

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Offshore Dianthus Cuttings Now Available From Selecta

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In August, flower breeder Selecta One announced that all of its potted, perennial and annual dianthus are now available as unrooted cuttings from its farm in Kenya. That's big news in the global distribution of plant material because until now, the USDA has only allowed vegetative dianthus mother stock to be produced domestically. Cuttings from offshore were required to enter a one-year "post-entry quarantine" before being sent to growers.

Dr. Mike Klopmeier, president of Ball FloraPlant, estimates that this onerous one-year quarantine regulation has been in place for more than 70 years. Back then, there were a lot more U.S. cut carnation growers, and pathogens like *Fusarium* could be imported along with the cuttings, which could seriously impact domestic production. At the time, there weren't any

fungicides to control this pathogen, so the USDA decided that, in order to protect American growers, dianthus cuttings could not be brought into the country without an extremely strict quarantine period.

Pictured: I Love U Dianthus from Selecta One.

We don't have to explain why this would put a crimp in breeders' efforts to sell dianthus commercially in large quantities, so there's never been a large volume of vegetative dianthus programs serving the U.S. (FYI—The regulation has never applied to seed-raised dianthus.) Plus, the number of domestic cut flower growers who grow large volumes of dianthus has significantly dwindled; most cut carnations now come from producers in Colombia and Ecuador. So, in reality, the original reason for the regulation no longer exists.

"That's an example of how the trade patterns have changed," explained Mike. "Now that we're more comfortable using the systems-based approach to clean plant production, we looked at other commodities we could put through the same approach and dianthus was the one."

The systems-based approach Mike is referring to is the newer way the USDA allows vegetative plant material to be brought into the country with appropriate safeguards for major pests and pathogens. Essentially, it puts the responsibility on the offshore producer to ensure the cuttings are pest-free prior to them entering the U.S.

It took more than 10 years of working with USDA and KEPHIS (Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services), but Selecta was finally granted permission this summer to import dianthus into the U.S. As of now, Selecta is the only

breeder-producer who can ship commercial quantities of dianthus cuttings into the U.S. that don't have to go through the post-entry quarantine period.

Mike said that Selecta already ships over 100 million dianthus cuttings into Europe and the UK, where the market for the potted types are extremely popular. Selecta is hoping the new deregulation on dianthus cuttings into the U.S. allows them to take advantage of a new opportunity: create a potted dianthus market as successful in the U.S. as it is in Europe.

"The consumer can't get it right now because it's too cumbersome of a supply chain to meet the need," explained Mike. "Now you can have a wonderful Valentine's Day crop or Mother's Day crop with significant volume."

And since Selecta is a breeder and producer, Mike said they can create "the whole package" to help growers and retailers, including marketing and POP.

They're also going to expand their perennial dianthus offerings. Self-propagators and specialty propagators have already been selling cuttings from their own mother stock of perennial dianthus, but now availability will be wide open, offering more product and more varieties.

And Selecta isn't going to limit their expansion to potted and perennial dianthus—they also want to include spring dianthus and basket types that growers and retailers can sell as a spring annual.

"We have been selling Pink Kisses and I Love U, but only after a one-year quarantine and in limited quantities due to insufficient supply," said Mike. "Now we've got all of these varieties and the availability, so the growers can order whatever they want, whenever they want."

All of this will be rolling out in the coming year, as Selecta sends out samples to growers and works on positioning the different types for the North American market. Mike was quick to point out that this isn't "a direct unrooted strategy"—Selecta's rooting station and young plant producer network are very much a part of this new initiative going forward. They know many growers will still want to have their dianthus cuttings rooted through their favorite supplier.

"It'll be much easier for them to bring in commercial quantities because they don't have to grow mother stock anymore," said Mike. "So this allows us to continue to support the existing network of rooted cutting suppliers."

To see Selecta's complete dianthus lineup, visit selectanorthamerica.com/Dianthus. **GT**