

March 21, 2017

Dear Ms. Needleman,

On behalf of the entire floral industry, I must take issue with your March 20th article entitled “What Happened to Traditional Floral Bouquets?” which states:

*Most of our cut flowers are imported from Latin America, where labor is cheap, working conditions harsh, regulations lax and chemicals prevalent — and that’s just the growing part. Then, after being jacked up on fungicide, dunked in vats of preservatives and jostled and manhandled for about a week, these odorless, uniform, sturdy flowers with their enormous carbon footprint come to rest in our florist’s hands or in our homes. Nice.*

As the CEO of the Society of American Florists, which represents growers, wholesalers and florists, I have been to dozens of flower farms in Colombia, Ecuador, Holland and the United States. Flower growers – both domestically and off shore -- work hard to make environmental and social responsibility a priority, and are extremely frustrated when they see such accusations. It is of great concern to see inaccuracies stated as fact, with no source.

Where did you get your information, and where are the facts to back up your claims? For instance, your statement of flowers being “jacked up on fungicides, dunked in vats of preservatives ... and mishandled for a week” is completely inaccurate and makes no sense. In reality, not only are pesticides costly for a business, but overuse would be harmful to the product. Actually, pesticide use in the floral industry has decreased dramatically over the last 15 years, as growers implement natural ways to control bugs – such as good bugs eating bad bugs or plant extracts that attract bugs.

Do you know that the majority of Colombian flower growers who export the vast majority of flowers to the U.S. are certified by Florverde, which has strict regulations on environmental and social responsibility? The Colombian flower industry – the source of most of the imported flowers -- is committed to sustainable farming and the environment through the minimal use of agricultural chemicals, approved for use in the U.S. and Europe. Only products registered with the Colombian Agricultural Institute and licensed by the Ministry of Health may be used.

Unfortunately, unwarranted accusations we sometimes see in the media are perpetuated by anecdotal, non-fact based information, often planted by others who have an agenda to paint a negative picture of the global flower industry. However, it is disheartening to see it happen in a credible news outlet such as *The New York Times*.

Should you ever have an interest in visiting flower farms domestically and off shore to get an accurate portrayal of the floral industry as a whole, we would be happy to put you in touch with growers as well as the director of Florverde who can provide you with the expertise you need. I can assure you, it is an experience you won't soon forget.

In the meantime, I see that your article is scheduled to run in print in the March 26<sup>th</sup> issue. I hope that paragraph of inaccuracies can be removed. Your article can certainly stand on its own without it.

Sincerely,  
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