

American flower growers scramble to meet historically high demand

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

Western U.S. flower growers say demand this spring has reached “exponentially higher” levels.

Growers across California and Oregon said they were overwhelmed with orders. With COVID restrictions loosening, many anticipate big sales for events this summer.

“There’s definitely an uptick in demand for fresh flowers this year,” said Steve Dionne, executive director of the California Association of Flower Growers and Shippers, or CalFlowers.

Industry leaders say the American consumer’s relationship with flowers has also changed. The past year, more shoppers have bought flowers for “ordinary days” rather than just for special occasions — a trend that’s continuing.

But flower farmers continue to wrestle with COVID-related challenges, including labor shortages, transportation disruptions and over-consolidation of the industry that will likely result in a flower shortage this year.

This spring stands in bold contrast to spring of 2020, which Dionne described as “a time of terror through the industry.”

During 2020’s toughest months, the domestic flower industry underwent major consolidation. Many florists, wholesalers and growers went out of business. Some farmers switched flower acreage to other crops.

The industry made a U-turn during the summer as Americans bought more flowers to adorn their homes and give to friends.

Flower demand in 2021, growers say, is “exponentially higher.”

In the lead-up to Mother’s Day, marketers and florists say they’re seeing record sales.



Courtesy of California Cut Flower Commission

An employee at Joseph and Sons Inc. carries flowers.

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Julie Ortiz, a second-generation flower farmer and sales manager at California company Joseph and Sons Inc., said she’s “fortunate and blessed” customers have recently shown “nonstop

interest” in cut flowers.

Dionne, of CalFlowers, said it’s still a bit premature to predict wedding sales because many couples are still watching state restrictions and scoping out venues. But growers, he said, are already being “flooded” with wedding inquiries.

Stacey Denton, owner of Flora, a small organic flower farm in Williams, Ore., said she’s seeing a wedding comeback.



Julie Ortiz

“In my experience, I feel like it’s totally rebounded to 2019 levels,” she said.

Last year, COVID prompted Denton to create an online floral store, which she plans to continue developing along with the wedding side of her business.

Dionne, of CalFlowers, said many people who postponed funerals are also ordering flowers.

Experts say a few other factors are also impacting the supply-and-demand curves.

The first is consolidation. Fewer domestic growers has led to tighter supply.

U.S. growers are also seeing less foreign competition.

The U.S. imports about 80% of its cut flower supplies annually, but because of jammed ports, limited air cargo capacity, vaccine doses taking up cooler space and civil unrest in Colombia, imports have shrunk this year.

Import difficulties have also tightened supplies of certain flower varieties. Bulbs from Holland are backlogged, and many farmers are having trouble importing specific seeds.

Finally, labor shortages in both the agricultural and trucking sectors have recently made it difficult to harvest and ship flowers on time.

Despite these challenges, Dionne, the industry expert, said he thinks the American fresh cut flower industry is having its day in the sun.

“We’ve never seen demand like this,” he said. “It’s been a good run.”

Drought may hurt honey bees; experts say cover crops could help

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

Beekeepers and researchers say drought across the West this year will likely hurt honey bee colonies.

Bees are expected to struggle most in California followed by Oregon, where meteorologists predict a hot, dry summer.

“I’m really worried about it,” said John Jacob, beekeeper and owner of Old Sol Apiaries in Southern Oregon. “Seems like it’s going to be extremely dry.”

Honey bee colonies can typically handle extreme heat as long as they have access to uncontaminated water, pollination experts say. The more serious problem is a potential lack of pollen sources — especially during late summer.

Lack of food sources can lead to colony collapse.

“Colonies are probably going to do really well this spring,” said Andony Melathopoulos, pollinator health specialist at Oregon State University Extension. “There’s enough moisture in the ground and a lot of things are still blooming. Where the rubber will hit the road — and it always does, it’s getting worse and worse — is when blackberries stop blooming around the end of June. Then the 80,000 honey bee colonies in (Oregon) don’t have a lot to go to.”

According to the California Farm Bureau, beekeepers statewide are worried about diminishing food sources.

Experts say it’s important for bees to have access to late-blooming plants through August when the landscape is dry and brown.

Jacob, the beekeeper, said he’s prepared to do whatever it takes to feed his bees through the drought, including feeding syrup. But this is expensive, and when beekeepers across the sector do so, it can drive up hive rental costs for farmers.

Whenever possible, Jacob prefers feeding his bees by working with farmers who plant cover crops that flower during the summer.

Tucker Pyne, owner of the Lucky Elk Farm in Rogue River, Ore., is one farmer Jacob works with. Pyne runs a small organic farm producing hemp, vegetables, fruit and meat.

Pyne uses cover cropping systems — a rare practice in the hemp sector, according to experts. He said his primary goal is to enrich his soil, and supporting pollinators is just a secondary benefit.

“The main reason why I use cover crops is to build organic matter in the soil,” Pyne said. “I’ve found cover crops are the most cost-effective way to do that.”

Western governors address concerns with conservation initiative

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Western governors are requesting close consultation in the National Climate Task Force’s work to conserve at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

The Biden administration on Thursday released a report outlining its vision to conserve and restore land, water and wildlife with recommendations for locally led, voluntary conservation goals.

That same day, the Western Governors’ Association sent a letter to National Climate Adviser Gina McCarthy requesting the National Climate Task Force’s close consultation with governors and raising several concerns.

Formally referred to as the 30 by 30 Plan, the goals are now part of the “America the Beautiful Initiative,” although specifics have not yet been established.

“Western Governors submit that effective forest and rangeland management is only possible through collaboration between federal, state, local and tribal land management agencies,” the letter said.

The governors suggested the administration consider multi-jurisdictional coordination through



The Nature Conservancy in Idaho

The Cenarrusa Ranch in the Pioneer Mountain Foothills near Carey, Idaho. Western governors have raised concerns about a White House initiative aimed at conserving vast areas of the nation.

USDA’s Shared Stewardship Strategy. Another effective mechanism for coordination and cooperation is the Western Governors Task Force on Collaborative Conservation, which provides a venue for state and federal officials to engage, they said.

They also pointed out the goals must have the support of constituents to ensure private landowner participation and community engagement in land-planning processes.

In addition, defining “conserved” will be a critical factor for the National Climate Task Force to consider, the letter said.

“Western Governors contend that

many federal, state, local, tribal and private lands in our states already enjoy robust conservation protections,” the letter said.

“Adopting an overly stringent definition of ‘conserved’ that does not accommodate necessary management activities would have detrimental effects on ecosystem health and function. Such vital activities include wildfire mitigation, post-fire restoration, habitat improvement and invasive species management,” the letter said.

In addition, conservation and multiple use are not mutually exclusive, the governors said.

“The multiple uses of recreation, agriculture, renewable and traditional energy development, timber management and others contribute to the environmental, cultural and economic attributes of vibrant, healthy communities,” the letter said.

It is also critical to ensure a conservation strategy does not disproportionately affect specific states or regions, the governors said.

“A strategy that relies heavily on federal lands would disproportionately affect western states, given the high percentage of western lands under federal ownership,” the letter said.

There is a variety of ways the strategy could address this concern, such as considering that each state individually meets goal or considering a regional approach to the conservation goal, the governors said.

“The 30 by 30 proposal has significant implications for state sovereignty and the lives of our constituents. Western states have a rich base of experience to inform considerations of policies to implement the 30 by 30 proposal and the environmental safeguards needed to ensure the vitality of our citizens and landscapes,” the letter said.

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