



**Manifesto**  
**Empowering Europe's  
Green Agenda: the  
strategic role of  
Flowers and Plants**

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29th March 2024



A woman wearing a grey cap and gloves is smiling while holding a pink flower. She is in a greenhouse filled with many potted plants. The background shows the structure of the greenhouse with a grid of supports.

## Introduction

**A healthier, greener, happier, and more resilient Europe.** That is the vision of the EU flower and plant sector on the future of Europe. This manifesto underscores the vital role of flowers and plants, as a cornerstone in building a sustainable and environmentally conscious Europe. In the pursuit of this, the European growers represented by Copa and Cogeca believe it is imperative to recognise the role of flowers and plants. This manifesto aims at raising awareness among citizens and politicians regarding the importance of our sector and our commitments, so that the green transition is not a missed opportunity. They are growing our future.

**EU floriculture and nurseries are the green force of Europe.** The European flower and ornamental plant production is valued at €9.4 billion, with over 33,000 enterprises operating on 55,600 hectares<sup>1</sup>. The production value of the European nursery industry is around €7 billion, with over 26,000 companies in the sector<sup>2</sup>. Altogether, the sector produces the majority of ornamental flowers and plants – both indoors and outdoors, plants to grow fruits and vegetables, and trees. Cooperatives also play an important role in this sector by enhancing the bargaining power of growers in the supply chain, facilitating joint investments that enable growers to attain greater added value for their products, and fostering economic and social advancement.

1 INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS FLOWERS AND PLANTS 2022, Volume Volume 71 Compiled by Iris Griesbach Centre for Business Management in Horticulture and Applied Research University Hohenheim, Germany. Data includes the United Kingdom + Eurostat  
2 Data from the European Nurserystock Association – EU countries only with data ranging from 2019 to 2023.





## A greener Europe

Our environment is the driving force of life. **EU flower and plant growers play a pivotal role in transforming European cities into green, liveable environments.**

The immense diversity of plants, flowers, and trees is the heritage of biodiversity and unquestionably a vital element in realising the European Green Deal. With this policy, it becomes increasingly evident that they stand as a key player in the realisation of greener and more sustainable Europe.

Emphasising the **undeniable role of flowers and plants in biodiversity**, the cultivation of more diverse plant varieties in Europe serves as a catalyst for increased food sources for native birds and insects, especially pollinators. This key role does not only supplement the nutritional needs of pollinators but also serves multiple environmental functions, such as cooling urban areas, preventing soil erosion, and averting flooding. This proactive approach helps to reverse biodiversity losses and addresses climate change concerns. By cultivating specific species, flowers and plants become a magnet for pollinators and natural predators, fostering biological pest control within controlled environment agriculture. **This, in turn, contributes to pollination, plant health, and the overall restoration of biodiversity.**



## A climate-resilient Europe

The sector stands as a powerful tool in the fight against climate change by facilitating carbon sequestration within urban and rural areas. The strategic planting of trees and greenery acts as a natural carbon sink, absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide and mitigating the impacts of greenhouse gas

emissions<sup>3</sup>. As cities face the challenges of rising temperatures and increased carbon concentrations, the role of the EU flower and plants sector in carbon sequestration becomes increasingly crucial.

The right composition of the landscape provides the shade we need in summer, purifies the air, mitigates noise pollution, captures water in the soil - thereby limiting erosion - and redistributes it in the form of evapotranspiration - cooling the air during heatwaves<sup>4,5</sup>. **Recognising and promoting this facet not only aligns with the goals of the European Green Deal but also positions the sector as a driving force in building sustainable, climate-resilient rural and urban areas for the future<sup>6</sup>.**



## A healthier Europe

Healthy plants form not only the basis of a robust and resilient sector, but also of European society. They contribute every day to the well-being of Europeans, fostering mental and physical health<sup>7,8</sup>. Research has demonstrated that a verdant living environment and green interior spaces **positively impact mental health<sup>9,10</sup>, fostering creativity and productivity<sup>11,12</sup>**. Numerous studies have also shown that contact with natural environments boosts well-being, enhances positive emotions and social interactions, aids cognitive function restoration, and acts preventively against the development of psychological and psychiatric disorders. Meanwhile, **colourful flowers boost our happiness by decorating our world and by enhancing the celebration of life's most precious moments.**

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## Allowing to grow the future

In acknowledging environmental and ecological benefits of the sector, it is important for the EU institutions and for stakeholders to promote the role of flowers and plants in realising the goals of the European Green Deal. If plants are a response to the challenges the EU is facing, the care our growers give them must be up to the challenge.

