



Find out what's happening in the fresh-flower supply chain, including the latest from Colombia.

Text and photography by Bruce Wright

**A BRIGHT FUTURE** “The big picture” includes, of course, the impact of the cut-flower supply chain on the environment and on the people who work at flower farms. About 40% of Colombian floral exports are certified by Florverde Sustainable Flowers, a program sponsored by Asocolflores, the Association of Colombian Flower Exporters. Florverde’s agenda covers both environmental and social responsibility. It even goes beyond working directly with flower farms to programs that benefit children in communities close to the farms—like the schoolkids at right, who enjoy after-school sports activities thanks to a joint effort between Florverde and the local municipality. To find out which Colombian flower farms are certified by Florverde Sustainable Flowers, visit [www.florverde.org](http://www.florverde.org).



**TAKING STOCK** At the opening ceremonies for Proflora, the international flower trade show held in October in Bogotá, a panel of VIPs (above) assessed the state of the industry in Colombia, the largest supplier of cut flowers to North America. The vice-president of Colombia, Germán Vargas Lleras (fourth from left) gave the keynote speech. Augusto Solano (second from right), president of Asocolflores, the Association of Colombian Flower Exporters also addressed the audience. A hallmark of the show is its Outstanding Varieties Competition exhibit (top photo). More special flowers from Proflora 2015 are seen on the following pages. For more about the trade fair, turn to page 28.

# the Big Picture

DO YOU SENSE CHANGE in the air? It's happening, and in a big way—so big it might be hard to pull back and see it.

“We are coming out of one long economic cycle and entering a new one,” says Joaquin de la Torre, a managing partner for Ball Seed Company and an industry veteran who provided an overview of the forces at play in the global market for cut flowers at the CalFlowers convention last summer.

For most people in the United States, there's a feeling that the economy is recovering and gaining speed—though not as fast as we'd like. But that's just one factor in the interconnected, worldwide cut-flower business—of which you as a professional retail florist are a very important part.

Here are a few things going on today, with some tips on how they could affect you and your business.

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**GOING GLOBAL** Cut flowers are a more international business than ever. True, “Buy local” and “American Grown” have a powerful appeal and interest for many consumers. But the international market in cut flowers is here to stay. Fortunately, the systems and techniques available for shipping flowers long-distance are better than ever—for those who take all the right steps, like making sure flowers are fully hydrated and properly processed, packaged and pre-cooled before they are shipped.

**BY LAND AND BY SEA** One of the latest developments is sea freight. Many types of cut flowers can emerge from a long sea trip (up to two weeks) fresher and healthier than if they had reached their destination faster by plane. That’s because on a ship, flowers can be kept colder,



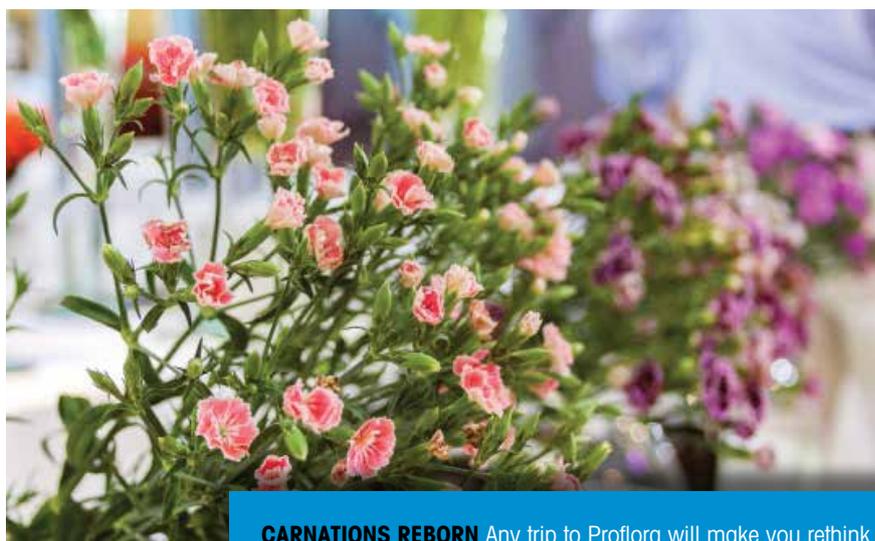
**AMAZING ALSTROEMERIA** Imagine alstroemeria with no stripes—plus, bright margins and striking green tips on the sepals (the wider, outer petals)—and you have ‘Revolution’ (above), the red and white variety from breeder Hilverda Kooij; it won third place among alstroemeria varieties entered into competition by breeders at Proflora 2015. ‘Marshmallow’ (right), from grower Flores de los Andes, is likewise stripeless. Among other entries submitted by growers, ‘Himalaya’, a purple-striped white variety from Grupo Andes, won first place. While not brand new, ‘Charmelia’ (left) still has novel appeal. It is an example of alstresia, a smaller-flowered relative of alstroemeria.



