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Intermountain West Florist Market Overview and Outlook

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Introduction

Americans purchase 10 million cut flowers daily, spending close to $7 billion annually (Tegethoff, 2023). The majority (80%) of the flowers sold in the U.S. are grown internationally in climate-optimal countries, such as Ecuador, Columbia, and Kenya (Li, 2016). But there are more than 10,200 flower farms in the U.S. (National Agricultural Statistics Service [NASS], 2024). California and Florida have the highest cut flower sales in the nation, but the industry is also expanding in other regions. For example, in Utah, the number of flower farms rose from 20 to 199 between 2018 and 2023 (Langford et al., 2023).

Highlights

- Cut flower growers in the Intermountain West may successfully access this market by highlighting the quality and extended vase life of their blooms.
- Cut flower growers may benefit from using season extension methods, such as high tunnels, to provide flowers throughout the year.
- Cut flower growers should discuss the variety and color needs with florist customers prior to planting.

Cut flower growers in the Intermountain West (Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Nevada) sell their flowers through direct-to-consumer markets such as farmers markets and wholesale to cooperatives, buyers, and florists. As growers gain more experience, florists and other wholesale markets often become a larger part of their business (Langford et al., 2024). In 2021, retail florist shops in the U.S. numbered just over 12,000, making up nearly 20% of all floral industry businesses (NASS, 2024). As the U.S. floral gift market is expected to grow just over 50% by 2028 (Arizton, 2023), understanding the preferences and needs of this important market will be essential for cut flower growers who want to enter and thrive in this market.

This fact sheet, the first in a two-part series from a January 2024 study, focuses on florist and market trends in the Intermountain West. The study provides local cut flower growers with pertinent information on the florist market such as current sourcing and flower expenditures, primary markets and annual sales, as well as current supplier challenges. Market trends regarding sales, flower variety, and color predictions are also discussed. This information will help growers identify current gaps in the florist market and explore ways to meet florist needs.

Study Overview

In January 2024, an online Qualtrics survey was conducted with florists in six Intermountain West states, including Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. A total of 1,412 florists were invited by email to complete the survey. The florist directory was compiled through internet searches of florists across the region. A total of 205 florists responded to the survey, with 170 valid responses. Survey questions focused on the details of florist businesses, including their experience, sales, expenditures, primary markets, current sources, and associated challenges. Additional questions focused on florist predictions of market trends for the upcoming year.

Florist Business Details

Details of the florist respondents' businesses are provided in Table 1. As shown, the respondent florists conducted business in six states within the Intermountain West region. Among the respondents, roughly a third (33%) were from Colorado, closely followed by 32% from Utah. Montana and Nevada were home to 6.5% of the respondents, Wyoming to 7%, and 14% to Idaho. The two respondents who selected "other" indicated that they covered multiple states within the region. Just under a third (29%) of respondent florists had been in business for less than five years, but the majority (46%) had been in business for more than 10 years. Therefore, the majority have a great deal of experience.

