

SUSTAINABILITY: AN EXAMINATION OF TRENDS  
IN THE FLORAL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINABILITY: AN EXAMINATION OF TRENDS  
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Sustainability in the floral industry is a constantly changing subject. As more products are created for florists to use in their designs, sustainability will evolve and be redefined. The purpose of this study was to examine the sustainable trends in growing, designing, and marketing within the floral industry. As seen in the companies analyzed, each business plan constitutes a different set of practices that are utilized for the benefit of that company. An applied best practices analysis was conducted on the floral industry's trends in sustainability. In the floral industry, businesses are shifting away from importing and focusing on local sources to retrieve their flowers. They are abstaining from using chemicals and floral foam that would be harmful to the environment and focusing on reusing their packaging, containers, and whatever else can be reused. Businesses need to stay up to date with new products in this industry because sustainable practices are growing and evolving and shaping the industry.

Keywords: floral, sustainability, importation, Veriflora

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of Study.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Chapter 2 METHODS.....	9
Description of Context.....	9
Description of Instrument.....	10
Description of Procedures.....	10
Chapter 3 PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS.....	12
Overview of Selected United States Companies.....	12
Most Common Advertisement Practices.....	14
Most Common Flower Sourcing Methods.....	17
Most Common Sustainable Business Practices.....	19
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	23
Summary.....	23
Discussion.....	24
Conclusions.....	28

Recommendations.....	29
REFERENCES .....	30
APPENDIXES .....	34

## LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Table 1. Marketing Trends in the NBA by Frequency and Percentage .....	13
Table 2. Southern and Northeastern Name of Business, Type, and Location .....	14
Table 3. Most Common Floral Advertisement Practices by Frequency and Percentage..	17
Table 4. Most Common Flower Sourcing Methods by Frequency and Percentage .....	19
Table 5. Most Common Sustainable Business Practices by Frequency and Percentage ..	22

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of Study

As the world's population continues to increase and resources have become scarcer, a greater focus on sustainable practices has emerged. Sustainability can be defined as the way humans manage an economy to preserve its productiveness (Zarsky, 1990). The current annual growth rate for the world's population is estimated at 1.22% (Kates & Parris, 2003). The increased interest on sustainable practices is looking at how to make the best use of the resources available, so those resources can continue to support a growing population.

In 2009, US food consumption totaled 654 billion pounds. Imports made up 17 percent of this amount (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2014). Much of the imports come from underdeveloped countries. The labor and cost of land in these countries proves to be substantially less expensive. This causes a reliance that the United States and these countries may not always be able to support. US citizens have begun insisting on more transparency within the production cycles of the goods and services they consume. When much of the United States' goods are imported from other countries, this transparency is not always available. The US Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development has partnered with the National Academies of Science to incorporate sustainable practices into all of its activities and programs. These organizations are looking to be a leading example for the

countries the United States imports from, in the hopes that the other countries will change their practices. (Golden, Subramanian, & Zimmerman, 2011, 821).

One United States industry that imports a large amount of goods is the floral industry. A study found that Colombia alone commands about 70 percent of the US flower market (McQuaid, 2011). However, the floral industry is beginning to see a shift towards more sustainably grown flowers. Consumers are becoming interested in flowers that are grown locally and are in season as opposed to importing cut flowers from all around the world. This sustainable shift is causing florists to begin offering products that support this movement.

Since sustainable practices continue to be the focus of many different industries, it is important to see how these practices are being implemented and received. In this study, the researcher systematically analyzed the use of sustainable practices in the areas of marketing, growing, and product development in the floral industry.

### Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, GoogleScholar, and Proquest. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: definition of sustainability, importance, agriculture, marketing, and products.

Sustainability defined as “transforming our ways of living to maximize the chances that the environmental and social conditions will indefinitely support human

security, well-being and health” (Giljum et al., 2000). It can also be described as conserving an ecological balance by avoiding the depletion of natural resources (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). Ever since the term was originally defined in the Brundtland Report (1987), there has been controversy as to how it should properly be defined. According to Daly (1991),

A lack of a precise definition of the term ‘sustainable development’ is not all bad. It has allowed a considerable consensus to evolve in support of the idea that is both morally and economically wrong to treat the world as a business in liquidation. (p. 223)

While many have overlooked sustainability in the past, its importance is being recognized as the world’s population continues to grow, and natural resources are becoming more limited. The world’s overall population is increasing at a slightly slower rate than the peak growth rate in 1965-1970. There is an average increase of about 80 million people per year. (Trostle & Seeley 2013). The continued increase can be credited to developing countries, where the life expectancy is increasing as improvements in health and living conditions occur (Conway & Barbier, 2009). The increasingly larger population is threatening the natural resource base. The overexploitation of natural resources accelerated by the rapid industrialization of countries such as China, India, and Brazil may eventually cause the loss of these resources (Gold, 2012).

