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Outlook 2017: Could Trump administration help U.S.-grown flowers?

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Cautious optimism. Those two words sum up the balanced perspective of things to come for American flower farmers in 2017.

On the one hand, flower farmers in California are facing significant increases in labor costs due to the increase in the state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour over the next four years. It's safe to assume that California's flower farmers will continue to face increasing costs and regulation during the final years of Gov. Jerry Brown's administration.

On the other hand, real change at the federal level could serve to balance out the challenges farms face at the state level.

How will the business climate change with a Donald Trump administration? Can the Trump administration really help make U.S.-grown flowers great again?

This, of course, is impossible to predict, but campaign rhetoric and the recent outline of post-inauguration priorities provided during this transition of power do provide some real hope in improving business conditions for U.S.-based companies, including flower farmers. Addressing the challenges of the unlevel playing field involved with global trade would certainly be one example of a reason for optimism.

Californians also passed Proposition 64 in November to legalize the recreational use of marijuana. Investment by venture capitalists, foreign interests and farmers who are positioning themselves for

the future demand for cannabis continues to make headlines in California. How exactly the changes to California's state law will affect the state's flower farmers is impossible to predict at this point. There are so many questions and uncertainty about the future success of any investment in becoming a pot producer, but it is something that the California Cut Flower Commission is watching closely.

Based on the planning discussions at the commission's year-end board meetings, the CCFC is estimating steady production levels of cut flowers in 2017, recognizing that flower farmers won't be abandoning their flower production to grow weed.

The commission successfully launched BloomCheck at the end of 2015, and currently has three farms certified under this new sustainability standard that was designed to better reflect the high environmental and regulatory standards involved with growing flowers in the state of California. Three farms were certified in 2016 — Dramm & Echter, Resendiz Bros. Protea Growers and Sun Valley Floral Farms. All three farms successfully completed the rigorous audit process of the new program.

In 2017, you can expect to see more farms from California join the program as they work through the online process that culminates with a very thorough third-party "on-farm" audit performed by Protected Harvest. BloomCheck is currently working with California's flower farmers, but has plans to expand nationally to help other domestic farms reflect the high standards and oversight involved with growing flowers in the U.S.

Working with the Certified American Grown program, the commission will again sponsor the American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour in 2017. The Field to Vase Dinner Tour stopped at seven farms in 2016, and seven more farms are scheduled for the national tour in 2017. A dinner in the beautiful peony fields of Alaska has already been announced and is scheduled for July 29 at Scenic Place Peonies in Homer, Alaska.

The tour continues to be an amazing opportunity for consumers and the industry to come around the dinner table and talk about the importance of buying and supporting American Grown Flowers. The brand continues to grow, with more flowers being sleeved with the certification every month. I encourage anyone and everyone to plan on joining us for one of these dinners in a flower field in 2017. They are amazing.

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