



Gerben Ravensbergen was recently presented with the top MPS-Florimark Production certificate by Theo de Groot from MPS

Computer controlled spraying mechanisms mean there's no human contact with pesticides.



One way of helping workers at Lilies of Life is through the use of this bulb planting machine that does away with back-breaking work by allowing workers to sit comfortably whilst planting. No heavy lifting is needed.

# Fair Play

*Green this, eco that, everywhere you turn, chances are one of the dominating subjects of the UK news agenda, the environment, will crop up in conversation. Global warming, carbon footprints, the treatment of workers in far flung destinations and closer to home are all hot topics.*

What's more, the conversation often includes a mention of flowers and plants, with so-called flower miles, the treatment of farm workers, the carbon emissions of heating greenhouses in Holland and so on hitting the headlines over recent months. All of this means one thing – there's never been a better time to answer the critics by marketing flowers and plants sourced from growers that guarantee to be both environmentally and socially friendly, via the FFP standard.

**Fair Flowers, Fair Plants** to give the standard its full title is an initiative designed to stimulate the production and sales of flowers and plants cultivated in a sustainable manner that respects people and the environment. These products are then presented to consumers under the FFP label, complete with specially created logo. All parts of the chain are included in the scheme, creating a traceable process from grower to exporter, wholesaler and on to the final retailer.

One grower to sign up to FFP is **Gerben Ravensbergen** from **Lilies of Life**, a Rijnsburg based producer of lilies that has reached the very highest levels of accreditation on both the environmental and staff welfare/social fronts (see photos above for specific examples).

Like many of the pioneering growers to quickly sign up for FFP, Lilies of Life has

achieved the very highest level of MPS certification – MPS Florimark Production – a certificate that is awarded when a farm has achieved the very highest certificates in environmentally friendly production, efficient and successful supply to the retail sector, high production quality and socially aware practices that ensure workers are protected by health and safety legislation, as well as being looked after in various other ways.

*"That made the move to FFP and the consumer label the obvious next step," says Gerben. "Now the consumer has a logo that assures them that they're buying a product that is both economically and socially sound."*

The best thing about the Dutch growers is that they aren't prepared to rest on their laurels once full accreditation is achieved. **Gert-Jan van der Weijden** for example, is looking to turn his cut rose nursery into a state of the art power generating operation where there are little or no Carbon Dioxide emissions.

Through a complicated series of heat exchangers, boreholes that tap into groundwater supplies and other techy things, the end result is that the greenhouse will produce enough surplus energy to run 200 homes in the nearby village. The use of groundwater for cooling also means that greenhouse windows can be kept closed, cutting CO2 emissions. All in all it's a real breakthrough in greenhouse design and construction that will make Dutch production spotlessly clean.

*"My roses will almost be a bi-product of producing power," jokes Gert-Jan. "It makes sense and is my way of helping the environment, whilst safeguarding my future if, for instance, rose prices tumble or competition from Africa intensifies."*

## Plants too!

When it comes to plant supply with FFP accreditation there's plenty to talk about too and for **Marcel de Lange of Nolina Potplantenwekerij**, a pot rose grower located near the Aalsmeer auction, FFP was a must.

*"The issues that FFP addresses has been the hot issue of the last decade and will continue to be so for some time to come,"* comments Marcel. *"By being a part of initiatives like this it shows customers that we care and that we do go the extra mile. The supermarkets are sensitive to using growers with the right certification, so it's about time everybody else was too. If we all buy traceable, certificated products from the growers, traders and retailers then we stop the other, less caring companies from doing business. That can only be a good thing."*

Marcel continues: *"FFP is not costly yet it gives so many opportunities to help the business and there's not too much work involved in achieving the label if you already do things the right way – often the hardest part is just proving what you do and there is a little time involved in preparing for the annual audit but it's not excessive. That's why the plants don't cost any more."*

Another plant grower making the most of FFP status is the giant **RijnPlant group**, producers of a staggering 125,000 plus anthurium plants every week.

*"It's good that people can choose between good practice or not,"* **Jeroen Dahmeijer**, the company's Sales Manager says.

*"Growers are working hard to clean up their act through huge investment so it's only right that there's a label that allows people to choose to buy from the ones that do try."*





**fair flowers  
fair plants**

The lilies are all bundled and cut by machine, once again removing any arduous labour.



Conveyor belts once again do away with heavy lifting and reduce the amount of walking

Sian Roses are constantly investing in new projects that improve the working conditions for their workers.