Industrial development in the past 200 years was founded on a reliance on inexpensive fossil energy and raw materials (Gold, 2012). However, this reliance coupled with a larger population has led to a depletion of resources. Many of the problems that threaten the survival of the planet result from the increased consumption of energy, water



and raw materials, the increased production of waste and emissions and the increased human use of land area (Gold). On average Americans produce about 4.4 pounds per person of waste daily. This waste totaled about 251 million tons of trash in 2012 produced in America alone (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014).

The rate of consumption and waste that is occurring is putting pressure on the Earth's resources to sustain such a consumer driven economy. The top six natural resources that are being put under pressure are: water, oil, natural gas, phosphorous, coal, and rare earth elements (Ruz, 2011, p. 1). It is estimated that many of the resources will be close to depletion at the rate of consumption currently taking place (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2013). Researchers are looking at ways to cut back on the rapid use of resources and possibly undo some of the damage that populations have caused to the earth's ecosystem.

Agricultural practices have shifted towards more sustainable practices. Sustainable agricultural practices have been defined as:

- High, efficient and stable production
- Low and inexpensive inputs, in particular making full use of the techniques of organic farming and indigenous traditional knowledge
- Food security and self-sufficiency
- Conservation of wildlife and biological diversity
- Help for the poorest and disadvantaged (in particular those on marginal land, the landless, women, children and tribal minorities)

- A high level of development decisions by the farmers themselves (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001, p. 10).

More farmers are adopting sustainable agriculture practices. Modern farming techniques, although they produce bountiful harvests, are causing ecological problems due to the large amount of pesticides and fertilizers used on the crops (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). The rapid rate of turnover with modern farming is causing a depletion of the soil's nutrients, which will eventually lead to lower yields (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). Sustainable agriculture focuses on practices that meet current and future societal needs while maximizing the net benefit to society (Tilman, Cassman, Matson, Naylor, & Polasky, 2002). With a growing population that needs to eat, sustainable practices may be the only way to continue to support the food demand.

Developing countries are projected to account for a large portion of the growing demand in global consumption. It is estimated that from 2013-2022 developing countries will demand 94 percent of grain imports, 99.8 percent of cotton imports, and 92.3 percent of meat imports around the world (Trostle & Seeley, 2013). A study focusing on sustainable agriculture practices in Thailand, China, Sri Lanka, and Mexico showed that yields rose 80 percent on average over a four-year period in fields where the farmers utilized sustainable agriculture practice (Trostle & Seeley). As developing countries continue to grow in population size and urbanization occurs, their share of agriculture products worldwide will increase. This increase provides opportunities for other countries to improve their farming methods and utilize sustainability to become a major supplier for global consumption.

Laws and regulations are being put into place to monitor agricultural practices in an effort to make them more sustainable. Congress addressed sustainable agriculture in the 1990 Farm Bill [Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA)] and recognized what the term sustainable agriculture meant and entails (Gold). Today the United States Department of Agriculture has programs in place to work with partners and stakeholders to integrate sustainable practices into farming practices (United States, Department of Agriculture, 2014). The United States Environmental Protection Agency is pushing for a higher use of biopesticides, which are pesticides derived from natural materials such as animals, plants, bacteria, and certain minerals (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2013). This kind of pesticide is far less harmful to the environment than the more commonly used chemical pesticides that are widely used in modern farming (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2013). Steps are being taken to conserve the world's resources in order to support the growing global population.

As the shift towards more sustainable practices emerges within many different industries so has the marketing of these practices. In 1999, firms began to take the idea of sustainability seriously, as this was the year that the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the United Nations Environmental Program released their first draft of the GRI guidelines (Bridges, 2008). In that year twenty organizations released sustainability reports based on those guidelines (Bridges). In 2006, 850 organizations released sustainability reports, including most of the Global 250 and Fortune 500 companies.

