

What requirements should your cut flowers and foliage comply with to be allowed on the European market?

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Cut flowers and foliage are subject to various legal and non-legal requirements. Satisfying basic buyer requirements and legal requirements is a must for exporters to the European market, but additional efforts also offer opportunities for distinguishing yourself.

Phytosanitary requirements as well as product labelling and packaging requirements of buyers should be followed strictly. This document provides an overview of the most commonly used buyer requirements and standards.

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1. With which legal and non-legal requirements must my product comply?

When exporting cut flowers to Europe, you must comply with the following requirements:

Plant health

The EU has laid down phytosanitary requirements to prevent the introduction and spread of organisms harmful to plants and plant products in the EU. Cut flowers and foliage exported to the EU must comply with the EU legislation on plant health.

Most [flowers imported in the EU](#) must be accompanied by an official 'phytosanitary certificate' guaranteeing the phytosanitary conditions of plants and plants products, and also that the shipment has been officially inspected, complies with statutory requirements for entry into the EU and is free of quarantine pests and other harmful pathogens. The current Plant Health directive will be replaced by a new one in December 2019. The [new directive](#) will be more stringent than the current one.

Tips:

- Phytosanitary certificates are issued by your national plant protection organisation (NPPO). Check with the relevant NPPO for the exact procedures to get the phytosanitary certificate. Click here for a [list of NPPOs](#).
- A model phytosanitary certificate can be found in [Annex VII of the Plant Health Directive](#).
- Check if your country and the country you want to export to have implemented digital services to facilitate the process of import and export. For example in the Netherlands there is the [e-CertNL system](#) (previously CLIENT export), which is also used by the Kenyan and Ugandan inspection authorities.
- Read more about plant health in the [EU Export Helpdesk](#).

Endangered Species - CITES

If you are exporting flowers that are listed as endangered according to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)) (e.g. certain orchids), you have to take specific procedures into account to prove that trade will not be harmful to the survival of the species. If your product is listed as endangered, all exports need to be accompanied by an export permit from your country's CITES authority and an import permit from the destination country.

Tips:

- Check in the [CITES species lists](#) if import and export permits are required for your product. If you are not sure, contact your local CITES authority.
- Getting all CITES documents may take some time (especially when you are a new exporter, not known yet by the authorities). Since timing is essential when handling with perishable goods as cut flowers, try to anticipate on possible delays during the application for a permit.
- Read more about CITES at the [EU Export Helpdesk](#).

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

Developing new plant varieties with superior features is often very expensive. The developers of new varieties want their return on the investments. To avoid that just anybody can use these new varieties, they are protected by intellectual property rights (IPR). In recent years, there has been a growing attention for these plant breeders' rights and illegal products are banned from the market.

Tips:

- Make sure that you know exactly who owns the IPR for your species and pay necessary royalties.
- An interesting trend is that plant breeders' only let their new variety be grown by a select group of growers. Staying in contact with breeders and offering perfect conditions to grow their new variety may therefore be an advantage
- Familiarise yourself with the protection frameworks for new plant varieties, for example from the [Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties \(UPOV\)](#) or the [Community Plant Variety Office \(CPVO\)](#).

Other legal requirements

In addition to the requirements listed here, there are other requirements that you should adhere to, for example on the use of packaging material. Note that there is also non-product-specific legislation on packaging and liability that apply to all goods marketed in the EU and most other European countries. Furthermore some EU countries have developed their own helpdesk for exporting companies, such as [Open Trade Gate Sweden](#).

Tips:

- For a list of requirements for cut flowers and foliage consult the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) where you can select your specific product under chapter 0603.
- Contact [Open Trade Gate Sweden](#) if you have specific questions regarding rules and requirements in Sweden and the European Union.

2. Which additional requirements do buyers often have?

Some buyers have requirements that go beyond existing legislation, in particular as regards social responsibility and sustainability.

CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility

European consumers pay more and more attention to social and environmental circumstances during the flower production. As a result, buyers often require you to meet environmental and social standards in the form of certification. Compliance with environmental standards (focusing on pesticide and water use) is a common requirement, while social standards regarding e.g. labour conditions are gaining importance.

There is an abundance of standards to choose from (although the actual criteria show a lot of similarities). To determine which scheme you should follow, the market your targeting will be decisive. The increasing share of the 'unspecialised' market (supermarkets etc.) has also had its effects on the buyers' requirements. Several supermarket chains offer flowers under their own private labels and often require compliance with social and environmental standards at the production level, through certification.

Participation in the [MPS-ABC certification scheme](#) (environmental), [MPS-Socially Qualified \(SQ\)](#) and [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) or similar certificates are gradually becoming a standard requirement. The [Ethical Trading Initiative](#), [Fairtrade](#), [Fair Flowers Fair Plants \(FFP\)](#), [Florverde Sustainable Flowers](#), [Veriflora](#), [FlorEcuador](#) and the [Kenya Flower Council Flowers and Ornamentals Sustainability Standard \(F.O.S.S.\)](#), are all examples of environmental and social quality standards.

