

## Trial shipment of Kenya roses on sea: FloraHolland

A trial shipment of Kenyan roses, in a refrigerated container, arrived in Antwerp on April 26, Christo van der Meer, operations manager of Fresh Flower Solutions for FloraHolland told the Cool Logistics conference.



"This is merely the first trial shipment as we look to provide an alternative to air freight, as the costs are about 40% less than air freight. Once the shipment has landed we will check the vase life of the roses and give feedback to the growers," he said.

FloraHolland is a growers' co-operative handling 11 billion cut flower stems annually and 1.3 billion potted plants with 20,000 different products and 200,000 distribution points in Europe. As FloraHolland has 125,000 transactions per day it provides a benchmark pricing system for the global flower trade.

Kenya currently exports EUR165 million worth of flowers annually to the Netherlands of which 75% are roses. It is followed by Ethiopia at Eur10 million and competes with other equatorial highland countries such as Colombia and Ecuador.

"We plan to do another 11 shipments this year and expect the last shipment to contain 19 commercial pallets and only one test pallet. Once we have proven that sea freight can compete with air freight, then this would allow Kenya and other African countries to diversify their product offering to other flowers, such as chrysanthemums," he told I-Net Bridge/BusinessLIVE.

Europe's flower trade is currently worth EUR7 billion of which only a tenth is imported, so there is a large potential for Africa, including SA, to expand its flower exports to Europe.

Once the sea freight is proven to Europe, then it could open a new market for African flower growers in North America, as ships could go to Miami just as easily as they go to Antwerp.

Van der Meer believed sea freight could also provide better temperature control of the entire cold chain as refrigerated containers were not available in air freight.

A total of 15 Kenyan rose growers were involved in the first trial shipment as FloraHolland wanted a representative sample of growers from the different regions of Kenya.

He said it would be unlikely to be used in SA, as SA flower exports were mostly composed of the hardier proteas, which were less delicate than roses or other cut flowers.