Sustainability practices are important to consumers, and businesses are marketing their practices to attract consumers to the products or business. Marketing sustainable

practices has been given the term “green marketing” (Townsend, 2002). Green marketing highlights the sustainable advertising, production, and packaging practices that a company may use during a product’s lifespan (Townsend). According to Golden, Subramanian, and Zimmerman (2011), the “green” shift stems from the consumers desire to have more transparency in the value chain within products. Multinational retailers and manufacturers marketing tactics to promote their sustainable business practices are the driving force behind the rapid growth of sustainable product design. Green marketing initiatives within a company can come from both external and internal pressures. These pressures can include satisfying consumer demand, reacting to a competitor’s green marketing actions, channel or supplier requests to modify inputs, cost, and philosophy (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001, p. 22).

Due to the increased pressures being put on businesses to highlight their green practices and support the sustainability movement, many companies have created new more eco-friendly products. According to Ashley (2007), 70 percent of a product’s environmental harm is designed into the product and the associated production processes. Companies now carry “green” lines within their base of products so that they can cater to the consumer looking to buy these types of products. Green products often have a higher price point, but consumers justify their purchase because green products often claim to have a longer life span (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001, p. 22).

Consumers are increasing their focus on sustainable, environmentally friendly products. A whole new market is emerging because of this shifting focus. As technology improves and research continues sustainable practices within agriculture, marketing, and product design will continue to develop in an effort to preserve the earth’s natural

resources and sustain a growing global population. Different industries are beginning to recognize their part in making sure the business they run is sustainable. One industry that is affected by the shift towards more sustainable practices is the floral industry.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the sustainable trends in growing, designing, and marketing within the floral industry.

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How are floral companies marketing and advertising their sustainable practices?
2. What sustainable practices is the cut flower industry utilizing when growing flowers?
3. What sustainable practices are florists using when designing arrangements?

## Chapter 2

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the sustainable trends in regards to growing, designing, and marketing within the floral industry. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

#### Description of Context

A trends study was conducted on sustainability in the floral industry. The floral industry is a seven billion dollar industry (IBIS, 2014). The annual growth rate of the industry has been an average of 0.6% since 2009. It is estimated that 36,613 businesses comprise the floral industry in the United States, providing about 90,427 jobs. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the median pay for florists in 2012 was \$23,810. The average hourly rate was \$11.45. It is expected that the job outlook in the floral industry will see an eight percent decline in the next eight years (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Imported flowers provide much of the cut flowers for the floral industry. The percentage of the top imports as recorded in 2012 was as follows: Colombia 78%, Ecuador 15%, and Mexico 2%. The top fresh flower growing states in the US are: California 76%, Washington 6%, New Jersey 4%, Oregon 2%, Hawaii 2%, North Carolina 2%, and Florida 1% (About Flowers, 2013).

### Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a trends analysis checklist developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). Research from the Review of Literature was used to inform the instrument and create topics for investigation. The instrument was created as a tool for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the different sustainable practices provided by florists in the United States. Space was provided on the checklist for comments in an effort to provide additional qualitative analysis when necessary. The researcher created the instrument by forming a checklist of questions that would facilitate analysis of sustainable trends in the floral industry.

A pilot study was conducted. Several third party websites of businesses with sustainable practices were used in the pilot study to assess the quality of questions created for the instrument. Through the pilot study the instrument questions were revised, and some were added and taken away. At the completion of the pilot study, the final instrument consisted of eight questions that gathered a wide range of information that would depict the trends in the floral industry. The final question was included so that any additional information not covered in the other questions could be added.

