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Colombian grower converts waste flowerbed cuttings into flower shipping boxes

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Flores Funza, a flower farm in Bogota, Colombia, and part of Riverdale Farms in Miami, takes environmental stewardship and social responsibility seriously. Seeing the 250-plus tons of organic waste that went into landfills every year from Funza's farm alone, it approached cardboard and paper maker Smurfit Kappa with the idea to convert stem and flower clippings, plus other organic waste from the flowerbeds, into pulp to make the farm's flower shipping boxes.



Sandra Jahnke, director of sales and marketing at Riverdale Farms and Sean Doblin, account manager, with the pulp-manufacturing machine at the Flores Funza farm. Smurfit experimented with its paper machines to adjust to the new raw material, and changes were made at Funza to improve the processing qualities of the carnation stems. They learned that if the stems were chopped into smaller pieces, cleanliness was improved and the moisture content was reduced.

After two long years of trial and error, Flores Funza built its first carnation stem pulp production plant at the farm. The result was a plant that could be easily operated in a small footprint, and this plant could handle 100 percent of the organic residue from the farm.

In early 2014, Smurfit Kappa began to receive shipments of Funza's stem pulp and converting it into cardboard for flower shipping boxes.

The benefits are many.

- Using fiber sourced from waste materials significantly reduces the number of trees needed to make shipping boxes.
- The former 250-plus metric tons of organic waste are no longer going to landfills and are being 100 percent recycled.
- The amount of water needed to recycle this amount of organic waste has been reduced by more than 50 percent.
- The production of CO₂ by the previous composting and landfill processes has been eliminated.

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- The strategic partnership between Funza and Smurfit Kappa has strengthened, resulting in a reduction in solid waste and a new, renewable source of raw material.

The farm also reclaims and recycles more than 60 percent of the water used in the greenhouses; water consumption has decreased by 30 percent by using technology to control soil humidity; organic waste from rose farms is reclaimed and converted to compost for the flowerbeds; and the use of organic biological controls has reduced their dependency on pesticides. Additional recycling programs are in place for all scrap iron, wood and plastic waste as well.

For the landscape, the farms have reduced the visual impact of the greenhouses by planting over 8,000 native species of trees and bushes, and preserved and restored native natural habitats of the surrounding lands, allowing native wildlife to safely nest and thrive.

In 2007, Riverdale Farms was only one of two flower companies in the United States to receive an Environmental Protection Agency award for environmental excellence. The company continues to strive for innovative and responsible answers to the daily challenges it faces in the flower business, environmentally and socially.

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