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with better control over the temperature than on a plane—and that's a key factor in flower freshness, one that's just as important, if not more so, than the speed of shipping by itself. Clearly, this option isn't good for last-minute orders, nor does it work for all types of flowers. But when it does, the cost of shipping—and the carbon footprint—can be cut in half. It opens up the possibility of more flowers coming to North America from the flower-growing countries in Africa that now supply the European market.

**A STRONG DOLLAR** Lately, while the US economy has been slowly improving, other countries that in the past were big flower buyers—Russia, Japan, and the European Union—have had a slower recovery or have even suffered setbacks. The ruble, the yen, and the euro are all weak in comparison



**CARNATIONS REBORN** Any trip to Proflora will make you rethink carnations, with exotic striped and fringed varieties in sophisticated colors on display, like those seen in the top photo above, from Luisiana Farms. But new varieties in the genus *Dianthus* from breeder Hilverda Kooij go even further: diminutive, frilly spray carnations in the 'Raffine' series (above); single-flowered carnations in the 'Solomio' series (left); and a bouquet of 'Cornef' carnations (below) in white and clear colors with long, slender petals. In another direction, from Ball Seed comes a variation on its popular 'Green Ball' *Dianthus barbatus* that is still without an official name; at the show, it was provisionally labeled "purple funky ball."



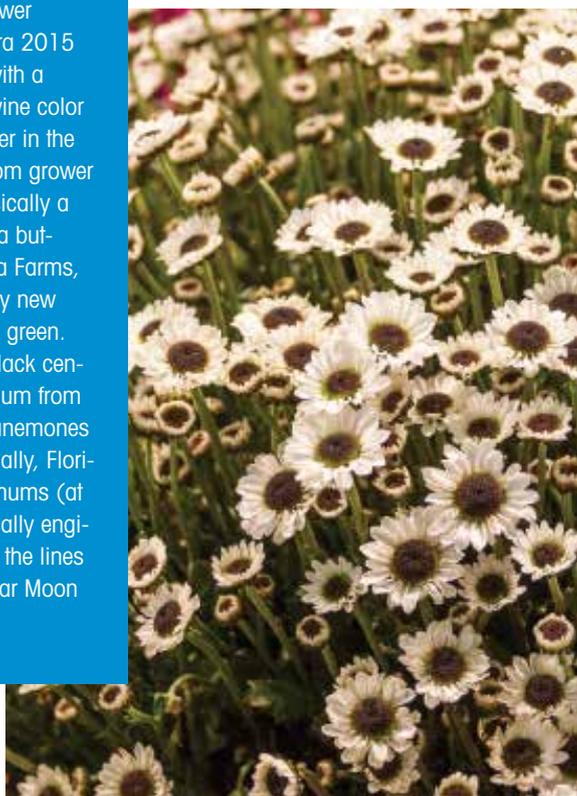
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to the dollar. That means Americans have relatively more buying power, and flower growers in other countries are more than ever interested in selling to the American market. "If a flower is not being sold in one market, it will try to find its way to another," says Joaquin.