### Description of Procedures

A trends study was conducted on sustainability in the floral industry. The instrument utilized in this study was a trends analysis checklist developed by the researcher. An applied best practices analysis was conducted on the floral industry's trends in sustainability. The instrument utilized in this study was a list of questions that uncovered the sustainable trends in this industry. The researcher began data collection on

May 13, 2014 and ended on May 21, 2014. The researcher used several websites to collect data for this study. The organizational websites that were analyzed included: LaFleur Plantscapes and Fresh Flora, Farmgirl Flowers, Field Florals, Botanica: Floral Design, Gaia, Terra Bella Flowers and Mercantile, Larskpur, Harvest Moon Flower Farm, Michigan Flower Farm, Renee Arcand Live Flowers LLC, EcoFlora, Flowers to the People, Anna Marie's Florist, Falling Springs Flower Farm, Sweet Earth Flower Farm, Blue Planet Green Events, William's Wildflowers, EcoChic Floral, The Painted Tulip, Robin Hollow Farm, Gardenia Organic, Field Sustainable Floristry, Emily Herzig Floral Studio, and Falls Flowers. When analyzing these websites, the researcher visited the *about* pages, as well as the *products and services* pages. The websites of each business were used to retrieve the data. The researcher was directed towards the sustainable trends in this industry through the research that was found.

Each website was systematically examined using the questions listed on the instrument and utilizing applied best practices analysis. The qualitative data were recorded and analyzed to retrieve the trends within the practices of the floral businesses.



## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the sustainable trends in regards to growing, designing, and marketing within the floral industry. This study consisted of an analysis of 24 different floral shops, florists, and flower farms throughout the United States. Six companies from each of the United State's four regions were analyzed: West, Midwest, Northeast, and South. This chapter includes the following sections: overview of selected United States companies, most common advertisement practices, most common flower sourcing methods, and most common sustainable business practices.

#### Overview of Selected United States Companies

One company was analyzed from 24 different states across the United States. Each of these companies claimed to have sustainable practices being utilized within their business practices. A company in this industry that identifies as sustainable must have practices in place to either cut down on waste, source their flowers in an environmentally friendly way, or have other sustainable practices in place. These companies ranged from flower farms to floral shops, each with their own twist on how to implement sustainability into their business. The businesses selected were commonly founded by an individual looking to improve the floral industry by reducing the amount of waste created during both the growing and designing phases of production. The different sustainable practices varied somewhat by region. The shift towards sustainability has caused companies in this industry to rethink the products, sources, and ways they design.

Through data collection, the researcher found many different methods that companies utilized to support their eco friendly initiative. A complete list of the Western and Midwestern businesses, their type, and their state location can be found in Table 1. Following Table 1 a complete list of the Southern and Northeastern businesses, their type, and their state location can be found in Table 2.

Table 1  
Western and Midwestern Name of Business, Type, and Location

Name of Business	Type	State
Lafleur Plantscapes and Fresh Flora	Shop	Arizona
Farmgirl Flowers	Shop	California
Field Florals	Farm	Colorado
Botanica: Floral Design	Shop	Oregon
Gaia	Shop	Nevada
Terra Bella Flowers and Mercantile	Shop	Washington
Larkspur	Shop	Illinois
Harvest Moon Flower Farm	Farm	Indiana
Michigan Flower Farm	Farm	Michigan
Renee Arcand Live Flowers LLC	Shop	Minnesota
EcoFlora	Shop	Ohio
Flowers to the People	Shop	Missouri

Table 2  
Southern and Northeastern Name of Business, Type, and Location

Name of Business	Type	State
Anna Marie's Florist	Shop	Tennessee
Falling Spring Flower Farm	Farm	Kentucky
Sweet Earth Flower Farm	Farm	North Carolina
Blue Planet Green Events	Shop	South Carolina
William's Wildflowers	Farm	Florida
Ecochic Floral	Shop	Texas
The Painted Tulip	Shop	Vermont
Robin Hollow Farm	Farm	Rhode Island
Gardenia Organic	Shop	New York
Field Sustainable Floristry	Shop	Maine
Emily Herzig Floral Studio	Shop	New Hampshire
Falls Flowers	Shop	Pennsylvania

Most Common Marketing and Advertising Practices

The researcher retrieved data regarding the marketing and advertising practices each business used and divided the data by region: West, Midwest, South, Northeast. The researcher analyzed the marketing and advertising practices of the Western businesses. According to the data, of the six Western businesses analyzed all of them had listed on the main page of their website, their sustainable business outlook. One of the companies had also advertised their sustainable approach to their business in a magazine centered on

green living. Besides the advertisements on their websites, the overall local reputation of the businesses acted as advertisement as well. Customers visiting these businesses were able to clearly recognize the sustainable practices being put into place because they were advertised throughout the packaging, flower offerings, and overall business model for each company. The companies used catchy phrases to get the sustainable concept across to customers. Some of these included: “Flowers you can feel good about,” and “Simple. Local. Beautiful.” The websites of the companies in this region were very transparent with their business practices, highlighting each practice they had in place to promote their sustainable mindset.

