Advancing California’s Cut Flower Industry, Advocating for Flower Farmers

The California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC), established in 1990, unites the state’s approximately 225 flower farmers to advance California’s $320 million flower industry. In addition to providing cooperative marketing opportunities and administering advocacy efforts, the commission has positioned the California Grown brand as a highly recognizable, consumer-facing brand to drive sales of the state’s fresh flowers and foliage.

Thanks to the efforts of staff and commissioners, in collaboration with participating flower farmers, CCFC has significantly moved the needle on promotion, governmental affairs and consumer demand for California cut flowers over the last four years.

Here’s a look at the impact CCFC is having on policymakers, wholesalers, florists, consumers and flower farmers, all with an end goal of advancing the California cut flower and greens industry.

Expanding the Size, Influence of the Congressional Cut Flower Caucus

The Congressional Cut Flower Caucus was launched by a bipartisan effort of Congresswoman Lois Capps and Congressman Duncan Hunter in 2014. Since its inception and thanks to the efforts of CCFC staff and flower farmers over the last four years, the caucus has grown to include six co-chairs and over 25 members of Congress.

The caucus is dedicated to promoting the domestic cut flower industry, including educating members of Congress and staff on the economic and cultural importance of America’s cut flower and greens farmers, as well as the challenges the industry faces. The caucus also sponsors events to provide a greater understanding of the issues and opportunities facing America’s flower farmers, their families and their flowers.

Growing the BloomCheck Certification Program

Created by CCFC in 2015, BloomCheck is the gold standard for sustainably grown cut flowers and greens in the United States. This rigorous certification assures buyers that the flowers they’re purchasing have been grown with great care by American farmers who respect the land and the people who work it.

BloomCheck Certified flower growers have completed a third-party audit to verify they use best practices that contribute to socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically viable farming. And only farmers who grow flowers and foliage in the U.S. and who meet BloomCheck’s exacting standards can earn certification.

For growers, BloomCheck is recognition of their dedication to the environment, to employees and to delivering fresh, safe, breathtaking flowers and foliage. For flower buyers and consumers, it’s assurance that they’re getting flowers grown to the highest standards on U.S. soil.

In the last four years, seven farms have become BloomCheck certified, earning the most rigorous certification for sustainably grown cut flowers there is.

And retailers recognize the benefits of BloomCheck, too. In fact, it’s the floral industry certification preferred by Albertsons stores thanks to its thoroughness.
Developing New Programs, Reaching New Markets With Grant Funding

Grant funding helps expand the programming and reach of CCFC. In recent years, CCFC has earned the grants totaling nearly $600,000:

- 2017 Emerging Markets Program, $75,000
- 2018 Market Access Program (China) $100,000
- 2018 Quality Samples Program (China), $30,000
- 2018 Emerging Markets Program (Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam) $100,000
- 2018 Specialty Crop Block Grant, $176,730
- 2019 Market Access Program (South Korea, Vietnam), $100,000

Engaging Farms, Wholesalers, Florists, Consumers Via Social Media

CCFC manages multiple social media accounts representing the floral industry, including California Grown Flowers, American Grown Flowers and the Field to Vase Dinner Tour. The total impressions on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook for these accounts during a single year are over 2 million, with a current following of more than 64,000 fans.

In addition to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, CCFC maintains a Pinterest page for American Grown Flowers that attracts over 100,000 viewers each month.

Leading California Grown Flowers Month Declaration, Contest

For the last four years, CCFC has worked with the state Senate to have June declared California Grown Flowers Month. This designation not only honors the state’s flower farmers, it recognizes the flower industry’s impact on the state’s economy: Creating 145,665 jobs, generating $12.2 billion in business activity and creating $1.1 billion in additional taxes. And it provides yet another chance to drive home the origin matters message with retailers and consumers.

To help meet this goal, in 2019, CCFC asked retailers to create displays featuring California Grown Flowers and Greens and provided point of purchase and marketing materials for their displays. Participating retailers included Safeway, Albertsons, Vons, Pavilions, Gelson’s, Bristol Farms and Lazy Acres Natural Market.

