

Viareggio's Flor-Export cooperative spotlights in the new Dutch movie *Klem*



Photo credit: VersiliaToday.

Lights, camera, action. Rising to international stardom is Flor-Export, a hundred-strong member cut flower and cut foliage cooperative from Viareggio. Their work recently 'bloomed on the silver screen', serving as the backdrop for a new crime movie *Klem*, by Dutch film director Frank Ketelaar.

At the recently held MyPlant show in Milan, Flor-Export's Ilaria Bertolucci explained that filming happened on a flower farm amid Tuscany's rolling hills and at the cooperative's rotunda-shaped headquarters in Viareggio. The latter served as a setting for a brutal fight scene, with actors kicking over dozens of trolleys laden with flowers. Naturally, the filmmakers compensated for the flowers destroyed during the actors' battle.

Fifteen cut flowers and cut foliage growers founded the cooperative in 1966 as an alternative to the local flower wholesale market in Viareggio, one of the major cities in Versilia, the area right along the Tuscan coast on the north-western edge of the province of Lucca.



L-R Ilaria Bertolucci, Sauro Angeli and Emanuele Francesconi staffed Flor-Export's stand at MyPlant&Garden.

Back in the 1960s, floriculture was once one of the pillars of Viareggio's industry. A series of booms and busts followed, albeit less important economically, it is still alive and kicking. Flor-Export, for example, is expanding its footprint by adapting to a new market and user expectations, partly helped by the gardening and home decorating boom during the pandemic.

In 2021, at the height of the pandemic, for example it reported €4.5 million in sales, the coop's largest annual revenue ever.

Export sales account for 15 per cent of the cooperative's turnover, with GlobalG.A.P. -certified cut foliage such as Ruscus, Eucalyptus and Myrtus among the top-selling products abroad.

Sauro Angeli joined Flor-Export as a managing director in 2016 and says that the run-up to All Saint's Day (*I morti*) is one of the busiest times of the year with nearly a million disbudded and spray Chrysanthemums changing hands. Lisianthus and Statice are also among the flagship products, which are typically given more time to grow than counter crops in the industrial, highly automated Dutch greenhouses.

In Lisianthus for example, growers have two crop cycles per year, whereas the Dutch peers have up to five cycles. The less intensive and more organically flower farming – the members of Flor-Export sustain – result in quality flowers, with sturdy stems, long shelf life and bold, non-fading colours. These quality criteria are much appreciated by the cooperative's customer base, which at home is mainly made up of floral wholesalers in northern Italy. Cut foliage predominantly finds its way to Dutch and UK-based flower factories, which use them as fillers in bouquets destined for UK supermarkets.

In commenting on the cooperative's participation in MyPlant Bertolucci says, "I think that Myplant is increasingly becoming important year after year as it allows us to meet international customers and breeders face to face. What's more, MyPlant serves as a unique bridge between florists and growers to exchange ideas and information about trends, new colours, flower shapes and more.

"This meeting between wedding planners, florists and growers is very important for us as a cooperative. MyPlant helps the European industry acquaint with flowers and cut foliage made in Italy which are readily available in the right season."