The researcher analyzed the websites of six businesses in the Midwestern United States for their marketing and advertisement methods. The advertisements used for these businesses were not as direct as those of the businesses in the West. Rather than stating the use of sustainable practices the term “natural” was used in three of the six businesses to describe the practices utilized within the business. Out of the six businesses analyzed three of the six were flower farms. Flower farms grow and produce the flowers they need to create their arrangements for the events they are contracted to do. All of the six businesses promoted the locality of their flowers used at the business, including the farms as a marketing tactic. Whereas the businesses in the West used transparency as an advertising method within their websites, the businesses in Midwestern United States did not. The customer looking for a florist using sustainable practices as a business model would have to contact the business to get a more detailed description of their methods.

The businesses the researcher analyzed in the Southern United States had different methods of promoting their sustainable practices on their websites. Four of the

six businesses mentioned their sustainable practices to inform their customers of the sustainability within the business. The researcher had to visit more of the pages on the websites of the other two businesses to learn about the sustainable practices that are used. The businesses used phrases such as: natural, local, and organic. Not all of these businesses were as clearly centered around sustainability, so customers interested in these organizations would have to do further research to obtain the knowledge of the practices in place. The advertisement method for these businesses was not as developed as some of the other region's sites that the researcher analyzed.

The advertising methods of six Northeastern United States businesses were analyzed for their sustainable practices. Four of the six websites mentioned their sustainable practices on the main page of their website. On location at these businesses, a customer would be able to know that the business is centered around sustainable practices based on the way the company is advertising. The other two of the six highlight the local sourcing of their plant material as their way to advertise their eco consciousness. This region's businesses were split halfway when it came to transparency of their sustainable business practices. The websites of three of these businesses were centered on what the business is doing to promote sustainability and shape the floral industry by their actions. The other three businesses did not have sustainable practices put into place for every aspect of their business: flower sourcing, designing, waste, packaging, etc. A complete list of the trends can be found in Table 3.

Table 3  
Most Common Floral Advertisement Practices by Frequency and Percentage

Floral Advertisement Practices	<i>f</i>	%
Taglines/Phrases	6	25.00
Main Page Advertisement	19	76.00
Transparency	18	75.00
Print Advertising	7	29.17
Website Advertising	23	95.83

Most Common Flower Sourcing Methods

The researcher retrieved data regarding how each business retrieved the flowers necessary to run their business and divided the data by region: West, Midwest, South, Northeast. All of the Western businesses analyzed sourced from local farmers and producers to provide them with the necessary cut flowers and plant material. One business highlighted that they sourced all flowers needed from farmers that were no more than 200 miles from them. The researcher found that most of the businesses evaluated used local sourcing for their flowers when they were in season and available. Some of the businesses strictly adhered to no outsourcing or importation of product and only obtained product from local providers. During the off-season or when flowers were not available, importation was utilized by some of the businesses. All of the companies that import flowers do so with certified sustainable growers usually from South America. Most of these businesses look for importers that are certified through Veriflora, which is a certification system for sustainably grown flowers and plants.

All of the Midwestern businesses analyzed source from local farmers for their cut flowers and plant material. Half of these businesses were also flower farms, meaning they obtained their product from their farms if available. If these businesses did have what they needed, then local sourcing was the next option utilized by these businesses. Some of these flower farms only used products available to them from their farm and did not look to other sources if their customers desired other flowers. A few of these businesses had a strict no importation policy so their customers were limited to what they could get from their farms or from local suppliers. The others imported the products they needed but did so by sourcing sustainably certified importers. Only one of the businesses did not clearly indicate where their imports came from, which may or may not mean that they are importing from sustainable growers.

The majority of the businesses analyzed in the Southern region specified that they sourced their flowers locally if available. The floral farms analyzed in this grouping specified that they do not import any floral products but source everything from their farm or locally. One of the businesses that was not a floral farm specified that they sourced all of their products locally and that they do not import anything. Out of the businesses that import their flowers, only some of them specified that they did so through a sustainably certified importer.

