

# Temperature and Team work are keys to Quality

Questions asked at Oudendijk Import about the variable quality of products arriving from their foreign suppliers have resulted in the development of a FlowerWatch program. Temperature monitoring is the cornerstone of this quality assessment system. The motivation is strictly based on “making tomorrow’s shipment better together” and not apportioning blame, this has resulted in the cooperation of all parties involved.



Don van der Meer, manager Oudendijk Import: “Quality is an investment to ensure our customers and the consumers remain interested in our products.”

Why do high quality flowers grown in the field arrive at their import destination in a below average condition? What does the loss in quality cost the owner of the flowers (grower or exporter/importer)? One example for protea, which has been calculated by Jeroen van der Hulst, managing director FlowerWatch, indicates that the potential value of a harvested stem can decrease by €0.50 along the supply chain. One shipment can therefore easily cost the flower owner thousands of euros. Oudendijk Import has taken the initiative to try and significantly reduce this potential loss in earnings. Don van der Meer, manager Oudendijk Import, says, “The industry loses a lot of money because of diminished product quality between harvest and retail. We have seen the high quality of the proteas being grown in South Africa, one of our main import routes. However, we have also all experi-

enced shipments arriving in either a perfect or an average to poor condition. The information from our in-house quality assessment of the shipments on arrival, including photographs to illustrate any damage, is continually communicated back to the growers. The typical reaction to a poor quality shipment is disbelief on behalf of the grower, convinced of the quality of the product when shipped from the farm. This raises the question, what can we do to improve the supply chain? We decided that we had to extend the quality monitoring system to include the time period between farm and Oudendijk Import in the Netherlands. The next question was, how could we measure the quality of the products from the moment of harvest to delivery at retail?”

**Correct temperature target**  
Contact with Jeroen van der Hulst led to investment in the FlowerWatch program. It started in August 2007 as

a research project focused on proteas imported from South Africa, but the recorded improvements achieved in less than a year lead Van der Meer to confirm that the program will be developed in the future to include more of the company’s main import routes and assortment of cut flowers and foliage. Temperature monitoring and control is judged to be the solution to 90% of the quality problems, starting when the product is harvested on farm. The target for proteas is 1°C, but since there has to be a balance between the ideal temperature and what is realistic today, the program aims to maintain the product within a temperature band of 1-4°C. Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the improvement achieved since the start of the program. FlowerWatch identifies seven critical points in the supply chain when the temperature is recorded. In general, the total number of transfer points involves 25-30 people. The success of a quality supply chain relies on every

one of these individuals taking their own responsibility for the correct handling of the flowers. Van der Meer says, “At first the individual parties involved in the shipping route from South Africa were hesitant, but this quickly turned into a high level of cooperation when number one, it was explained how important their role in the cool chain is to the final quality of the flowers and number two, the people were confronted with the earnings lost due to quality.” The recording of temperature data along the supply chain has also led to positive discussions with KLM Cargo and a commitment to maintain the

temperature in the cargo hold at below 5°C. Van der Meer adds, “The competition from sea transport is certainly positively affecting the customer service surrounding air freight. In the past, it was clear that even though the temperature requirements for our flower shipments may have been stated in the documentation, direct instruction was still required per shipment.”

## Professionalism

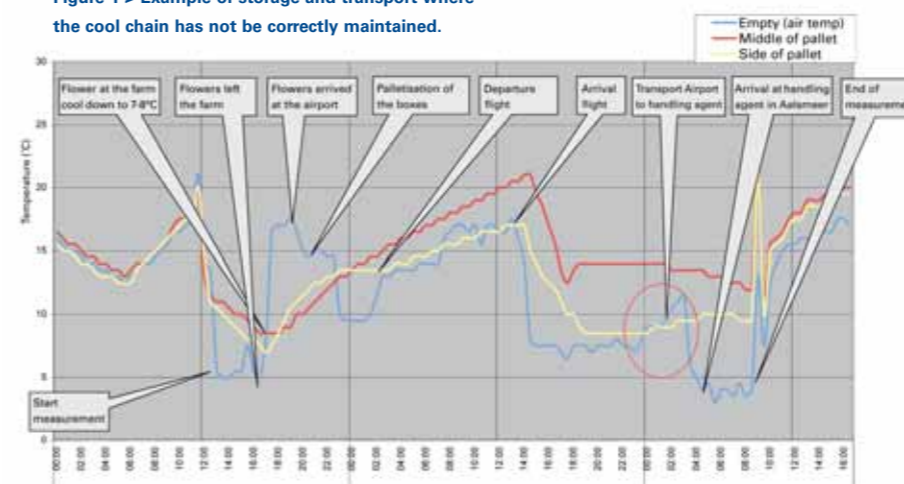
Van der Meer is adamant that the objective of the program is not to penalise any single party working within the supply chain or to obtain



Jeroen van der Hulst, managing director FlowerWatch: “Monitoring and improving the cool chain maintains the quality and value of the flowers during storage and transport.”

evidence for claims, the motivation is 100% focused on improving product quality. Van der Hulst confirms the philosophy of FlowerWatch is not to apportion blame but to work together towards improving the cool chain. The experience to date with the implementation of the program also clearly highlights that the correct implementation of the cool chain has to be driven by the owners of the flowers. “The professionalism of Oudendijk Import and its supply partners to commit to both the training of personnel and consistent monitoring of shipments, including vase life tests, and their ability to analyse the economic impact of variable product quality is the ultimate reason for the success of this program. The temperature monitoring in itself is not an answer to better flowers, it is a tool to alert the supply chain to problem areas. The money earned from the system relies on professional management who make product quality their priority and react to the signals put down on paper by the temperature loggers. This can be as simple as farm personnel not closing the cool cell door correctly, or promptly. Analysing what went wrong, communication of the problem and staff training are all management tasks that increase cool chain knowledge at all levels in the supply chain – making tomorrow’s shipment better together.” <

Figure 1 > Example of storage and transport where the cool chain has not been correctly maintained.



Source: www.flowerwatch.com

Figure 2 > Example of an improved cool chain.

