



Mr Janusz Wojciechowski
Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development
Berlaymont, 1049 Brussels

Brussels, 10 April 2020

RE: Need for extraordinary measures to support the flower & live plants sector survive the COVID-19 crisis

Dear Commissioner Wojciechowski,

The flower and live plants sector (cut flowers, indoor and outdoor plants for ornamental purpose and for ecosystem services, propagating material and bulbs) is undoubtedly the agriculture sector impacted the most by the ongoing exceptional COVID-19 sanitary crisis and the lockdown policies implemented at national level across the EU. These drastic measures have caused, among others, the closure of non-essential specialised retail shops (flower shops, local markets, garden centers), the suspension of popular events, festivities and most Spring flower-related celebrations (Easter, Mother's days, 1 May) and the activities of all related event and hospitality industries as well as the paralysis of gardening services in public and private spaces. These lockdown measures, adopted by Member States to curb the spread of COVID-19, have led to the immediate and massive collapse of European and international demand for our products as well as to the drop out of most sale and distribution channels. Preliminary estimations suggest that overall demand for our products on the European market has decreased by 80% since the introduction of measures mid-March across the EU.

As you are well aware, the timing of this crisis could not be worse as the sector was just entering its peak season (from March to June), during which between 50 to 80% of its yearly sales and turnover are realised. These highly perishable and seasonal products rely on a natural plant cycle that cannot be interrupted during the ongoing crisis; It is moreover impossible to store them or to reorganize the supply in these circumstances as no alternative outlets can provide a sufficiently substantial alternative in the short/medium term for the usual market volumes. Consumption of flowers and live plants produced within the EU is destined at 85% for the EU internal market; the remaining 15% that are destined for exports are also being directly and severely hit as most destination countries have enforced similar lockdown measures while import flows from dedicated supply-chain partners in southern countries, amounting to less than 10% of the total EU market value and completing the offer from the EU production, have also almost practically come to a halt. As a result, all products that have not been sold in time now inevitably go to waste, which implies the destruction of production and stocks to a massive scale across the EU and beyond.

These unfortunate circumstances have put all the main actors, segments and sub-sectors of the flowers & live plants sector and supply-chain across the EU in a tenuous position to continue ensuring their viability during and beyond this crisis as they are faced with immediate and immense liquidity problems and are not financially consolidated enough to survive for weeks without sales income while their operating and employment costs cannot be suspended as products and stocks need to be maintained by a minimum workforce. The dramatic 'domino' effect that has ensued since mid-March on the overall supply-chain is bringing the whole sector to the brink of a full breakdown across the EU and beyond, with immense ramifications in terms of bankruptcy of businesses and related employment across the supply-chain (Breeders and producers of propagating material, growers, wholesalers, traders, distribution channels, specialized retail shops, landscapers).

We would also like to remind you that our sector, characterized by its high competitiveness and a strong and healthy market-driven orientation, has never benefitted from any sort of financial support under the Common Agricultural Policy, all the while making a significant positive socio-economic contribution to the EU by employing around 760.000 people in the EU (of which 335.000 at production level, 95.000 at trade and wholesale level and 332.000 in retail) and representing a total market and consumption value of 48 billion EUR, not only in the largest producing and consuming countries (Netherlands, Italy, Germany, France and Spain) but across the EU 27 as a whole.

The undersigned organisations, which represent various segments and sub-sectors of the flower and live plant sector across the EU and altogether a significant voice for the sector, are herewith joining forces to call on yourself and the European Commission to do their utmost to activate as soon as possible extraordinary and temporary support measures that are urgently needed across the EU to support the flower & live plants plant sector survive this extraordinary crisis.

We are aware of the proposals put forward separately by Copa Cogeca and would support a similar approach along the following lines:

- Short-term and temporary extraordinary support measures for producers and all other operators from the sector (trade, wholesale, distribution, breeders, specialised retailers) that require urgent adoption:

Activation of exceptional measures for tailor-made crisis management, such as those provided for example under Article 221 of the Common Market Organization (CMO) Regulation 1308/2013 (but not necessarily exclusively in case other exceptional avenues can be triggered), in order to allow the sector to benefit from EU financial assistance to:

- guarantee financial liquidity and compensate for stock destruction and operating losses – to be applied retroactively for the reference period March to June 2020
 - benefit from measures to compensate at least 80% of disposal costs and production costs of products not being sold
 - maintain the functioning of the EU Single market
- Medium to long term measures:
 - Establishment of a multi-annual dedicated budget line specifically designed to address the promotion of flowers and plants towards consumers under the EU promotion schemes for agricultural products provided for by EU Reg.1144/2014
 - Resume the organisation of the annual meeting(s) of the Civil Dialogue Group (CDG) on Horticulture dedicated to the flower & live plants sector to ensure a regular exchange of information with the Commission services and an opportunity for a constructive dialogue.
 - Implement an annual collection and publication of statistics and data on the sector by the Commission on a yearly basis (e.g. production, consumption or trade) as it is done for other agricultural sectors.

Without any doubt, other constraints and essential needs for this sector will emerge in the coming months both in the context and aftermath of this crisis. We nevertheless believe that the rapid enforcement of these initial measures will allow the sector to stay afloat and maintain a certain degree of economic activity while continuing to support employment by the sector.