**PRICE PRESSURES** You might think that would mean lower prices for American flower buyers, as sellers compete. But flower prices are affected by many factors, some tending to push prices up. For example, flowers that are flown into Miami usually travel from there to other U.S. cities by truck—but today Americans are also buying more fresh fruits and vegetables from overseas, which means more competition for trucks that can handle perishables. That, along with new regulations on truckers, tends to jack up the price of trucking services, according to Christine Boldt, executive vice-president of AFIF, the Association of Floral Importers of Florida. Americans can, however, hope that strong competition among sellers will at least



**MAVERICK MUMS** Like carnations, chrysanthemums are an undervalued, staple flower that's ripe for reconsideration. They are specialty of Colombia's Antioquia region, which includes the mountain-ringed city of Medellin, with its annual flower festival. Novelties of note at Proflora 2015 included 'Amethyst' (top photo), with a green center and petals in a rich wine color outlined in white—first-place winner in the spray chrysanthemum category from grower Flores El Capiro. 'Bon Bon' is "basically a button pom," a disbud version of a button pom, says Neil Gold of Galleria Farms, which showed a series of the hardy new mums in yellow, bronze, gold and green. White petals and a dark, almost black center make 'White Viking', a spray mum from Galleria, reminiscent of the white anemones so popular with today's brides. Finally, Florigene rolled out brand-new spray mums (at left) in saturated shades of genetically engineered purple and lavender, along the lines of this well-known breeder's popular Moon Series carnations.



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help to keep flower prices stable.

**PLAYING PAC-MAN** Following the economic crisis of 2008, many smaller growers, shippers, and other cut-flower businesses struggled to survive. Many were gobbled up by bigger, stronger companies. As a result, the channels of distribution are now in the hands of fewer and bigger players. That's especially true of breeders and growers in Colombia and Holland—but consolidation has also taken place at wholesale and retail levels. The result is an industry where starting up is harder than in the past, but those who are already thriving tend to have strong, sophisticated operations.

**GETTING WARMER** Growers everywhere in the world, from California to Colombia and from Holland to Hawaii, are facing

**STUNNING SPECIALTIES** Long gone are the days when the Proflora trade fair was focused only on staples. Among the most noticed specialty flowers in 2015: Danziger's award-winning 'Blackberry Scoop' (at left) is the first in a line of cushion-shaped scabiosa flowers, soon to be available in more colors, with white anthers like candy sprinkles on top. Likewise, Danziger's veronica (top photo above), with incredibly long spikes, is brand new. It's easy to see why 'Fringed White' kale, from Ball Seed, won a prize in its category. Below, Ball's 'Planet' is a top-flowering spray delphinium that comes in pale pink and royal blue. 'Blue Lace' hydrangea, from Arvi Farms—Groflowers, was a Proflora winner in 2013 and remains a standout. Painted flowers from Galleria Farms reflect the subtle artistry of a custom process involving precision airbrush tools and nontoxic dyes.



