

Final Report

Training workshop on Quality, Post-harvest Treatment and Marketing of Tropical Cut Flowers

Prepared by: Jan Hintze, Jungle Plant & Flower Service

Delivered 13th – 21st January, 2014



An arrangement with local flowers provided by the workshop participants.

Acknowledgements.

I was contracted by the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries to deliver training workshops on floriculture to a select group of women at Gold Ridge Mining Ltd, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, as part of an ACIAR funded project HORT2008-011 "Strategies using floriculture to improve livelihoods in Indigenous Australian and Pacific Island communities". I appreciate NTDPIF interest and assistance in carrying out this work. I would also like to acknowledge Gold Ridge Mining Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of St Barbara Limited in providing my accommodation and internal transport. Too, I am grateful to Mrs Ruth Liloqula, the Social & Economic Development Superintendent from Gold Ridge Mining Ltd., for her time and assistance with organising this workshop.

Objectives.

The objective of my portion of the project was to present to the women who live on the Mining Lease operated by Gold Ridge Mining Ltd., the possibility of commercial flower production as an input to their livelihood and to provide a cash flow which would give them a degree of independent income into the family.

The women come from a number of villages located on the Mining Lease, and some have family working for the mining company which employs a large number of local people. Some have been relocated into newly built villages, and land is available for commercial use, although there was also the consideration that they may prefer to grow flowers purely for their own enjoyment in their gardens.

Preliminary Issues

Mrs Ruth Liloqula, M/s Doris Marcsik, Mr. Mark Hoult and I had a meeting in Darwin and we discussed at length an outline of what was required for the workshops and how we would provide it.

Considerable time was spent before I travelled to the Solomon Islands to produce two books for the project.

The first was a concise outline of the areas covered by the workshops, since I have observed that it is fairly difficult for participants to remember all of the things discussed and explained during the hours of attendance. There is also, often, an added language difficulty, since the local communication is with Pidgin. To have a booklet, to keep in their possession, which succinctly outlines the work we have done, makes an excellent reminder in later times.

The second booklet was a collection of photographs of the more commonly used cut flower types of Heliconia and several genera of Zingiberaceae (Gingers). These have been captioned with the formal registered cultivar name as well as the Botanical Latin name together with a few notes on their use, vase life, etc.

Both booklets were printed and bound in Darwin prior to my departure, and I carried them with me as excess baggage which, although expensive, was considered a more reliable method of transport than postage.

I also took with me a box of rhizomes of Zingiber spectabile varieties which NT Department of Plant Industries and Fisheries officer, M/s Doris Marcsik, had developed for flower production in Darwin, and which she and Mrs Ruth Liloqula, who is the Social & Economic Development Superintendent for Gold Ridge Mining Ltd., had selected as a new variety suitable for growing in the area. These rhizomes were prepared for export by M/s Marcsik who obtained the appropriate export permit, after Mrs Liloqula had arranged an import permit from the Solomon Islands Government. The plants were delivered to the quarantine officers at the airport on my arrival there.

Programme

I left Darwin on Sunday, January 12th and stayed in Brisbane overnight, to catch the flight to Honiara on Guadalcanal Island, Solomon Islands, on Monday morning. Transportation all went well, and although I had a lot of baggage, what with the booklets, one hundred copies of each, as well as the plants, and all my electronic equipment. I supply my own computer and projector, as well as electrical cables etc. to be certain that all is compatible and working.

On arrival, I spent some time with the Quarantine Officers at the airport, and then met with Ruth Liloqula, who shepherded me to the bus which was to take me up to the mine camp, where I was to stay. Ruth lives in Honiara, but it was decided that it would be easier for me to stay on the mine site, since that is where I would be working. It was an interesting, if rough, trip up, 30 km over very rough roads in the pouring rain. However we arrived without incident, and I was taken to a very comfortable room with bath, which was normally occupied by someone who had flown out, and would be away for the duration of my stay.

On Tuesday, January 14th, I met with Ruth and we went back down to Honiara to check that the Quarantine Officers had dealt with the plants appropriately, which they had, although the plants needed more watering to make sure the fresh potting mix was thoroughly soaked - however being Zingibers, they would handle that ok. Then we went back up to the Community Relations Centre which is on the Mining lease but somewhat down the mountain from the mine and treatment plant, and from the camp, which is on top of the mountain. We had a good discussion about the way Ruth wanted the workshops to go, and I checked out the meeting room where the workshops were to be held, and apart from the point that the walls are basically all window, and there was only a small space to project my presentation, it was a very good space.

We commenced the workshops on Wednesday, January 15th, and we started with me giving an overview of what we were all about, and then the ladies introduced themselves, one by one, and indicated whether they had land available on which to grow flowers. Most were married women with children and all had land available through family connections. Since all these women were selected by Ruth Liloqula as being suitable for inclusion in the

programme, all seemed keen to participate, and showed a distinct interest in flower growing.

We handed out the copies of the Handbook and Identification Guide to those who were there on that day, and on subsequent days to those who could not make it on the first day. The weather was particularly inclement, and flooding made it difficult for the women who lived on the other side of one of the local rivers to get to the workshops. However, after a day or so the rain slackened off, and all the women were able to attend. The women came from a number of villages in the vicinity of the mine and most of them had been moved to a new site, further away from the operating area, hence were in the process of establishing new gardens.

I made a brief run through of the programme and pointed out how it related to the Handbook, and gave an outline about what the course was for, and how it could fit into what they were wanting to do with it, and where it could lead them if they wished.

