

New entrant Floritec makes its mark in a mature Chrysanthemum market

Dutch-based Floritec, a breeder of Chrysanthemums, potted Celosia and Aster, deserves credit for having cemented itself into a global position of market acceptance in less than two decades. The company has become the mark for leadership in 'Customised Breeding' and more recently achieved a new milestone by opening a new breeding facility in the Netherlands' epicentre of Chrysanthemum production.

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It's tough enough keeping a Chrysanthemum brand relevant and in high demand, let alone launching a new one.

Jeroen Ravensbergen, with a long track record in summer flowers and bedding plants before joining Floritec as CEO in 2019, puts it this way, "Commercial Chrysanthemum growing is much about accurate scheduling and crop steering at each growth stage with growers having developed patterns and experiences with tried-and-trusted varieties. This leads them to continue to grow the same varieties even though there are equally performing or even better alternatives. Chrysanthemum production is a generally conservative business, as well as it might be given the large-scale nurseries and sums involved."

TAKING THE GUESSWORK OUT

So, when the original four founding partners began Floritec in 2007, job number one was to overcome what in business management jargon is called the 'status quo bias'. If, by their very nature, growers resist new cultivars simply because they fear uncertainty and loss of control, taking out the guesswork in Chrysanthemum innovation is crucial.

As such, the company adopted a unique approach to conducting

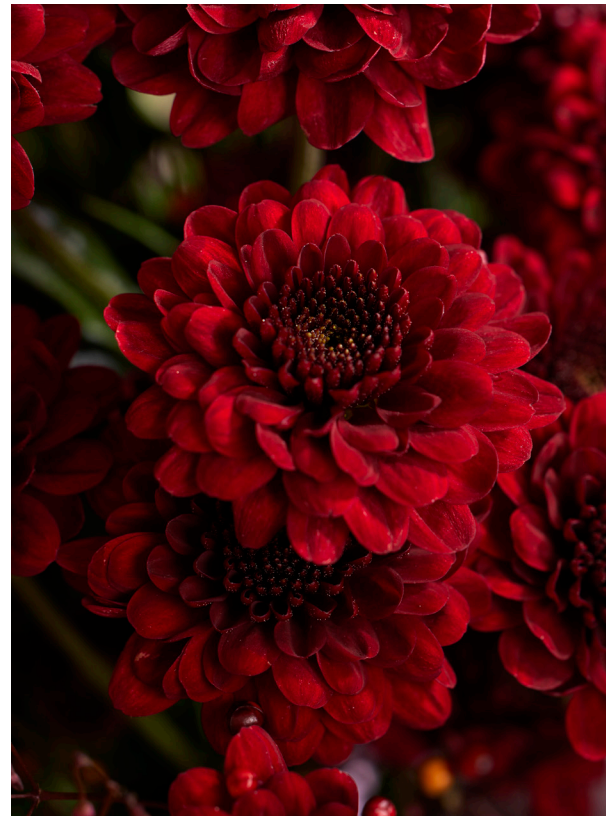
its breeding programmes 'in situ', breeding customised mums in growers' glasshouses and their locations' specific climatic conditions. Apart from making the growers genuinely part of the breeding process, engaging them in the complex cultivar decision-making process at a very early stage, Floritec increased exposure to their full spectrum of Chrysanthemums: Santinis, spray mums and disbuds by being prominently present at trade shows, research projects, and FlowerTrials.

For this reason, Ravensbergen is proud that Floritec works so closely with reputable growers such as Dalat Hasfarm in Vietnam and Spais Fiori in Italy, who want to cultivate their Chrysanthemums as a partner.

A team of breeders and assistants, for example, regularly travel to Acate-based Spais to 'shave and pollinate' under extreme growing conditions a myriad of blooms which will ultimately lead to reliable varieties adapted to thrive in the conditions that prevail in South Eastern Sicily.

