



Intermountain West Wholesale Cut Flower Buyer Market Assessment

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Introduction

The Society of American Florists (SAF) estimates that there are approximately 500 wholesale cut flower distributors in the United States (SAF, 2022). Wholesale distributors have locations throughout the country, including the Intermountain West. Wholesalers purchase flowers in bunches or single stems, depending on the cost or value of the flower variety. Wholesale cut flower prices fluctuate based on market demand throughout the season and regional, national, and international product availability (Ford et al., 2012). The majority of cut flower growers selling to wholesale markets have extensive industry experience and, thus, have developed established relationships and met standards for quantity and quality (Curtis & Stock, 2023).

This fact sheet discusses the results of a study conducted in early 2024 with wholesale flower buyers operating in the Intermountain West. The study was intended to provide local cut flower growers with pertinent information on wholesale buyer preferences for sourcing flowers from the Intermountain West, including pricing, quantity, variety, and delivery preferences. The study also included wholesaler business details and current supplier challenges to assist growers in identifying market gaps and needs.

Highlights

- Cut flower growers in the Intermountain West may successfully access this market by highlighting the quality of their blooms and making delivery convenient for wholesalers.
- Cut flower growers may benefit from using season-extension methods, such as high tunnels, to provide flowers throughout the year.
- Growers should identify flower varieties that grow best and focus on producing large volumes of those rather than producing small quantities of many varieties.

Study Overview

In early 2024, wholesale flower buyers in the Intermountain West were invited via email to complete an online survey. Using Internet searches, researchers compiled a wholesale buyer directory for floral wholesalers across the United States. Of the 26 wholesalers invited to take the survey, eight wholesalers responded to the survey. The survey was based on previous surveys conducted with florists in Utah and the Intermountain West. Survey questions focused on floral business details, including years in business, revenues, floral expenditures, primary markets, current sourcing, etc., as well as industry trends and outlook. Additional questions focused on their perceptions and preferences for sourcing local cut flowers from Intermountain West growers, including current challenges in sourcing cut flowers, interest in sourcing locally grown cut flowers, and quantity, variety, and pricing preferences.

Floral Business Details

As shown in Table 1, the wholesaler respondent operations are well established as half indicated that their operation had been in business for more than forty years. These wholesalers handle large orders of flowers and have high operating budgets. Among the five respondents who reported their typical annual sales revenue, four reported annual revenues exceeding \$1.5 million. Their typical annual flower expenditures were also high, as four of the five reported their operations' annual cut flower expenditures exceeded \$500,000. Wholesaler primary markets included florists and events or event spaces, followed by grocery stores, and online and holiday sales.

When questioned about their current flower sourcing, 63% of the respondents indicated that they source most of their flowers from international growers. Half said that none of their flowers came from Intermountain West farms in 2023. Three reported less than 10% and one wholesaler reported more than 75% of their flowers are sourced from Intermountain West farms.

When asked about their current challenges in sourcing flowers from international or large commercial operations, 38% of the respondents identified delivery schedule and flower quality as challenges, and 37% said that they faced no challenges. These results suggest that wholesalers are satisfied with the vase life and color selection of flowers sourced from commercial or international growers, but experience frustration related to deliveries and flower quality. Specifically, they expressed concerns about flower damage in transit as well as on-time delivery in advance of major holidays. Smaller-scale flower farms in the Intermountain West may successfully market their products by highlighting the quality of their blooms and making delivery convenient for wholesalers.