All Northeast businesses imported flowers to some extent. Some chose to import only from sustainable growers, while others did not specify where they were importing their product. Products for these businesses were imported from the United States and South American certified sustainable growers. The majority of these businesses purchased at least some of their cut flowers and plant material from local growers or

distributors. The businesses were focused on supporting local jobs through their sustainable choices. Two of the businesses analyzed were flower farms. These farms collected most of their product from their land, however some importation does occur for what is not available on the farm. A complete list of methods can be found in Table 4.

Table 4  
Most Common Flower Sourcing Methods by Frequency and Percentage

Flower Sourcing Methods	<i>f</i>	%
Local	21	87.50
Import from Sustainably Certified Growers	11	45.83
No Importation	10	41.67
Import from Unspecified Source	4	16.67

Most Common Sustainable Business Practices

The researcher retrieved data regarding the sustainable business practices each business used and divided the data by region: West, Midwest, South, Northeast. The researcher analyzed the sustainable practices of six businesses in Western United States. The businesses analyzed had different methods in place to promote sustainability and reduce waste throughout their business operations. Sustainability focuses on reducing the carbon footprint a company produces and preserving the resources that are available. Some methods that these companies utilize include: reusing containers or using recycled ones, avoiding or not using floral foam at all, composting all plant waste, and recycling all packaging and other waste. By reusing containers the businesses are reducing the



amount of energy used to initially produce each container, and ultimately working to lessen the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions created. The same concept applies to not using floral foam in arrangements. Floral foam's basic element is plastic and it is filled with chemicals that are not biodegradable. Some of these businesses opted to not use this product because of its harmful effects to the environment. These western businesses are focused on lessening the impact that their business has on the environment through these different practices they employ.

The researcher analyzed the sustainable practices of six businesses in the Midwestern United States. These businesses did not have as many processes in place to promote sustainability in their companies. The majority of the businesses focused their sustainable efforts on the growing and production phases of cut flowers. Some of the businesses focused their efforts on reusing containers and using ones that have been recycled. One of the companies also mentioned how they reuse their ribbons to cut down on the waste produced by their company. The businesses in the Midwest did not have as many practices in place to promote sustainability.

The businesses analyzed in the Southern region varied with their offerings for sustainable practices. Some of the practices included: not using pesticides and chemicals in the growing process of the flowers, implementing live plants into the arrangements that can be planted and preserved after being used in the event. Some of the businesses in this region also stated that they use vintage and recycled containers to cut down on the emissions created through the production of new products. Multiple companies also stated that they recycle all their packaging goods and waste. Compost of plant waste materials was a sustainable practice that many of the businesses had in place.

The companies analyzed in the Northeastern region had unique sustainable practices in place. Some of these included the use of gray water. This practice highlights reusing water for different purposes as a way to decrease the businesses' consumption of water. One business's sustainable practice was to collect branches, berries, and other wild outdoor pieces to be utilized in arrangements. This same business also noted that they avoid the use of Styrofoam, plastic, synthetic materials, and excessive packaging. Another sustainable practice put into place by one of the businesses was the task of telling all of their suppliers to reduce the packaging they include when delivering any products to the shop. They also went as far as to ask suppliers to not send any paper packages or invoices to them but to keep things as paperless as possible. Using biodegradable shopping bags, business cards, tissue, and wrappings is one practice that the researcher noted when analyzing the Northeastern businesses. One business went as far as to implement sustainability into the design of their shop. This business had a shop floor made of recycled, pressed wood chips and a counter made of reclaimed barn wood. Each business had different methods in place that they believed would lend towards their goal of having a sustainably focused business initiative. A complete list of the different sustainable practices utilized by businesses can be found in Table 5.