NEW BREEDING FACILITY

More recently, Floritec opened a new breeding facility in Honselersdijk to accelerate growth and better address their customers' needs.



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"We will stick to our customised, 'in-situ' breeding. But more room is needed because this approach requires additional work to fine-tune 'experimentals'. Moreover, after 16 years in business, there's more work in maintaining and managing our gene pools. More importantly: next to customised breeding, there are 'hortipreneurs' finding on-site selection a hassle and difficult to implement without disrupting existing crop cycles. Then there's a third group of growers, who are so busy that they mostly flip through our catalogue to see what is readily available. All three types of customers are equally important. We aim to serve them best by putting our innovations in Chrysanthemums



and potted plants in the limelight at our new test greenhouses,” says Ravensbergen. He then recites Matthew 5:14-16 from the Bible: *‘No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house’.*

OPEN BY APPOINTMENT

The new breeding facility is open by appointment only and is sure to draw returning visitors at dates more or less coinciding with the major horticultural events and trade exhibitions in the Netherlands. Ravensbergen elaborates, “The atmosphere is friendly and welcoming, allowing growers to browse our assortment

of pre-commercial and experimental five times a year. Our single largest Chrysanthemum trials happen in week 24 during the FlowerTrials and GreenTech. The trials in week 44 run parallel to the IFTF show and Trade Fair Aalsmeer and are another important fixture in the Chrysanthemum industry’s calendar. In addition, Floritec will host three trials at different dates in the year.”

The company’s test and demonstration greenhouses are ideally situated within a stone’s throw of Royal FloraHolland Naaldwijk. Ravensbergen notes, “I reckon 75 per cent of the Netherlands’ top ten Chrysanthemum growers are within a 25km radius or even less distant, making it easy to pop in. Running your own test greenhouse brings another important benefit as it allowed us to become an official member of FlowerTrials.”

IMPORTANT FINDINGS

Trying to put yourself in the shoes of a grower is one of Ravensbergen’s most important findings from Floritec’s first 16 years in Chrysanthemum breeding and trading. “We don’t want to pretend to have all the answers. The grower’s feedback is constructive as he knows best what colour, bloom shape and stem length are relevant to which markets and which cultivars fit their cultivation techniques.” Floritec’s newest structure blends ‘functional’ and ‘state-of-the-art’. Ravensbergen comments, “There are no partition walls to create several temperature zones. The greenhouse’s design is rather basic in contrast to the ultra-modern greenhouses in the Netherlands, with the Chrysanthemums inside

being a rather pampered, energy-intensive crop, provided with the right light intensity in each growing phase. We deliberately try to move away from such cropping programmes and put a healthy amount of pressure on production, which will ultimately lead to much more resilient cultivars.”

BREEDING CRITERIA

There are criteria to check multi-fold through the different stages of breeding. These include transportability, stem weight, shelf life, plant density and resistance to Verticillium wilt, Chrysanthemum White Rust (CRW), and Fusarium wilt. Moreover, the flowering response is crucial as a new variety must allow for enough crop cycles per year. Equally challenging is to cater for the broadest possible portfolio while staying focused. Ravensbergen says, “Creating profitable varieties that can be grown with fewer synthetic chemistries and more biological products while preserving natural resources is paramount. We try to accelerate the breeding of climate-resilient Chrysanthemums that can thrive in variable conditions. Last but not least, there is a need for aesthetic value. We follow the slogan, ‘Colouring the planet,’ and want to excite the entire value chain with new, fantastic flowers. Ultimately our products are designed to bring joy.”

BOTANICAL CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Can botanical Chrysanthemums help breed more resilient blooms? Ravensbergen says, “They sure can. There’s collaborative research between WUR University, my alma mater, and the Chrysanthemum industry, focusing, amongst others, on thrips resistance. Following decades of domestication and

breeding, focusing mostly on pretty blooms, desirable traits have been selected out of the gene pool. Genetic drift may have resulted in the loss of rare species and a decrease in the gene pool. Undoubtedly, that screening of botanical material will allow breeders to find lost traits.”

