

Changing the image of African roses

Compared with roses from South America, African roses are often considered to be the poor relation. However, at least one company is trying to change the image and is successfully finding new markets for its quality roses.

By Helen Armstrong

“We are trying to change the perception of the African roses which we can do by adding value and taking care with the packing selection,” says Isabelle Henin Spindler, managing director of Red Lands Roses.

This started with varieties and the decision to specialise in spray roses. “We feel that there is a new market for the new sort of spray roses we are growing.”

“We grow varieties with long stems and large flowers and varieties which we feel we can work with.” This includes the varieties Pink Flush and Abeba, the latter of which was voted “Best Kenyan rose, VBA award 2006”. It has large buds and dark orange flowers.

“We are finding that this, as well as our other spray roses, does particularly well in Russia. We can now fly them directly to Russia via the Dubai Flower Centre. This sales channel is becoming a huge trend because we have around seven flights per day from Nairobi to Dubai and two direct flights to Moscow.”

The Dubai Flower Centre has

also opened up the Japanese market. In the past, the cost of freight through Europe used to be make this too expensive but this is no longer an issue, says Spindler and as a result the Dubai centre is growing very fast, she says.

Red Lands Roses is in Ruiru, 35km north east of Nairobi at an altitude of 1700m close to the equator. The farm covers 15 ha and is expanding by a further 1.5ha. Roses are grown in plastic houses on a 100% hydroponic system with full recycling of water. The substrate is volcanic material which is dug out from close to the farm, washed and sterilised.

She is also on the look-out for new technical ideas and innovations. For example, last year she trialled the shading paint, Reduheat which is designed to keep out heat but allow photosynthetically active radiation to enter the greenhouse.

“I thought it was fantastic. It changed the greenhouse climate overnight and the roses had thicker and longer stems and it reduced blackening on the red roses, although we



Red Lands Roses is finding a strong market for large, strong spray roses such as Pink Flush (left) and Abeba (right).

know other plastic can do that as well. Other plastics can also diffuse the light and have an impact on flower colour and size but never altogether. Reduheat did that but unfortunately my financial manager thought it was too expensive for us!”

Tailored to buyers

Red Lands Roses is producing 24-26 varieties which Isabelle says makes production quite complicated, “but when you sell direct to a wholesaler you can’t offer them only one variety because clients want something of everything.” This also makes administration regarding traceability more complex. Nevertheless, the farm is certified by many international bodies such as Flower Label Organisation (FLO), Eurep-Gap, MPS-GAP, MPS-Social, MPS-Environmental label,

Flower Label Program (FLP Germany), Max Havelaar Switzerland and the Kenya Flower Council.

As well as numerous varieties the farm also supplies three grades: Extra, First and Standard. In addition, clients can request bunches which are for example, extra tight or extra open. Roses are harvested three times per day to ensure optimum quality of each stem and are immediately pre-cooled once cut, and put in disinfected cold water for six hours.

It is all part of meeting customer demand.

“You need to closely watch market dynamics as well as the marketing strategy of our clients, in terms of who their customers are.

“We want to people to know that the good roses don’t just come from South America!” ■