*"The big problem is communication though because we have to work together to promote it at all points in the supply chain. For example we have a display in the office for our clients to see, when we exhibit around the world we include FFP material on the stand and all our plant labels include the FFP logo. If we all do that and the shops do their part with displays then there's no doubt that the UK market is ready for it."*

Environmental issues are addressed by RijnPlant through the use of biological disease treatment (95% of disease is treated that way) and through a sophisticated greenhouse system that means light usage has been reduced and nothing is emitted, reducing light pollution. The farms themselves produce energy, with any surplus returned to the national grid. A reduction in the use of peat is another marked success.

*"The secret is ensuring the whole company, from top to bottom, thinks the same way about the issues hitting the headlines,"* states Jeroen. *"We all need to work together to find a solution that protects the world for future generations and FFP is one way to do that. OK it's started slowly but it can gather momentum and perhaps that's better than starting with a bang only to grind to a halt."*

### **The worldwide label**

Fair Flowers, Fair Plants production isn't confined solely to Holland. Growers across the globe have signed up to the FFP label with schemes everywhere improving the lives of workers immensely, as well as improving 'green' issues.

One farm that has been a part of the FFP initiative for around 7 months is **Sian Roses** who operate four farms in Kenya growing roses, callas and young plants, with supply heading to the likes of **SGP** in the UK.

*"Step-by-step we're creating more facilities for employees and each year we make plans to further improve the working environment,"* Jan van 't Hul told us. *"For example, we're creating*

*a small hospital near the farms, we make sure employees get well fed when they're at work because we don't know what happens when they go home and we have put in place clear procedures so that employees have the correct guidelines to follow."*

Jan continues: *"As a company we always try to be in the right place and do things well and with FFP having a wider reach than just import it made sense to be a part of it, especially as having some of the MPS certificates meant signing up was relatively straightforward. At the end of the day, one of the strengths of FFP is that it doesn't matter where the product comes from – we're all part of the same thing. FFP is there to make the sector stronger, which is why everybody should be a part of it."*

### **The wholesaler shortage**

With the production in place and more growers signing up all the time, it's perhaps surprising then that there's such a shortage of UK-based wholesalers participating in the FFP



concept, making the most of the undoubted demand from florists already frustrated that they can't get hold of their products.

*"There's no excuse not to be involved,"* says **Ronald van de Burg** from **Flowering Direct**, a small,

recently formed wholesaler that joined FFP when setting up the business. *"I really believe in the whole thing because it simply makes sense. Florists are struggling from competition and FFP gives them an opportunity to grab back some of that lost business in an easy way because the supermarkets aren't a part yet. The 'green' discussion is not going away, London has the Olympics in 2012, which will have to be the greenest Games yet, so businesses have to capitalise. I have to offer something different as a wholesaler and FFP does it."*

Ronald continues: *"FFP gives great help with their point of sale material, website, PR etc, the*

*flowers and plants carrying the FFP label don't generally cost any more in normal conditions and customers are responding to these kinds of products, so there's no reason not to be a part of it. It's worth it for the publicity alone and the knowledge that you're doing your own little bit to help."*

Flowering Direct ([www.floweringdirect.com](http://www.floweringdirect.com)) supplies customers directly from Holland, with buyers based at the auctions purchasing via the clock and direct from growers. So far the company's customers are mainly London based, although deliveries can be made to most parts of the UK, with Ronald hoping to work closely with the retail florists already signed up to FFP, although he does add that work is to be done on communicating what the FFP standard is all about, echoing the thoughts of some of the growers.

*"All the way along the chain from grower to end consumer, we need to be selling the message, telling people the benefits and explaining the ethos behind FFP. Enough people both within and outside the industry are interested, but they don't really understand the principles."*

Ronald also identified a problem that's been talked about elsewhere in **F&WB**: *"The problem with too many florists is that they get trapped inside the four walls of their shop. They need to look beyond and see the opportunities that are out there. In my opinion too many are in denial about what they're doing – it's about business, not just floristry."*

*"The product range available with FFP label is growing all the time and it is now possible to make up an FFP bouquet. Plants have always been strong. All I would ask is that if somebody wants to find out more they get in touch with me. After all, this is a great opportunity."*

Want to find out more about FFP?

Tel: +31 174 615 707

[www.fairflowersfairplants.com](http://www.fairflowersfairplants.com)

E-mail: [info@fairflowersfairplants.com](mailto:info@fairflowersfairplants.com)