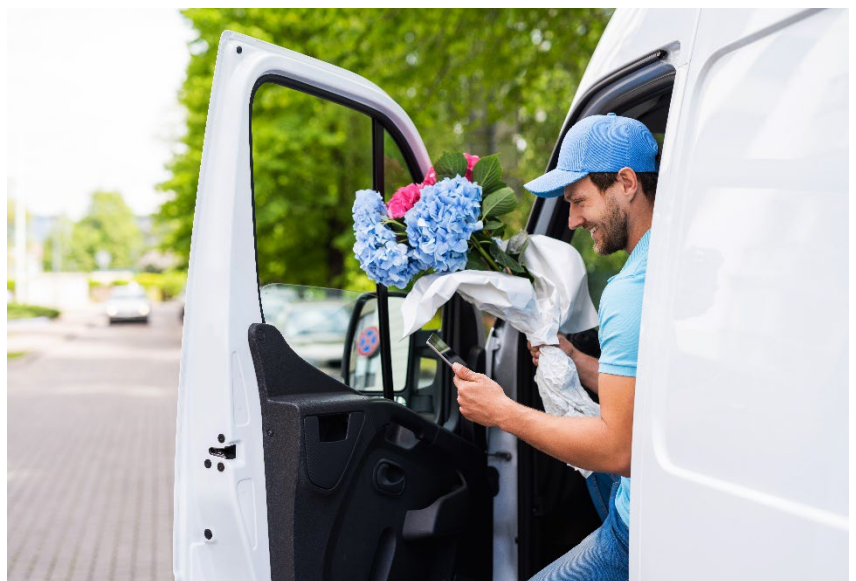


Table 1. Wholesaler Business Details

Question description	Category	Sample (%)
How long has your business been in floral distribution?	Less than 5 years	17%
	20 to 40 years	33%
	More than 40 years	50%
What is your typical annual sales revenue?	\$250,001 to \$500,000	20%
	More than \$1.5 million	80%
What are your typical annual cut flower expenditures?	\$250,001 to \$325,000	20%
	More than \$500,000	80%
Which of the following are primary markets for your business? (Choose all that apply.)	Florists	75%
	Events/event spaces	75%
	Grocery floral	38%
	Online sales	37%
	Corporate/business	12%
	Individuals	25%
	Holiday products	37%
	Other	12%
Where do you source the majority of your flowers?	International growers/suppliers	63%
	U.S. growers outside Intermountain West	0%
	Growers in the Intermountain West	12%
	We grow our own flowers	25%
If you source from international growers or large commercial operations, what are your primary challenges? (Choose all that apply.)	None or not applicable	37%
	Flower quality	38%
	Storage or vase life	0%
	Flower type	12%
	Color selection	0%
	Sales terms	12%
	Delivery schedule	38%
	Communication	0%
Other (cost, shipping damage, timing)	37%	

Table 2. Local Sourcing Preferences

Question description	Category	Sample (%)
In 2024, what percentage of your flowers would you like to source from Intermountain West farms?	None	63%
	10% or less	12%
	11% to 25%	13%
	26% to 50%	0%
	51% to 75%	0%
	More than 75%	12%
How much more would you be willing to pay over commercial or international pricing for local cut flowers?	None	75%
	Less than 5%	13%
	6% to 10%	12%
	More than 10%	0%
Do you pick up flowers from farms or require growers to deliver them to a distribution center?	Pick up from farms	0%
	Grower drop off	67%
	Other (Pick up/drop off, or ship)	33%
Has the availability of cut flowers in the Intermountain West benefitted your business?	Unsure	50%
	No	17%
	Yes	33%
What barriers do you currently face in sourcing flowers from the Intermountain West? (Choose all that apply.)	None or not applicable	37%
	Don't know where to purchase	38%
	Time required to communicate	25%
	Travel time to pick-up location	12%
	Pricing	37%
	Lack of inventory/supply required	50%
	Lack of types/varieties required	25%
What would be the minimum volume (bunches) needed weekly from Intermountain West farms?	10 or less	33%
	51 to 100	33%
	More than 400	34%
What time of year are you most likely to need cut flowers from Intermountain West farms?	Never	17%
	All year long	33%
	Other (wedding season, summer)	50%

Local Sourcing Preferences

As shown in Table 2, five of the eight (63%) respondents did not want to source flowers from Intermountain West farms in 2024, only one wanted to source more than 75% of their flowers from Intermountain West farms, and the two remaining respondents indicated they would like to source less than 10% or 11%–25% of their flowers from local growers. Three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they would not be willing to pay more for locally grown flowers compared to commercially or internationally grown flowers. Another 25% stated they would be willing to pay from 1%–10% more for locally grown flowers.

Half of the wholesalers were unsure if the availability of cut flowers grown in the Intermountain West had benefitted their business, but they also sourced none or less than 10% of their flowers locally. Those who reported a benefit indicated appreciation for being able to get flowers more quickly than those shipped from overseas. The most commonly reported barrier to sourcing flowers from the Intermountain West was limited inventory or insufficient quantities available from local farms. Additionally, the single “other” response highlighted a need for farms to specialize in flower varieties and produce larger quantities of those rather than smaller quantities of many different flowers. Of the respondents, 50% indicated they required flower growers to drop off their flowers at a central location or distribution center. Two respondents gave “other” responses and indicated they may pick up the flowers or have growers drop them off. Several wholesalers noted that vendors often ship flowers to them, making the process more convenient.

The most reported barrier to sourcing flowers from the Intermountain West was limited inventory or insufficient quantities available from local farms.