Lastly, we shall stress that the flower & live plants sector is a major contributor to both the environment and public health: all studies converge in demonstrating that flowers and plants in gardens and cities have the potential to deliver solutions to mitigate climate change's impact by acting as CO2 traps and making congested cities more liveable, thus raising the quality of life of European citizens as well as contributing directly to a healthy lifestyle, including mental health. With the ongoing policy discussions on the New European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, it is important that the flower and live plant sector's potential contribution to the fight against climate change is not forgotten.

Dear Commissioner, the viability and survival of the whole flowers and live plants sector, and all related jobs and businesses, is now at stake. We urge you to act swiftly in order to avoid the materialization of a worst-case scenario that would hamper our sector for years to come, with long-lasting and irremediable effects on employment and economic activity created and supported for decades by all the operators from this sector.

Thanking you for your consideration and dedicated attention to this sector, we remain at your disposal for any additional clarification you may require.

Sincerely yours,

[signed]

Sylvie Mamias
Secretary General
UNION FLEURS

[signed]

Jan-Dieter Bruns
President
ENA

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Mr Norbert Lins

Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
European Parliament

About the signatories to this letter:

Union Fleurs – International Flower Trade Association is the umbrella organisation for national associations and companies active in the floricultural trade. The general mission of Union Fleurs is to represent, promote and defend the interests of traders and wholesalers in cut flowers, cut foliage and potted plants. Union Fleurs was founded in 1959 in Brussels and has nowadays members in 20 countries. Within its membership, Union Fleurs gathers over 3.000 companies, of which more than 1,500 floricultural traders and wholesalers in the EU (Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium). Members account for more than 80% of the total value of the worldwide trade of cut flowers and pot plants.

Email: info@unionfleurs.org - Website: www.unionfleurs.org - EU Transparency Register N° 14864192565-82

ENA - European Nurserystock Association represents nursery stock growers' organisations all over Europe. The nurseries, where live plants are propagated, grown and traded, are members of regional or national nursery organisations that are members of the ENA. Sixteen EU countries currently constitute the membership of ENA: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

Email: ena@enaplants.eu - Website: www.enaplants.eu - EU Transparency Register N° 248993414712-40

ARELFH (the Assembly of European Horticultural Regions) represents 20 member regions and 28 AOPs from 9 European countries. Its main missions are to defend the economic and social interests of the fruit, vegetable and horticultural sectors in Europe; to foster exchanges of best practices, partnerships and joint projects between regions and professional organisations; and to actively seek new solutions for the main issues affecting the future of the fruit, vegetables and horticultural production in Europe.

Email: europe@areflh.org - Website: www.areflh.org - EU Transparency Register N° 729014411618-96

VAL'HOR is the inter-branch organisation for ornamental horticulture in France. It is officially acknowledged since 1998 by the French Ministries of Agriculture and Trade as representing the entire sector. VAL'HOR in figures: **53 000** companies represented; **3** branches: production, trade and retail, landscape; **10** trade associations: growers, nurseries, seeds companies, garden centres, wholesalers, florists, agro-shops, landscape contractors and landscape architects.

Email: valhor@valhor.fr - Website: www.valhor.fr

VBN is the Association of Dutch Flower Auctions, cooperatives that organize the international ornamental marketplace for 4.100 producers and 2.500 buyers. With daily over 100.000 transactions regarding more than 30.000 varieties of cut flowers and plants, the flower auction is a key player in the worldwide ornamental chain.

Email: e.herben@vbn.nl - Website: www.vbn.nl - EU Transparency Register N° 60862364841-67

CIOPORA is the International Association of Breeders of Asexually Reproduced Horticultural Varieties. Breeders of such varieties account for two-thirds of all Plant Variety Rights (PVR) titles in the world. For more than 50 years, CIOPORA has represented these breeders in all matters of Intellectual Property (IP) protection and aims to foster an environment in which the innovation of these breeders can flourish. CIOPORA is a member-based, non-profit organization.

Email: info@ciopora.org - Website: www.ciopora.org - EU Transparency Register N° 834378913628-15

ANTHOS is the Royal Trade Association for Nursery Stock and Flower Bulbs. It fulfills a supervisory role in the development of (inter) national policies for market access (e.g. United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Russia) and offering assistance in the event of trade barriers in countries all over the world. Besides, the organisation and its members are financing, advising and implementing the product promotion of flower bulbs and nursery stock.

Email: secretariaat@anthos.org - Website: www.anthos.org

FLEUROSELECT is the international organisation of breeders, producers and distributors of propagation material of ornamental plants. Fleuroselect's mission is to promote the development of indoor and outdoor plants and flowers and breeding in general. The organisation is also a platform for networking by offering informal meeting possibilities during events and information sharing.

Email: info@fleuroselect.com - Website: www.fleuroselect.com

ELCA is the European association of landscape professionals. Together they work on the design, construction and maintenance of gardens, public green and green buildings. 24 countries are affiliated to ELCA, together representing 13. 000 companies and 125. 000 employees. On behalf of this large group, ELCA wants to be the discussion partner and to strengthen the social movement towards greening and sustainability. ELCA calls on the importance of greenery with societal benefits in Europe and is the voice of the green professionals who take care of this important work.

Email: contact@elca.info - Website: www.elca.info