Table 5  
Most Common Sustainable Business Practices by Frequency and Percentage

Sustainable Business Practices	<i>f</i>	%
Reused/Recycled Containers	10	41.67
Avoid Floral Foam	7	29.17
Compost Plant Waste	6	25.00
Recycle all waste	4	16.67
Reuse Décor	1	4.17
Avoid Pesticides/Chemical	16	66.67
Reuse Ribbon	5	20.83

The data collected on 24 floral businesses indicated that many of the sustainable practices were utilized throughout the businesses. There were notable regional trends with the sustainable practices used. Every business the researcher analyzed was different, and had varying standards to qualify whether something was a sustainable practice or not. The results presented in this chapter indicate a gradual shift towards sustainability within the floral industry. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order for floral companies to stay current and competitive in the industry, they must implement and be aware of the trending practices. These trends must always be analyzed so that companies are using the most up to date and efficient practices. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

#### Summary

Sustainability is a growing trend within many industries. Companies are looking for ways to cut down on the waste created by their company and for ways to sustain the resources available to them. Companies have a growing interest in where their products come from, what resources are used to produce them, and how much waste is attributed to the creation of the products. Consumers are also becoming increasingly interested in supporting companies that take their impact on the environment into consideration when implementing their practices. The shift towards sustainability is being recognized and accepted throughout many industries.

In the spring quarter of 2014, data were collected from 24 floral companies in 24 different states across the United States. The instrument used consisted of an eight-question checklist. The instrument was fluid and evolved throughout the data collection process to account for additional findings not already identified in the questions. The questions were used to gain a better understanding of the trends in sustainable floral

practices across the country. Information was gathered and organized using the instrument.

Results indicated that many sustainable trends were consistent throughout the companies analyzed, but there were also noticeable differences in practices among regions. The sustainable trends identified were regarding advertising and marketing, floral sourcing, and sustainable business practices. Every company utilized a different compilation of practices that helped to promote their individual sustainable business initiative. The emerging sustainable trends were centered on sourcing flowers locally and reusing various products to cut down on waste. Gradually the businesses are implementing these sustainable practices.

### Discussion

Results from this study revealed there were sustainable practices common throughout the different regions of the United States. Floral companies utilize common phrases and words to attract the clientele interested in sustainability. Some of these phrases include: sustainable, natural, local, pesticide free and organic. These phrases encompass what Townsend (2002) describes as “green marketing.” The companies that were analyzed marketed their practices using these words on their websites and within their stores. In most instances, customers were aware of the sustainable approach these businesses were taking because of the companies’ openness about their business practices. However, not all clients were aware of the sustainable practices. So, to make customers more aware, companies need to utilize other mediums that are easily accessible to advertise their practices. These companies are recognizing the benefit of

disclosing this information. Since 1999, when the Global Reporting Initiative and the United Nations Environmental Program published reporting standards, more companies are disclosing their practices (Bridges, 2008). The businesses use their sustainable practices as a way to market themselves and be set apart from other florists. The phrases regarding sustainability are as much a marketing tactic as they are a business initiative. By claiming sustainable business practices, these organizations attract certain customers that they might not have originally. There are certain implications that go along with using these phrases. These terms are current to this time period; however, as the English language constantly evolves, so will the terms used to describe these practices. The businesses will have to stay current on what terms and phrases are being used to describe what is currently known as sustainability. By staying current, they can continue to attract the desired clientele.

A noticeable regional trend was recorded when analyzing how these organizations obtain their flowers. A study found that Colombia alone commands about 70 percent of the US flower market (McQuaid, 2011). However, the companies analyzed in this study used other methods to obtain their flowers. Many of the companies in the Western region only sourced their flowers locally and tried to abstain from importing flowers. In some cases, however, the companies had to import their flowers, which they received from sustainable certified companies. Many of the companies, imported their flowers from Veriflora certified importers. Veriflora works to certify importers that meet the sustainability requirements, however, businesses should always double-check this certification to ensure they are receiving sustainably grown products. The flower farms that were analyzed utilized all of the flowers grown on property or sourced from other

local farms to find the product they needed. The local farms that these companies were sourcing from practice natural farming techniques and avoid all harsh chemicals and pesticides. Today the United States Department of Agriculture has programs in place to work with partners and stakeholders to integrate sustainable practices into farming practices (United States, Department of Agriculture, 2014). These efforts are helping to promote sustainability and reduce the amount of resources needed for growing. Also, by these companies sourcing locally, transportation costs and the pollution associated with traveling long distances are cut down. This practice both reduces the amount of waste produced while using fewer resources. Importation of flowers can prove to create an implication for floral companies; an importer can claim to be sustainably certified when they are actually not. It is up to the companies to stay up to date and do their research before deciding whom to import their flowers from.

