

Phytosanitary products in the cut flowers sector

Rational use that respects the health and safety of professionals and consumers

Much like other products associated with agricultural sectors (particularly food products), questions may sometimes be raised about certain aspects of cut flowers: their geographical origin, seasonality, modes of production and the use of phytosanitary products.

The plant sector wishes to emphasise its long-standing commitment to **preserving the health and safety of professionals and consumers**.

The sector also confirms its commitment to pursuing **its transitional and CSR initiatives**, which constitute one of the three key ambitions of the new inter-branch strategic project for 2030.

1. Key figures for cut flowers

Almost 80% of cut flowers sold in France are imported, mainly from the Netherlands (82%), Italy (4%) and Kenya (4%) (Source: % by value, French Customs according to TradeDataMonitor – compiled by FranceAgriMer, 2022). The Netherlands represents the sector's primary logistics platform, and imports from this country are not necessarily locally sourced.

2. Production of plants and cut flowers

1. The sector adheres to a strict legal and regulatory framework

- **The use of phytosanitary products is a necessity:**
 - o Producers use these products as needed when signs of disease appear on plants, posing a threat to their cultivations (and therefore to the company's economic viability and ability to employ workers). This use is rational, given the cost of the products and the limitations set on their use. Their elimination without alternatives would result in severe technical roadblocks.
- **Active substances are subject to authorisation:**
 - o Each product that may be used in production is subject to prior authorisation, reviewed at least every 10 years, first at the EU level (for the active substance) and then at the national level (for each commercial speciality containing the active substance).

- Each commercial speciality is authorised for a given type of plant, parasite, disease or weed, and carries a specific dosage and conditions of application. This information is indicated on the product label.
- In the EU, the cultivation of plants for non-food purposes is not subject to MRLs (maximum residue limits).
- **Their use in production is subject to limitations and controls:**
 - French producers of cut flowers use products which are approved by public authorities.
 - The use of these products is strictly regulated:
 - Mandatory use of personal protective equipment.
 - The use of suitable application equipment, limiting product overuse or runoff.
 - Prerequisite for the use and possession of phytosanitary products: an up-to-date "certiphyto" certificate.
 - Recording of the treatments carried out.
 - Only using the products authorised in adherence with applicable law (dosage, conditions of application, re-entry interval, target plants and pests, etc.).
 - Each year, the State carries out monitoring to ensure these conditions of use are being met.

2. The sector is investing in research and innovation for the development of alternative methods.

- For 30 years, **1/3 of the operations of the sector's Technical Institute** (ASTREDHOR) have been dedicated to researching **alternative solutions** to synthetic phytosanitary products. For example:
 - **The use of auxiliary fauna** as substitutes for chemical methods to combat pests (aphids, caterpillars, mites, whitefly, thrips).
 - **Physical methods** involving blowing or brushing off cultures, and trapping pests with glue bands.
- The institute is involved in **programmes** which are financially supported by public authorities and the VALHOR inter-branch organisation. For example:
 - **PARSADA²**: the institute was notably selected under the PARSADA plan (2025-2029, French Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry) for the development of solutions for the management of thrips, which is the main pest impacting the production of cut flowers.
 - **Ecophyto 2030 Plan**: renewal of the DEPHY FERME programmes to reduce the use of phytosanitary products on plants grown under cover (including cut flowers).

3. The sector develops voluntary processes, labels and certifications

¹ Certiphyto is an official French individual document certifying an ability to use, sell or buy plant protection products or advise professionals. This certificate aims to promote the use of alternatives, by encouraging the use of these products to be limited and by reducing the risks associated with their use.

² The "Strategic Action Plan in anticipation of potential European restrictions on active substances" and the development of alternative techniques to protect plants.

- Plante Bleue³:
 - o National reference label for French horticulturists and nursery owners using an environmentally friendly approach. Plante Bleue guarantees that plants have been produced in an eco-responsible fashion **using low amounts of inputs**.
 - o The "Plante Bleue 3" level notably includes the **prohibition of CMRI phytosanitary products**, and the implementation of **integrated biological control** in hydroponics (100% in greenhouses or tunnels, i.e. under cover).
 - o The commitment of 10% of producers to "Plante Bleue 3" level **means almost 50% of French** production areas are covered by these specifications. "Plante Bleue 3" enables access to the national certification "HVE - Haute Valeur Environnementale" (High Environmental Value).
 - o The sector is currently working on the development of a mandatory tool for the collection of data, notably in order to **monitor the use of phytosanitary products**.
- Organic farming: excludes the use of synthetic phytosanitary products.