Sometimes these local initiatives are benchmarked against [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) and/or [MPS](#). Furthermore importers (mostly in the 'unspecialised market') may also participate in initiatives such as the [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#) in the UK, or the [Business Social Compliance Initiative](#) (in several Western European countries). These initiatives focus on improving social conditions in their members' supply chains. This implies that you, as a supplier, are also required to act in compliance with their principles.

Tips:

- Both buyers and consumers (especially in western and northern Europe) consider environmentally friendly and socially responsible production very important and this importance is expected to increase in the future. Become certified to prepare for the future.
- Use your good practices and certification as a marketing tool in the communication with (potential) buyers.
- [ITC Standards Map](#) gives an overview of the different labels used and their specific requirements.
- If you want to target supermarkets directly, check which sustainability criteria they impose.
- Familiarise yourself with the [ETI base code](#) to check what ETI members require from their suppliers.

MPS

The leading B2B scheme for flowers is [MPS-ABC](#). The MPS Group not only develops and administers certificates, it also carries out certification itself. MPS ABC certification covers environmental performance and is considered a must for growers. Furthermore they have several other schemes such as MPS-SQ (focussing on social issues), MPS-GAP (on Good Agricultural Practices) and MPS-Quality. The most comprehensive scheme is MPS-Florimark, which is a combination of the aforementioned four schemes.

Tips:

- More information about MPS can be found in the [ITC Standards Map](#).

- Having your company certified against MPS SQ meets the social requirements of most major retailers.
- Note that MPS-GAP is accepted as equivalent for GLOBALG.A.P.

GLOBALG.A.P.

[GLOBALG.A.P.](#) is a B2B scheme originally focusing on good agricultural practices (GAP). GLOBALG.A.P. has been the most important scheme for food products for years, but it is gaining importance for cut flowers as well, especially when selling to supermarkets.

Tip:

- More information about GLOBALG.A.P. can be found in the [ITC Standards Map](#).

Ethical Trading Initiative

The [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#) is based in the UK. Leading UK retailers like Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's, Morrisons and others are members of ETI, but also companies in other countries. The members adopt a code of labour practice including wages, working conditions, health and safety, and the right to free trade unions, that they expect all their suppliers to follow. This and other initiatives like BSCI focus on improving social conditions in their members' supply chains. This implies that you, as a supplier, are also required to act in compliance with their principles.

Tip:

- More information about the Ethical Trading Initiative can be found in the [ITC Standards Map](#).

Cold chain management

Proper cold chain management has a positive effect on the quality and vase life of flowers. Therefore EU buyers' demands for cold chain protocols are growing. Note that, although improving your cold chain management may be a challenge, the higher product quality should also improve your profits.

Tips:

- Developing and implementing cold chain protocols will be vital to survival in the coming years.
- Do not wait until buyers ask for improved cold chain management, but anticipate on the developments.

ITC's Standards Map

Check the International Trade Centre's [Standards Map](#), an online tool which provides information about over 200 voluntary sustainability standards and other similar initiatives covering issues such as food quality and safety. In Standards Map you can identify standards or codes of conduct relevant to your product, review the main features of the selected standards and codes and compare standards' requirements side-by-side.

3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

In addition to the official and common requirements, specific requirements apply to niche markets.

Organic flowers

Organic flowers are produced and processed by natural methods defined in EU legislation. The market for certified organic flowers is however very small and most organic flowers sold are produced in the EU.

Tips:

- Keep in mind that some flower traders perceive organic flowers as a lesser quality product due to a lower aesthetic quality and durability. As such, organic flowers are not much favoured in Europe yet.
- Although the market for certified organic flowers is still very small, the use of more 'natural' production methods (e.g. replacing certain pesticides by insects etc.) is growing. Stress your environmentally friendly production methods.

Fairtrade, Fair Flowers Fair Plants and other standards with a consumer label


Although CSR requirements are common buyer requirements, standards that are communicated through a consumer label still represent a relatively small part of the market, mostly in north-western Europe. Examples of relevant consumer labels are: [Fairtrade](#), [Fair Flowers Fair Plants](#), [Florverde Sustainable Flowers](#), [Veriflora](#), [FlorEcuador](#) and the [Kenya Flower Council Flowers and Ornamentals Sustainability Standard \(F.O.S.S.\)](#) are all examples of environmental and social quality standards.

Tips:


- Always check with your (potential) buyer if he demands certifications and which certification schemes he prefers.
- Information about several standards can be found on the ITC Standards Map: [Fairtrade](#), [Fair Flowers Fair Plants](#), [Florverde® Sustainable Flowers](#), [Veriflora](#), [FlorEcuador](#), [Kenya Flower Council F.O.S.S.](#)

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