SUCCESSFUL SERIES AND STAND ALONES

After 16 years of selling their blooms on the market, Ravensbergen is visibly happy to have created, through Floritec, a successful umbrella brand selling Calimero, Rossi, Jinda and Ellison

Santini series, the Da Vinci pot mums and the Twisted series in potted Celosias. ‘Jinda Red’ – touted as the red rose among the Santinis by floral designers – has conquered the market with its warm, burgundy red pompon blooms. Floritec’s spray varieties purple/white ‘Amethyst’ and yellow ‘Zippo’ can be found in greenhouses in Colombia and Italy, respectively. The news of the moment is Santini ‘Maverick Orange’. The cultivar has unique pompon-shaped tangerine blooms and a fresh green/yellowish core. Though the Maverick series

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is relatively new, it already holds prestige and value in the world Chrysanthemum market. All three members of the Maverick family – including ‘Maverick White’ and ‘Maverick Sunny’ stand out for their sturdy stems and excellent shelf life.

THE PERKS AND CHALLENGES OF BEING ON TREND

White and yellow are the world’s best-selling Chrysanthemum colours. “Worldwide, brides continue to wear white on their wedding day, so it will always remain a vital part of the colour mix. Also, whites are the easiest

‘COLOURING THE PLANET,’... ULTIMATELY, OUR PRODUCTS ARE DESIGNED TO BRING JOY’



to dye, which is a prerequisite for many growers. What strikes me most is the growing demand for unusual colours, which you often see in mass media sources. It's hard to speak about genuine trends, the rise in popularity of soft pink, Barbiecore-like colours being the exception to the rule. In potted mums, two-toned varieties are a favourite with end consumers." When asked about where Floritec looks for breeding inspiration, Ravensbergen says, "We treat ourselves as our audience. That's how you make the best breeding work. Marketing manager Daphne Hooegeveen adds, "Inspiration is everywhere; Floritec listens to family, friends, growers, traders, looks in fashion, and interior design. Additionally, there's collaborative market research by the industry-wide marketing campaign JustChrys."

STATE OF THE TRADE

Chrysanthemum business-wise, Ravensbergen says that the outlook for the energy market is very different to where we were last year, which was marked by a 30 per cent drop in winter production. He comments, "Overall, there's a more stable demand and supply of energy, but uncertainties remain for growers. Also, there is more clarity on the price elasticity of mums in the age of inflation. So, the belief in a (foreseeable) future in Dutch Chrysanthemum production holds strong."

At the same time, Kenya produces more and more mixed bouquets, which prompts Ravensbergen to ask what will happen if retailers decide to move away from air freight in floral too. "Sea freight will gain further momentum. Our Rossi en Calimero series has strong sea legs, so we are well prepared in that respect. We are working on protocols for sea transportation. Our partner Dalat in Vietnam transports 80 per cent of its blooms by sea container, giving us valuable insights in this transportation mode."

The modern Chrysanthemum occupies an outstanding number two position among the world's top three most traded and grown cut



flowers. According to the latest AIPH stats, the global production area of the flower spans 41,269ha under glasshouse or in the open. In validating these figures, Ravensbergen adds, "Some green professionals sustain that Colombia grows between 1.8 -2 billion stems per year, mostly destined for the North American market, while Asia, that is mostly Vietnam and Malaysia, produce more or less the same volume for predominantly the Japanese and

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Australian market. Europe, more precisely the Netherlands, has an annual output of between 1.2 - 1.3 stems." An important barometer of global Chrysanthemum production and trade is the stats of Royal FloraHolland. At the world's largest flower hub, the number of supplied Chrysanthemum stems in 2022 was 247,7 million spray Chrysanthemums, 97,4 million Santinis, and 61,1 million disbuds.