**Clean water is essential to flowers and plants.** In preventing and mitigating water scarcity, growers want to irrigate more efficiently, store rainwater, and reuse water as much as possible to reduce our environmental footprint. An EU water agenda should ensure water supply and focus on boosting innovative techniques for efficient irrigation, storing water, and reusing wastewater in flowers and plants. Quality and quantity remains vital for resilient plants.

**Growers are eager to accelerate the energy transition.** To enable them to switch to green energy, the EU shall prioritise the infrastructural expansion of electricity and sustainable energy and heat grids near flowers and plants growers. Access to renewable and affordable power supply is a key enabler in decarbonisation of production. To enable the transition the infrastructural expansion of electricity and sustainable energy and heat grids shall be prioritised. Furthermore, CO<sub>2</sub> is indispensable for the growth of plants. To nurture them climate-neutrally, CO<sub>2</sub> has to be recycled from near industries to prevent gas consumption at farm level.

**Growers are transitioning from conventional to greener plant protection and micro and macro-organisms** (e.g., natural predators). The EU shall facilitate this transition by placing more effective low-risk and biological active substances, biocontrol, and precision techniques on the market. Accessible and affordable alternatives from the basis for greening our cultivation. Conventional PPPs are ensured to be available in IPM if no effective alternatives exist.

It should also be remembered that one of the specific features of the sector is the **length of the product life cycle**: from several months for annual plants to several decades for trees. Growers are key actors in providing the propagation material needed to green-up the continent and achieve the EU forestry strategy's target of reforested our biodiverse forests, which includes planting 3 billion additional trees by 2030.

In addition, the sector is unique for its upfront equipment investment needs, which relies heavily on banks' confidence, crucial for successful operations. Due to past crises, securing loans for investment is a challenge. **To ensure a sustainable future, it must be recognised as a viable industry**, supported by robust insurance against climate and industry-specific risks. With many growers set to retire, developing takeover mechanisms with banking and insurance support is vital for the continuity of European plant production.

While the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further accelerated the rise in the price of, particularly, energy and inputs needed for flowers and plants production. This has also led to a compounded increase in raw material expenses, particularly affecting the EU economy and causing a more pronounced impact on the plant reproduction sector due to its unique production cycles and raw material requirements (e.g. substrates).



## Conclusion

**European growers are committed to consistently preserving the richness of our botanical history and heritage, decorating our world, and improving the health of millions of Europeans every day.** Therefore, we call for action to our stakeholder and national instances to support and promote this manifesto and encourage collaborative efforts to enhance the recognition of the sector.



# KEY MESSAGES

## THE SECTOR'S CONTINUED EFFORTS



Flowers and plants play a beneficial role in enhancing the health and well-being of millions of Europeans and the environment they live in on a daily basis, contributing to the celebration of significant moments in life and promoting social interaction.



Plants provide essential food for human beings, as well as for pollinators thus fostering biodiversity restoration. Plants green and cool our European cities and communities, improving air and soil quality, and mitigating climate stress.



The sector is constantly investing in new models to reduce its footprint from producer to consumer: sustainable plants for all across the continent.



Growers want to store rainwater, irrigate more efficiently, and reuse water as much as possible to reduce our environmental footprint.

## AREAS OF ACTION



Recognising the sector's role in contributing to the Union's environmental and health objectives. Flowers and plants do not only achieve ornamental purposes: this must be promoted at EU level through better education and communication.



Boosting investment in research for new plant varieties (e.g. NBTs) through renewed legislative support, and more public financing to invest in urban greenery, and better education programmes for European schools.



The costs of raw materials and energy have eroded producers' income. Transitioning to more sustainable production methods is only feasible if horticultural entrepreneurs have the necessary capital to invest in new processes, as well as more technological and innovative infrastructure with reduced environmental impact.









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**Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU.**

Together, they ensure that EU agriculture is sustainable, innovative and competitive, guaranteeing food security to half a billion people throughout Europe. Copa represents over 22 million farmers and their families whilst Cogeca represents the interests of 22,000 agricultural cooperatives. They have 66 member organisations from the EU member states.