When asked how many bunches they would need each week from flower farms, respondents were divided. Some reported needing 10 bunches or fewer each week, but an equal number wanted more than 400 bunches weekly. With a limited growing season for flowers in the Intermountain West and seasonal holidays and events, time of year was important to consider, as reported by six respondents. Here, three respondents highlighted the need for flowers in the wedding season from spring into fall. Two others indicated they would need flowers from the Intermountain West all year long. These responses suggest that cut flower growers may benefit from using season extension methods, such as high tunnels. Two-thirds of respondents indicated a need for predictive scheduling with Intermountain West flower farms, in that they would need at least six days’ notice in regard to flower availability in order for them to be able to fill their customers’ orders through other vendors if necessary.



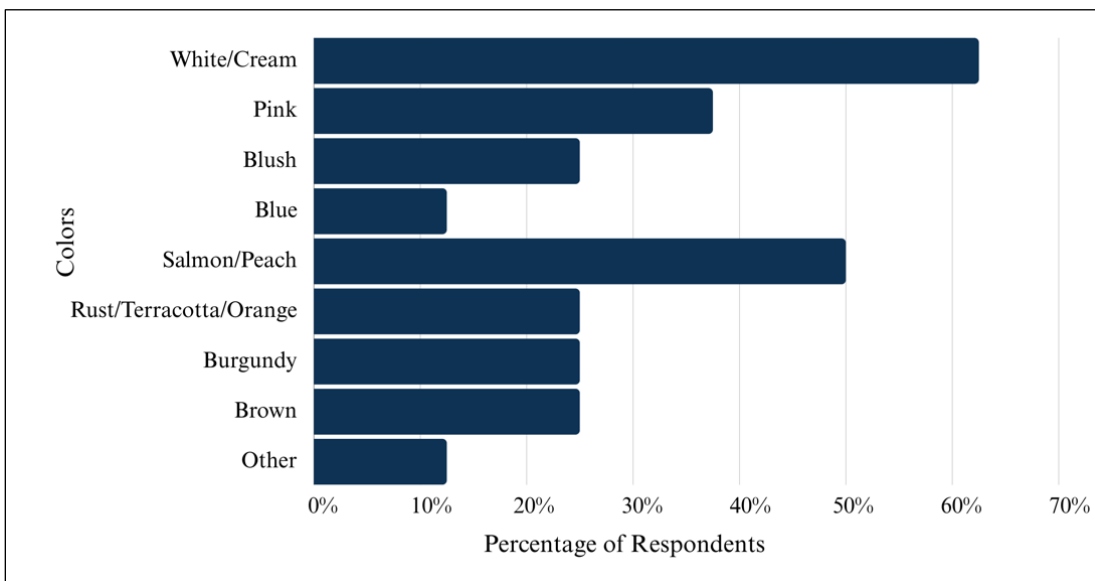
There were few responses when wholesalers were asked what flower varieties are difficult to obtain from international operations, but the respondents were most interested in varieties that may not handle shipping well. Among the eight wholesalers that participated in the survey, five indicated that they would prefer to get peonies from growers in the Intermountain West. At least half of respondents selected lisianthus, tulips, dahlias, and ranunculus. There was little interest among the respondents in sourcing dried flowers.

When asked for suggestions they have for cut flower growers in the Intermountain West, the overwhelming theme was that growers should identify flower varieties that grow best and focus on producing large volumes of those rather than producing small quantities of many varieties.

Industry Trends and Outlook

The predicted color trends for 2024 among wholesalers included white/cream and peach/salmon, followed by pink and blue (see Figure 1). Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents felt that floral sales would increase in 2024, and the remaining two wholesalers were uncertain about future floral sales. Respondent wholesalers mentioned that this year’s presidential election could influence sales and that the 2020 pandemic is still impacting floral markets.

Figure 1. *Cut Flower Color Trends for 2024*



Conclusions

Cut flower wholesalers handle large volumes of flowers at fluctuating prices based on market demand and availability. Although the respondent wholesale buyers do not currently source large volumes of flowers from Intermountain West growers, there are opportunities for growers seeking to serve this market. Respondent wholesalers’ largest barriers to sourcing cut flowers from growers in the Intermountain West was limited supply or availability, pricing, and lack of grower contact information. They also noted that flower quality, shipping damage, and timing/logistics were issues with their current corporate/international suppliers. Hence, Intermountain West cut flower growers may be effective at entering this market by:

- Promoting their location.
- Emphasizing variety availability.
- Highlighting the quality of their flowers and the reduced stem loss associated with local sourcing.

Finally, while wholesale respondents generally require flowers all year long, season extension techniques can be used by Intermountain West growers to extend their seasons from late winter to late fall, thus improving their ability to provide a consistent, high-quality product to wholesale buyers.

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