral shop. The label is an initiative of the Colombian Flower Growers’ Association, ASOCOLFLORES, an organization that represents companies producing flowers. Given the program’s lack of independence, the bottom line interests of flower companies are inherently prioritized over the interests of workers and unions.



Instead of using resources to support flower workers, the Colombian Flower Growers Association has spent millions of dollars promoting the “Florverde” label to consumers and The “Colombia: Land of Flowers” public relations campaign. The PR campaign is not motivated by an interest to protect workers, but by an interest to sell flowers to US consumers, promote the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and promote the failed US-funded drug eradication program, Plan Colombia. The program has lied about improvements in the flower industry. For example, it claims that 14% of workers are unionized, when most of these workers are in undemocratic, company unions. ASOCOLFLORES also fudges its statistics to exclude subcontracted workers who are denied basic labor rights.

After years of trying to engage in a dialogue with ASOCOLFLORES over the labor standards in its Florverde certification program, dozens of organizations in Colombia and internationally have expressed concern for the programs’ lack of interest in improving the labor rights component. Read the sign on letter on ILRF’s website.

Florverde DOES NOT:

- Give workers the right to form the organization of their choice. (instead promoting only "information and participation mechanisms" for workers, which do not include unions). Independent, democratic unions are the best enforcers of worker rights because they are operated by the workers themselves.
- Prohibit company engagement in anti-union activities
- Guarantee the right to collective bargaining.
- Specifically prohibit discrimination against union members
- Ban HIV or pregnancy tests during recruitment (these tests are often used in a discriminatory way - women who are pregnant, for example, will not be hired).
- Ensure that overtime work is voluntary and paid at a higher rate than normal hours.
- Guarantee women workers' right to maternity leave.
- Explicitly ban forced labor (Around Valentine's Day, workers are often forced to work up to 80 hours a week, often without higher pay for overtime.)

The Florverde program claims to promote “voluntary social programs” amongst other vague initiatives. These do not address the major labor abuses facing flower workers every day. Social programs can help to solve some problems but a living wage, reasonable production quotas that protect workers’ health, guaranteed protective gear and democratic unions to enforce these standards are the real key to "worker friendly" farms. Read ILRF’s roadmap to fair product certification at www.laborrights.org.