The celebratory month was also promoted each year in a series of blog posts and in our e-newsletters.

Taking the Internet By Storm

Over the last three years, CCFC has developed new user-friendly websites for each of its brands, including CCFC, BloomCheck, Certified American Grown and the related American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour sub-site, and the Kee Kitayama Research Foundation.

These sites speak to multiple audiences, sharing the work of each brand, promoting programs and using blog posts to share the stories of California’s flower farmers and CCFC’s efforts to promote them.
Bringing the Rose Parade To Its Roots

Originally established to showcase the bounty of what’s growing in California when the rest of the country is snowbound, CCFC has helped the annual Tournament of Roses Parade, January 1 in Pasadena, return to its roots by certifying floats that feature over 85% of cut flowers and greens grown in California.

The California Grown Certification for parade entries began in 2012. In 2019, a record nine entries earned the certification and won the hearts of millions of viewers nationwide. There’s nothing quite like the earned media attention California Grown Flowers gain when mentioned dozens of times on multiple channels as the parade is broadcast worldwide!

Tempering the Turmoil Over Cannabis

In recent years, there’s been lots of discussion in the media and among flower farmers about whether the legalization of marijuana would lead farmers to switch to cannabis cultivation. Some did. But fewer than estimated when the alarm began to sound.

That tempered reaction is thanks in part to the efforts of CCFC to connect with farmers on the issue and to guide the conversation (and contribute facts) in media coverage.

Bottom line: Some flower farmers are converting to cannabis, but the numbers are lower than predicted.

Certified American Grown

Launched in 2014 and operated by CCFC, Certified American Grown is a unified and diverse coalition of U.S. flower farms representing small and large entities across the country. Together, they’re giving consumers confidence in the source of their flowers by providing the only third-party guarantee in the floral industry that the bouquets and bunches that are purchased were actually homegrown.

In just five years, Certified American Grown is the largest and most successful consumer-facing brand promoting the origin of flowers in the market. The brand is now a widely sought after guarantee, appreciated by retailers, designers and consumers alike.

Today, our 65 certified farms represent over half of all U.S. cut flower production!

Hosting an Award-Winning Dinner Tour

Launched in 2015, the award-winning American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour invites guests nationwide to dine among the exquisite fields of America’s most stunning flower and foliage farms. The dinner tour is a cross-country series of elegant pop-up gatherings where seasonal, sustainable blooms dazzle on beautifully designed tablescapes that have been elegantly dressed by top U.S. floral designers, while gourmet meals are prepared by well-known farm-to-table chefs.

At each unique meal and through the accompanying farm tour and design demonstrations, guests meet hardworking American flower farmers and make a personal connection between flowers and agriculture as part of America’s floral landscape.

Since launching, the 34 farm-based dinners have garnered unprecedented local and national media attention and provided wildly successful way to showcase the beauty and heritage of America’s flower-farming families.

Guests at these dinners become brand ambassadors, sharing their experience with friends and family, and altering their flower-buying habits.
Garnering Attention and Kudos

How successful is the dinner tour, you ask? In 2017, the tour snagged Floral Management’s 2017 Marketer of the Year Award. The publication noted that the tour brings thousands of sophisticated consumers (and influential reporters and digital influencers) to greenhouses, flower fields and rooftop gardens for unforgettable experiences of to-tier dining and locally grown flowers. At the time of the award the marketing effort behind the tour had reached an estimated 482 million people through 505 media placements.

Heading Up the Annual Washington, D.C. Fly-In

For nearly a decade, CCFC has been helping flower farmers add their voices to advocacy efforts and tell their personal stories to policymakers through an annual Washington, D.C., fly-in.

In recent years, we’ve added flower farmers from across the U.S. to our efforts, bringing them to our nation’s capital along with staff, our contracted lobbyist and florists committed to designing with American Grown Flowers and Greens to communicate their successes and challenges, and rally support from representatives.