4. The sector aims to achieve a rate of 90% of plants being sustainably produced and sold by 2025.

- In 2023, VALHOR joined the international consortium "FSI - Floriculture Sustainability Initiative"⁴ and its FSI 2025 commitment, which aims to achieve **90% responsibly produced and traded volumes by 2025**.

3. Trading plants and cut flowers

1. The sector promotes best practices to limit exposure by professionals

- Professional organisations oversee the promotion and observance of best practices for workplace health and safety, aiming notably to **limit worker exposure** to phytosanitary products (wearing equipment, gloves, aprons, etc.).
- In addition, several existing studies have examined the presence of pesticides on cut flowers, as well as the link between worker exposure to these products and the development of certain illnesses. **The conclusions of these various studies are not aligned**, and their results should be interpreted **with due caution**. While one Belgian study⁵ appears to establish a link, it should be noted that the analysis by the German institute BfR⁶ (German Federal Institute for Risk Analysis) concludes that, based on available data, *"cut flowers such as those traded in Germany are not expected to pose a risk to the health of customer. The same applies to florists, who handle cut*

³ www.certificationsduvegetal.org

⁴ www.fsi2025.com

⁵ "Pesticide Residues on Three Cut Flower Species and Potential Exposure of Florists in Belgium", K.Toumi, C. Vleminckx, J. Van Loco, B. Schiffrers, September 2016.

⁶ "Assessment of health risks from pesticide residues on cut flowers", BfR, April 2021.

flowers, as long as recommended occupational health and hygiene standards are complied with."

2. The sector's commitment to cut flower traceability

- French flower production and imports are **complementary**.
- Exporting countries (outside the EU) include Kenya, Ethiopia, Equator and Columbia.
- The use of imported flowers is necessary in order to provide **supply that meets consumer demand**. While interest in local, seasonal and responsibly grown flowers is growing, price remains the most important factor for consumers.
- Professional organisations (florists, plant and flower wholesalers) are calling for the implementation of **country-of-origin displays** on invoices, as well as in-store display solutions for florists⁷.
- At the same time, the inter-branch organisation launched a strategic initiative between sector stakeholders in order to **foster French production**⁸.

3. The sector encourages responsible use of imports

- National organisations (floristry bodies, plant and flower wholesalers) invite businesses to prioritise **supply from certified and approved flower farms**⁵.
- Certain (non-EU) exporter countries have developed **quality and sustainability standards**. For example:
 - o The Kenya Flower Council (KFC), a union representing 80% of rose producers, has implemented the FOSS indicator (Flowers and Ornamentals Sustainability Standard). 80% of flowers exported from Kenya to Dutch platforms are certified using a local certification or via the MPS (a Dutch certification).
 - o Equator has developed the "Flor Ecuador Certified" label for producers with the most virtuous methods, notably in terms of controlling and reducing the use of phytosanitary products.
- Certain **non-governmental organisations** have also developed their own specification requirements for cut flowers (example: Max Havelaar).
- Launched in 2013, the **FSI - Floriculture Sustainability Initiative international consortium is based around a package of standards**, notably encompassing international standards such as MPS-GAP (rewarding best agricultural practices), MPS-ABC (certification based on environmental impact), MPS-SQ (certification based on social criteria) as well as standards implemented at the national level in various countries.

⁷ White paper on "Traceability of cut flowers - Sectoral commitments for informed consumers", UNF - (French National Union of Florists), 2023.

⁸ This is one of the ambitions of the inter-branch strategic project for 2030. VALHOR also contributed to the organisation of the "French Cut Flowers Day" at the Salon Du Végétal convention in Angers, 11/09/2024.

About VALHOR:

VALHOR has been officially acknowledged by French public authorities as the French horticulture, floristry and landscape inter-branch organization. It represents 45,885 specialist businesses and 202,440 professionals, generating €15.3 billion in revenues. It is the umbrella body for 10 French professional organizations representing the production (VERDIR, Felcoop, UFS, CR), sales (FFAF, JAF, FGFP, Floralisa) and landscaping (Unep, FFP) sectors.

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