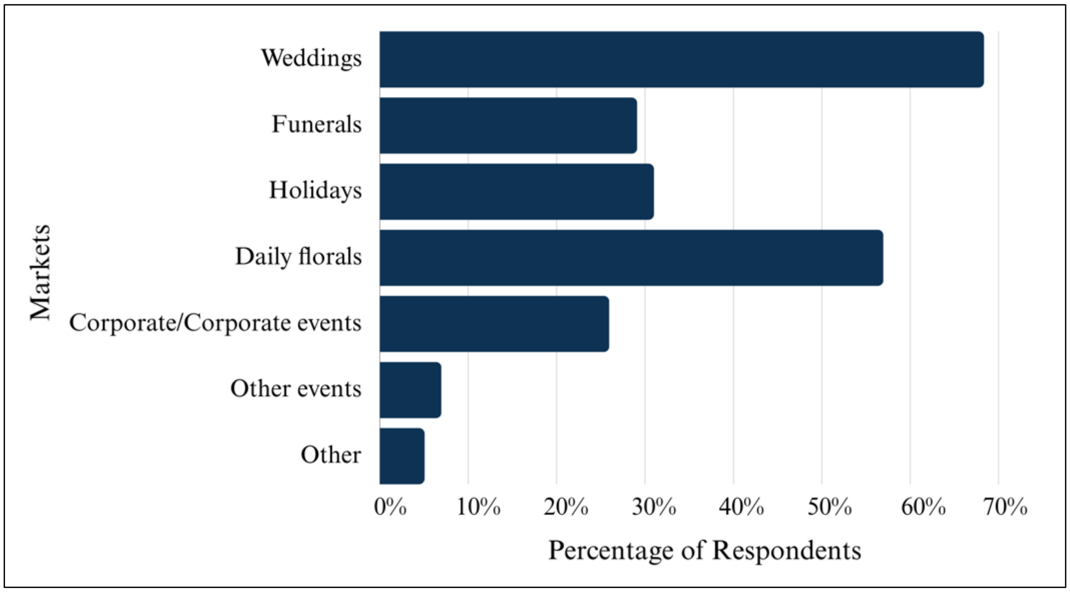
Expenditures and Sales

Over half (57%) of the florists reported that their annual cut flower expenditures exceeded $40,000. Similarly, 58% reported their annual gross floral sales exceeded $100,000. Just under 6% of the respondents had annual sales of less than $10,000. When questioned about their primary markets, approximately two-thirds (68%) indicated that weddings were a primary market (see Figure 1). More than half (57%) also reported that daily florals were a major portion of their business. Funerals (29%), holidays (31%), and corporate work, including corporate events (26%), were also each selected by more than a quarter of respondents. Among the respondents that indicated "other events" were a primary market, results included dances (such as high school proms and homecoming dances), elopements, rehearsal dinners, bridal and baby showers, floral workshops, and unspecified local events. The "other" responses highlighted floral arrangements for private homes, hotels, and brand installations.

Table 1. *Floral Business Details*

Question description	Category	Sample (%)
In which state is your floral business located?	Utah	32%
	Nevada	6.5%
	Idaho	14%
	Colorado	33%
	Wyoming	7%
	Montana	6.5%
	Other	1%
For how many years have you operated a floral business?	5 years or less	29%
	6 to 10 years	24%
	11 to 20 years	20%
	More than 20 years	26%
What are your typical annual gross floral sales?	Less than $10,000	6%
	$10,000 to $25,000	8%
	$25,001 to $50,000	10%
	$50,001 to $75,000	11%
	$75,001 to $100,000	7%
	More than $100,000	58%
What are your typical annual cut flower expenditures?	Less than $10,000	15.5%
	$10,001 to $20,000	10%
	$20,001 to $30,000	12%
	$30,001 to $40,000	4.5%
	$40,001 to $50,000	12%
	$50,001 to $65,000	9%
	More than $65,000	36%
If weddings are part of your business focus, what is your typical wedding size (in dollars)?	Not applicable	5%
	Less than $1,000	15%
	$1,000 to $2,999	28%
	$3,000 to $4,999	22%
	$5,000 to $9,999	17%
	$10,000 to $14,999	6%
	$15,000 to $19,999	4%
	$20,000 or more	4%
Do you create your own floral designs, or do you normally follow preset/prescribed designs?	Unsure	0%
	Design own floral offerings	83%
	Use some preset designs	17%
	Only use preset designs	0%

Figure 1. *Primary Markets*



The most common per-wedding income category amount for florists who served this market was $1,000 to $2,999, which was selected by 27% of respondents. Only 7.7% of the respondents sold wedding florals exceeding $15,000. This suggests that although weddings are a major part of florists' businesses, each wedding individually makes up a small portion of their revenue.

Floral Designs

Florists working with larger companies to fulfill floral orders may be restricted by what designs they are allowed to use. The florists were asked if they follow preset designs or if they design their arrangements. The majority (83%) indicated that they design all their floral offerings, while the remaining 17% design most arrangements but may use some preset designs. This suggests that florists have considerable freedom in choosing what flowers and colors to use and how to arrange them.