We make all the arrangements, provide advocacy training and talking points, and flower farmers do the rest! These trips have led to our connection to the First Lady’s Luncheon, calls for American Grown Flowers in the White House, expansion of the size and influence of the Cut Flower Caucus and earning the ear of key policymakers on issues that affect our nation’s flower farmers.

Leading American Grown Flowers Month, Contest

Thanks to the efforts of Certified American Grown, for the last three years, the U.S. House and Senate have jointly introduced a bipartisan resolution declaring July “American Grown Flowers Month.”

Each year, the resolution officially recognizes that purchasing flowers grown in the United States supports the farmers, small businesses, jobs and the U.S. economy; that growing flowers and greens in the United States is a vital part of the U.S. ag industry; and urges “all people of the United States to proactively showcase flowers and greens grown in the United States in order to show support for our flower farmers, processors and distributors as well as agriculture in the United States overall.”

For the last two years, Certified American Grown also hosted the American Grown Flowers Merchandising Contest in connection with American Grown Flowers Month. In 2018, nearly 1,200 retailers participated in the first-ever competition. Participating retailers were judged on the quality and beauty of their in-store displays promoting American Grown Flowers Month, their ability to increase flower sales in July and their efforts to promote the celebratory month overall, as well as promoting the Certified American Grown brand.

The average sales increase for the top five stores from each company was more than 17.5 percent. Overall, participating stores reported an average increase in sales of 6.7 percent throughout the month of July.

Supporting the American Grown Act

In May 2019, when Alaska Congressman Don Young, a member of the Congressional Cut Flowers Caucus, introduced the American Grown Act that would require the federal government to purchase cut flowers and greens grown in the U.S. for use in its facilities, Certified American Grown and CCFC lent their support.

The organizations created a website in support of the legislation, led signature gathering efforts in support of the act and encouraged other flower industry associations to support the legislation.
Staring at the First Ladies Luncheon

For the past four years, a 107-year-long tradition from the Congressional Club has showcased all American Grown Flowers and Greens, thanks to the efforts of Certified American Grown staff. Since first getting the nod to use all American Grown Flowers at the event, Certified American Grown has led the floral design for the event.

In 2019 alone, that meant procuring over 21,000 stems from certified farms and organizing a team of 30 designers and support staff who created 1,200 boutonnieres, 144 table arrangements, 18 VIP room arrangements, six cascading head table designs and two floral “selfie walls.”

Procuring Blooms and Greens to Showcase

One of the best ways to tell the story of America’s flower farmers is to get their beautiful products out there. We showcase the beauty and bounty of American Grown Flowers and Greens by leading procurement efforts for major events including: The Rose Parade, the American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour, the First Lady’s Luncheon, annual fly-ins and industry floral competition. In the last few years, homegrown flowers were procured for nearly 40 events!

These amazing displays of American Grown Flowers are made possible thanks to the generosity of U.S. flower farmers and efforts by procurement pro Anna Kalins.

Over the past five years, California Grown and Certified American Grown Flowers have been placed front and center with state and federal policymakers, florists and consumers thanks to the programs administered and supported by CCFC. Without these efforts and the donations of amazing examples of homegrown flowers and greens for special events, the promotion of and advocacy for the floral industry would suffer.

Working Toward Additional Critical Goals

Our work is not done! In 2020 and beyond, it’s critical that we continue to grow and promote the successful programs established via CCFC and on behalf of CAG.

Here are the key priorities:

• Continuing key programs like the American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour, the First Lady’s Luncheon, the Washington, D.C., fly-in, California Grown Flowers Month and American Grown Flowers Month resolutions and promotions, along with the related contests.
• Expanding BloomCheck to include more farms and retailers, and adding potted plants as a separate certification.
• Additional exploration trips funded by grants.
• Increased California Grown and American Grown entry certifications at the Rose Parade, along with a new joint reception with the Tournament of Roses.

Keep the momentum going!

As you can see, the last four-and-a-half years have been packed with efforts that increased the promotion of, consumer demand for and advocacy related to the cut flower industry.

The best bet to keep the momentum going?

A ‘yes’ vote for the continuation of the California Cut Flower Commission on the March referendum!