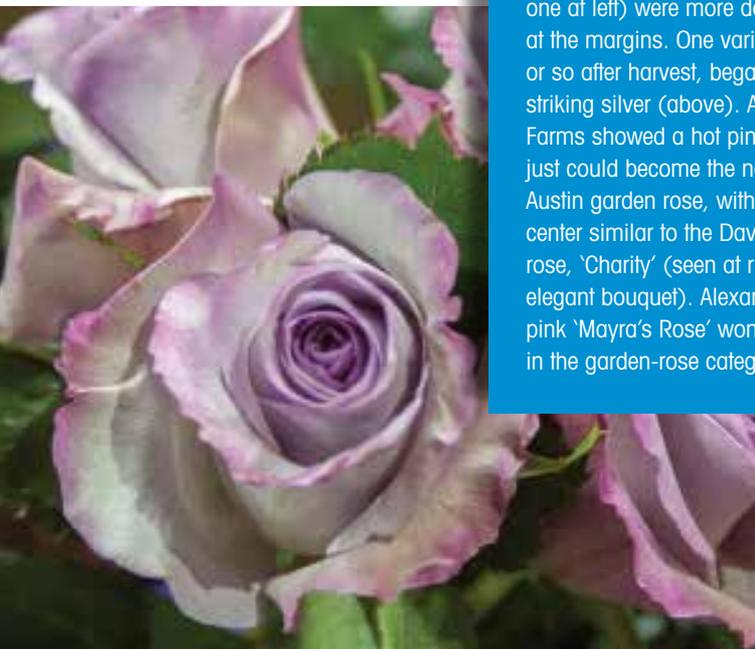
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shortages of three essentials: water, land, and labor. Climate change is partly to blame; so is economic growth over the past decade in developing economies. These shortages will tend to keep prices higher than otherwise. They also point to a higher-than-ever profile for sustainability initiatives that help flower growers make the most of their land, conserve and preserve water resources, and attract a steady, reliable work force with programs to insure a better life for farm workers (see "A Bright Future," page 16).

**YOUTH TRAIN** Now anywhere from their late teens to their early thirties, the large demographic cohort known as the Millennials will soon have spending power to surpass the baby boomers. This generation brings a whole new set of habits, values and behaviors to the marketplace. Just how to characterize the Millennials is still being studied and debated, but two points are most frequently raised: One, there's no question that Millen-



**TOMORROW'S ROSES** Part of the fun at Proflora is seeing varieties that are still being market-tested. Breeders and growers set them on display and ask customers for feedback. Florigene showed several roses in different shades of lavender, created by inserting a color gene into the rose, just like in Florigene's purple Moon Series carnations and spray carnations. Some were a solid color, others (like the one at left) were more deeply tinted at the margins. One variety, a day or so after harvest, began to turn a striking silver (above). Alexandra Farms showed a hot pink rose that just could become the next David Austin garden rose, with a green center similar to the David Austin rose, 'Charity' (seen at right in an elegant bouquet). Alexandra's shell-pink 'Mayra's Rose' won first place in the garden-rose category.



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nials are attuned to the internet, particularly social media. Two, most experts also agree that Millennials bring a high awareness of social and environmental responsibility to their buying decisions—another reason for florists to buy and promote fair-trade flowers.

**VALUE VERSUS PRICE** How do those in the cut-flower supply chain (that includes you!) adapt to the changes that are coming, and those that are already here? “Quality, variety, reliability,” says Joaquin. “Most buyers today will look first at these three factors and will not sacrifice them for price—even though price is still important. That’s a big important change.” Joaquin’s comments are intended for growers and wholesale florists, but they apply equally to retailers. When customers know they can rely on you for a dependable supply of high-quality flowers in a sufficiently varied and novel assortment to meet their needs—at reasonable, but not necessarily the lowest prices—they will keep coming back. 🌸



**SHOW TIME** Proflora—the big trade fair that takes place every other year in Bogotá, Colombia, just three hours south of Miami—is a must for the largest wholesale flower buyers. But last year’s show also saw a rise in the number of independent retail florists attending. “I get ideas and inspiration from the amazing displays,” says Jessica Cosentino AAF, of Cosentino’s Florist in Auburn, New York. “I get more out of this every time I come,” adds Cherrie Silverman AIFD, AAF, of Cherry Blossoms Florist in Westminster, Colorado. “One thing that impresses me is the passion and dedication of the growers.”

For those who want to see world-class floral design, in 2015 Proflora hosted (in cooperation with the European florist organization, Florint) the first-ever Proflora Americas Cup competition (top photo), along with demonstrations by top international designers. Galleria Farms’ award-winning booth, seen at upper right, celebrated the motto, “Live Life Colorfully.” At near lower right, one example of a marketing idea you could have picked up at the show: at Alexandra Farms, petals from fragrant garden roses were enclosed in lidded glass jars. Remove the lid, and experience a rush of perfume—a nice concept for your next bridal show.



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