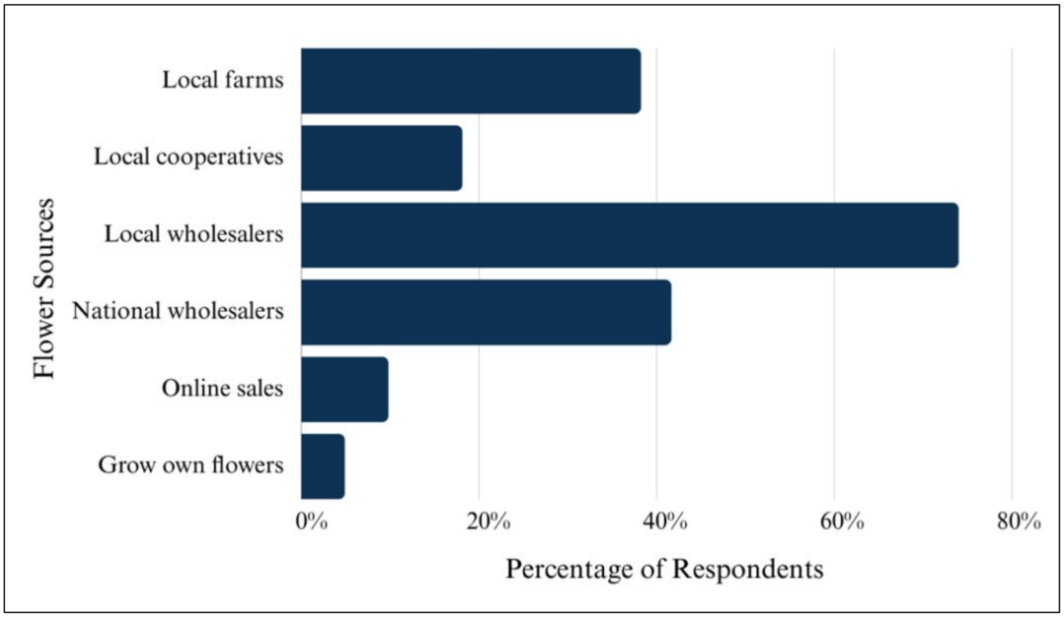
Offerings Beyond Florals

Respondent florists were also asked what services and products they offer in addition to cut flowers. Among those that offered services other than cut flowers, 43 (45%) florists indicated that they also sell gift items, more than any other product. The next most popular item was plants, including houseplants and succulents. Additionally, florists reported offering various other products, such as home goods and decor, clothing and accessories, food and drinks (especially chocolate and candies), bath and body products, and art and stationery. While services were less commonly mentioned than products, some florists also offered event planning and hosting services, as well as workshops or classes.

Current Cut Flower Sourcing

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) indicated that they purchase most of their flowers from local wholesalers (see Figure 2). National wholesalers were also popular, with 42% of respondents reporting them as a major supplier. Local farms were identified as major suppliers for 38% of the respondent florists, while local cooperatives supplied 18% of the florists. Among the respondents that reported "other" major suppliers, the most common response was sourcing directly from farms in South America, particularly in Ecuador.