Finally, the different sustainable practices that the companies had in place when designing and choosing the products used in each arrangement were analyzed. This subject is where there was a lot of variation between businesses. The different companies could benefit from researching what kinds of other sustainable practices businesses in their industry are utilizing. Some of the different practices that were common across regions were the reuse of containers and the avoidance of floral foam. Multiple companies noted that this was a practice of theirs. Another practice that only a few businesses mentioned was the reuse of ribbons in their arrangements. Many of the companies also composted all of their plant material to help reduce the waste created by their operation. The organizations in the Midwest did not have as many practices in place as the Western and the Northeastern regions did. Some businesses used live plants in

their arrangements so that they could be planted after the customer was done using the arrangement. This practice was an effort to reduce waste by creating arrangements that will not be thrown away. These businesses effort to reduce the amount of waste they produce may only seem to have a small impact. However, on average Americans produce about 4.4 pounds per person of waste daily (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). By practicing waste reduction in their business, these companies are able to reduce their impact on the growing amount of trash produced in America. The implications with these sustainable practices are that new products and methods of designing arrangements are always being formed. What is defined as sustainable today may not continue to be defined this way. Companies need to stay aware of what their customers are looking for in a business, as well as what the new trends, products, and practices are. It is the job of each company to train their staff so that their efforts toward sustainable practices continually expand. Furthermore, companies should research sustainable businesses practices in other countries for possible practices they can utilize. This will help ensure that each company is continuing to support and promote sustainability through their business practices.

This study was impacted by several limitations. The greatest limitation was the source being used to find information on the companies. The companies' websites were the only resource that the researcher used to retrieve data. Not all practices may have been listed on these sites. The data for some of the companies could be misrepresented and may not adequately reflect the overall practices of that company. Another limitation was time. More time could have allowed the researcher to research more companies, resulting in a greater sample size and more accurate representation of sustainability in



floral companies. Finally, there may be some subjective bias reflected by the researcher that could have impacted the study. The researcher has prior experience with floral companies and that knowledge could have created a bias in the study. Despite these limitations, the study provided an in-depth analysis into sustainability practices in the floral industry.

Sustainability in the floral industry is a constantly changing subject. As more products are created for florists to use in their designs, sustainability will evolve and be redefined. Researchers are looking at new ways to preserve the resources that have not already been depleted. The concept of sustainable practices is a new and emerging trend throughout many industries. Each industry takes the basic concepts and interprets it to fit their businesses' practices. As seen in the companies analyzed, each business plan constitutes a different set of practices that are utilized for the benefit of that company. In the floral industry, businesses are shifting away from importing and focusing on local sources to retrieve their flowers. They are abstaining from using chemicals and floral foam that would be harmful to the environment and focusing on reusing their packaging, containers, and whatever else can be reused. Sustainable practices in this industry are growing and evolving as they continually shape the floral industry.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Floral companies utilize key phrases and terms in their advertising and marketing on their websites and other media to portray their practices to their customers.

2. Local sourcing of flowers is utilized whenever possible, however, if not an option, companies source their flowers from sustainably certified importers.
3. The most common sustainable practices floral companies use when designing is reusing their containers and ribbons, avoiding the use of floral foam, composting all plant material, and using live plants in arrangements.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Stay up to date with new products being offered in the floral industry and utilize those that promote sustainability.
2. Train and inform all employees on sustainable practices that are beneficial to other companies and implement these practices.
3. Discover another medium to advertise sustainable practices to customers.
4. Monitor other sustainable floral companies for notable sustainable practices that the business could benefit from.
5. Consider offering more easily accessible information to customers pertaining to the sustainable practices in place at the company.
6. Implement practices that monitor importers for reliability and accuracy to ensure the best and most sustainable products are being delivered to the company.
7. Future research should examine sustainable practices implemented in other countries.

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## APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument



### Floral Sustainability Question Checklist

<b>US Region</b>	<b>Name of Company</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Details</b>
		1. Does the business advertise sustainable practices? If yes, how?		
		2. Does the business get a lot of their flowers locally?		
		3. Where is the business importing their flowers?		
		4. Does the business utilize techniques to cut down on waste when designing their arrangements? If yes, how?		
		5. Does the business's marketing strategy highlight sustainability?		
		6. Is the business using products that are considered sustainable or beneficial to the environment?		
		7. How long has the business utilized sustainability in their practices?		
		8. List any other sustainable practices the business has.		