The following three days - Thursday and Friday, and the following Monday - were taken up by going through the Handbook, section by section, covering the decisions that need to be made about what flowers they could choose to grow - Heliconias, Gingers, Anthuriums, Orchids; and the conditions required to grow them. Generally speaking, these women are already experienced gardeners, since they usually grow at least some of the food they eat, including vegetables and fruit, so that cultivation skills do not need to be taught. However, I did discuss in some depth the requirements for Anthuriums and Orchids, since these vary somewhat from soil based plants. Since most have chickens and often pigs, I also explained how to make liquid fertilizer from the chicken and pig manure, as well as its use in the garden.

The course then went on to lay down standards for harvesting flowers - what time of day, what stage of growth, and trimming details as well as post harvest treatment to maintain the flowers in good condition for future use. We covered, with pictures, the various flowers and what they should look like when harvested, in the Quality Control segment, and I find that this is one of the most difficult ideas for them to adopt. Generally, these new growers tend to leave the flowers far past the ideal maturity, however, I tried to explain that the flowers last longer if harvested at the proper time and looked after in the proper manner after picking.

Selling flowers, in market situation, would be the most likely option for those prepared to go on to a commercial production. The fresh food market in Honiara provides space for flower stalls on Saturday mornings, and I visited there and was pleased to see the number of women who were selling a wide range of flowers, and that my previous training a year before had results in improving the harvesting and presentation standards.

There is an area allocated and somewhat furnished as a local market on the mining lease, but this does not seem to be utilised at this time.

I did provide a short talk on the principles of small business, including reliability, knowing your customers, keeping track of costs and determining cost of production, but until a decision is made to go commercial, this was rather premature, and would need to be expanded.

There is a section in the Handbook on packing for transport, but I did not go in depth into this, just a quick overview, since at this stage the growers had not decided whether to look at commercial production or just growing for local and personal use. The marketing section was only briefly discussed, since it is by no means clear that the ladies would want to go further, nor how they would do it, given the difficulties of transportation down to Honiara. Transport of flowers to other islands, which is only possible by air, is expensive, and, at this stage at least, unrealistic. Export overseas also would need to be a co-operative endeavour, to ensure sufficient flowers for a continuous supply. Quarantine standards would need to be laid out for overseas export, and would also be recommended for inter-island transport, but this would be an internal matter.

On the final day of the course, Tuesday, January 21st, we went in a bus to Honiara where we visited the garden of one of my contacts from a previous training programme. Mary has expanded her garden and business enterprises, and it was a very good opportunity for this group to see what could be done, and that one of their own was being very successful doing it. Mary is a great role model, and has experience in helping other women to develop their gardens to suit their aims. She also provided my group with some plants, as well as offering a demonstration of mixing potting mix for growing plants for sale in pots.

Evaluation

There is certainly the interest and ability, as well as the availability of land, to make flower production possible, on various levels of scale. It is unlikely that all the women will become commercial producers, but that is only to be expected, in that they all have other commitments to family etc. The difficulties of transportation need to be considered, since the cost of moving flowers from the growing area to the market would be quite high, although there is plenty of minibuses available to do so. There is a florist in Honiara who might be interested in using their product, and she could be central to any export effort.

A follow up to see how any plantings are proceeding could be useful. I requested the ladies to bring flowers in from their gardens, so that I could get an idea of what is already available on the island, and discovered that there was a wide range of Heliconias and gingers already there, but that there could be value in introducing a few more varieties. There is a distinct lack of variety in the Claw types of Heliconia, as well as the pendular species. More varieties of Costus would be of interest, as well as some of the more reliable cut flower varieties of Cucurma.

Orchid varieties could be brought in in flasks, which I assume is already happening, seeing what Phalaenopsis flowers were for sale in the market, and tissue cultured Anthuriums could be considered too, although the hardier varieties are available in the gardens, and some were donated to the group by Ruth Liloqula.

Development of an international export industry is possible, although a sufficient volume of production to support this is a fair way off. Difficulties with quarantine entry into Australia

and New Zealand, the nearest likely importers, need to be considered, and the coolchain handling would need investigation. Orchids have been trialled with success, and might be the most successful product to start with. There are regular airline connections to these two countries, and it is likely that there is regularly space for freight outgoing.

APPENDIX 1. Photographs illustrating various issues in the report.



The training room, where we worked, with some of the women having lunch.



Flowers on sale at the market in Honiara, showing Heliconias, Costus Orchids and Musa.



Orchids and foliage on sale Honiara market including some palm flowers, top left.



The ladies visiting Mary's garden in Honiara



Mary showing the ladies how to make potting mix

APPENDIX 2.

Names of ladies who attended the Workshops

Gladys William, Mataruka Village

Saelyn Keitlyn, Chichige Village

Margaret Barava, Pitukoli Village

Bernadette Neda, Tururana Villag

Sari Solomate, Bubulake 3 Village

Stella Vola, Bubulake 3 Village

Ireen Nesia, Bubulake 3 Village

Tala Medosi, Bubulake 2, Village

Lorrina Tova, Bubulake 2, Village

Gethron Teli, Bubulake 2, Village

Milisa Billy, Bubulake 1, Village

Betu Roni, Bubulake 1, Village

Pricillar Boto, Ravua 1, Village

Mirriam Rose, Ravua 1 Village

Maerine Jame, Tanatita Village

Joycelyn Petty, Obo Obo Village,

Hilda Delight, Matagono Village