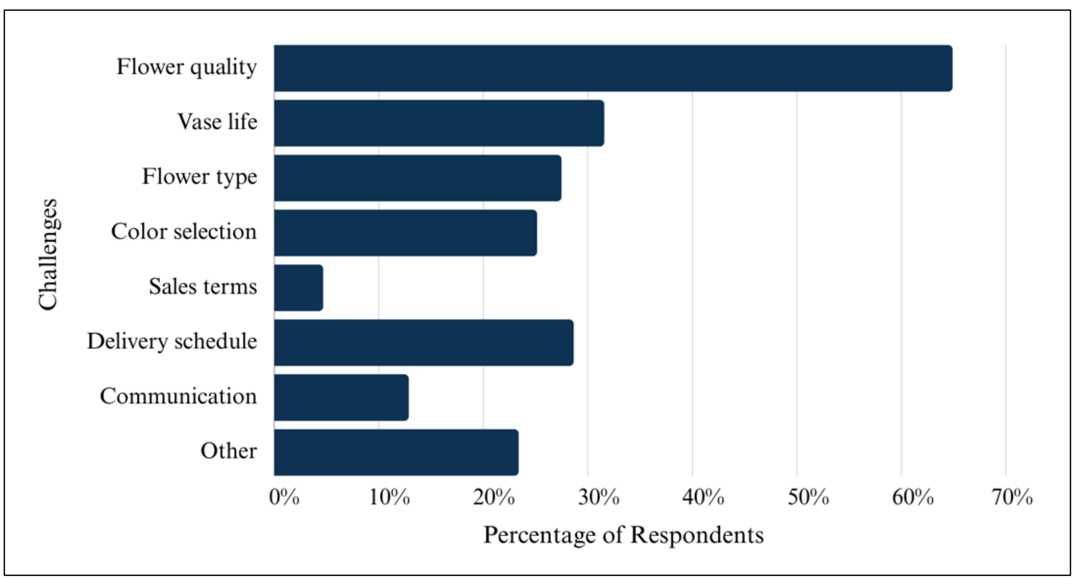
Figure 2. *Primary Flower Sources*



Wholesale Sourcing Challenges

When asked about challenges they face in sourcing from wholesale cut flower suppliers, nearly two-thirds reported that flower quality was a primary challenge (see Figure 3). The next highest-ranked challenge was storage or vase life, which was reported by 31.5% of florists. Sales terms were the least commonly reported challenge, as only 5% of the respondents considered the sales terms a challenge when working with wholesalers. Only 10% of florists selected “none or not applicable,” indicating that they do not work with wholesalers or, if they do, they are not experiencing any challenges sourcing from them. Among the “other” responses, the price was the primary challenge, with 11% of respondents writing in that sourcing cut flowers from wholesalers is pricey.

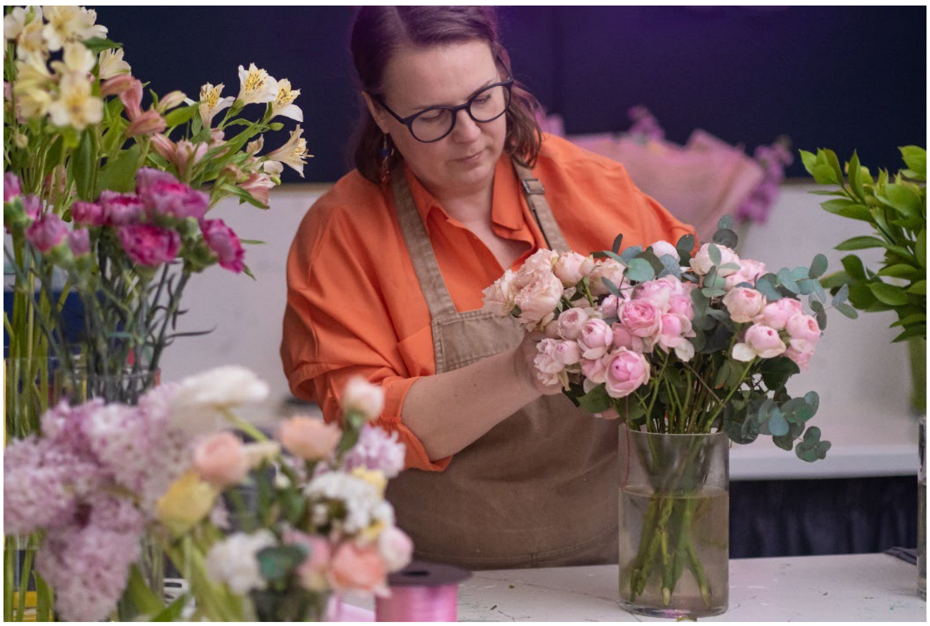
Figure 3. *Wholesale Flower Sourcing Challenges*



Blue was the most challenging color for florists to obtain from wholesalers, followed by peach or salmon, brown, and orange or terracotta, which were also frequently reported. A quarter of respondents (26%) stated that they faced no difficulties in sourcing colors from their wholesalers. Additionally, some florists indicated a preference for specific shades of a color or mentioned encountering difficulty obtaining certain colors, notably bridal colors such as white, cream, and blush, especially during wedding season from June to October.

Market Trends and Outlook

Respondents were divided in their 2024 floral sales projections. Roughly a quarter (25%) felt that sales would not increase, while 39% believed floral sales would increase. The remaining 36% expressed uncertainty regarding the trajectory of floral sales in 2024. Some reported that they were seeing a plateau in sales, while others found it was too difficult to predict.

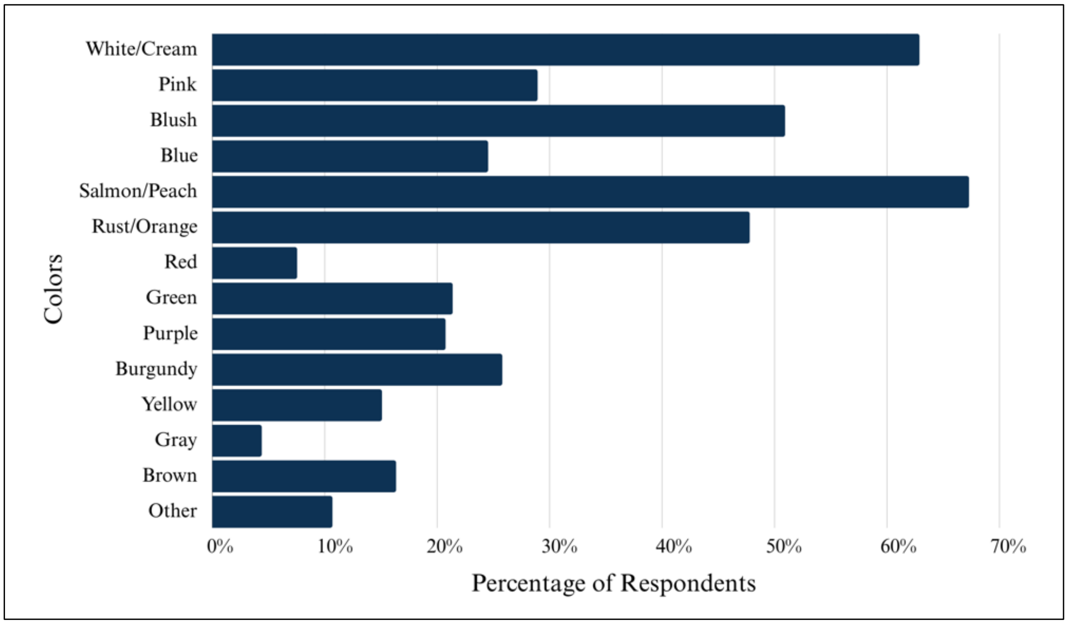


Among those that felt floral sales would increase, some based this projection on the growth and establishment of their small businesses, paired with an uptick in their sales. Others had experienced changes in their business, such as offering more event florals compared to daily florals. Some florists felt that total sales would increase due to their current higher workload compared to the previous years, while others thought sales would remain stagnant or decrease because their business was slower than usual. Some florists saw consistent increases in sales annually since 2020, anticipating this trend to continue. Conversely, others noted that many of the weddings and events postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic have already occurred, leading them to predict a decrease in floral sales from rescheduled events in 2024.

The economy, inflation, and price increases were the most cited reasons to predict floral sales decreases in 2024. Some saw a trend for smaller weddings with smaller budgets and more engaged couples choosing to do their flowers rather than hiring professional florists. Many acknowledge that flowers are a luxury item and may be one of the first things eliminated when households have restricted budgets. Several also noted that because 2024 is an election year, they are less confident in sales increases.

The most popular color trend for 2024 among surveyed florists was salmon or peach, reported by two-thirds (67%) of respondents (see Figure 4). Similarly, 63% of respondents identified white or cream flowers as a 2024 trend. Half (51%) of the respondents predicted seeing blush as a popular color in 2024. Among the “other” responses, the most common response was all colors or arrangements featuring multiple colors. Gray was the least popular color, only selected by 4.4% of the florists.

Figure 4. *2024 Color Trend Predictions*



Conclusions

Flower quality was identified as a major challenge when sourcing cut flowers from wholesale suppliers, but flower quality was repeatedly reported as a benefit of local flowers by both florists and wholesalers. Florists also noted vase life as both a disadvantage of flowers sourced from wholesalers and an advantage of locally grown flowers. Therefore, both quality and vase life may be major selling points for growers looking to work with florists, as these characteristics are commonly recognized by florists and would address the challenges they face when sourcing from wholesalers.

This survey provides valuable insights into the Intermountain West florist market and its trends. A notable finding from the research is the significant role of flower quality and vase life in influencing florists' sourcing decisions. While sourcing cut flowers from wholesale suppliers presents challenges related to quality, locally grown flowers are perceived as superior in both quality and vase life by florists.

By marketing the superior quality and extended vase life of locally sourced flowers, growers can position themselves as a preferred supplier to florists. By leveraging these key selling points to strengthen their partnerships with florists, growers can compete in the market and contribute to the growth and sustainability of the floral industry in this region.

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