



High-quality and environment-friendly production



The Costa Rican
Leatherleaf Project



Bayer CropScience

How it all started

Leatherleaf fern is the most widely used greenery in the florist industry today. The dark green, versatile and long-lasting fronds of the leatherleaf fern have made it indispensable to many floral designers in the most selective florist markets around the globe.

Costa Rican production started in the 1980s with the first plants imported from Florida. The diversity of climates in the country enabled leatherleaf to flourish and it is currently grown on around 1,600 hectares.

Around the millennium Costa Rica became the world's biggest and best producer of leatherleaf fern. This position led to problems with some environmental protection organisations because of claims of water contamination, and this naturally increased the risks for leatherleaf growers.

The biggest difficulty facing Costa Rican leatherleaf producers is disease control based on weekly fungicide applications. Since this involves high quantities of agrochemicals, the risk of environmental contamination is very high.

Grupo Floreal, one of the biggest leatherleaf retailers with business relationships in Europe, the United States, Japan and other countries around the world, listened to their customers' requests to protect the leatherleaf market against the criticism from some environmental organisations. This led to a new strategy in the leatherleaf business. Starting with 42 suppliers in Costa Rica, Grupo Floreal initiated the implementation of good agricultural practices as defined by the Rainforest Alliance Organization. The aim was to achieve the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal of approval, which guarantees that good agricultural practices are implemented in an environmentally and socially friendly way.

What we aimed to achieve

Over time and especially the past three years, the relationship between Bayer CropScience and Grupo Floreal has intensified, thanks to developments in the research field. In addition, the technical background provided by Bayer CropScience in topics relating to good agricultural practices is viewed positively by the Rainforest Alliance, particularly as Grupo Floreal has the support of Bayer CropScience in topics relating to crop management, e.g. the development of fungal pathogens control strategies based on sound research and new discoveries about how to control the giant mealy bug (*Orthesia* sp.) and weaving bee (*Oreasema* sp.)

Who is involved

Producers: The leatherleaf growers face the pressure of producing under sound social and environmental conditions and keeping the crop free of disease and pests. The best way to reach these objectives is to have good technical preconditions and first-class coaching for the people in the field to guarantee their health and safety.

FLOREAL S.A.: Floreal was concerned about selling an environmentally and socially friendly product. The alliance provided by the food chain partnership increased technical support, delivered coaching, product management and research information to leatherleaf growers and provided powerful tools for exporting the produce with added value.





Certification programme: Responsibility for environmental and social issues in the production of agricultural produce must be linked to the multinational companies who sell crop protection products. It is their responsibility to ensure these products are handled rationally and safely. These are the critical points of any certification programme.



Bayer CropScience: Through specific technical and commercial developments Bayer CropScience specialists were able to provide leatherleaf growers with the best alternatives for crop protection management, using practical research, coaching and technical assortment in the field to identify new pests and diseases. The BAYGAP

TOOL, an easy-to-understand coaching tool, enabled field workers to learn the correct way to handle crop protection products, warehouse management, product mixes, safe equipment and other topics of relevance to the sound management of agrochemicals.

The Rainforest Alliance: cultivating earth-friendly flowers

The rapid growth of the floriculture industry has created welcome jobs in Latin America. Sales of leatherleaf fern bring \$52 million annually to Costa Rica, where fern farms employ 6,000 people at salaries above the rural average. However, flower cultivation has very often come at the expense of healthy ecosystems, and also the well-being of workers and surrounding communities. Because flowers are not food, governments do not impose restrictions on the use of agrochemicals. With only weak government controls, pesticide and fertiliser use can threaten the health of workers and neighbours as well as drinking water supplies. In many cases the governments of importing countries require extensive pesticide usage to ensure flowers are free of pests.

Through a four-year-long process of research, experimentation and field trials, the Rainforest Alliance developed standards for responsible flower and fern farm management. The standards protect ecosystems and wildlife habitats, conserve water and soil, promote decent and safe working conditions and ensure that the farms are good neighbours to rural communities and wildlands.



Diego Berrocal
General Manager of Floreal S.A.



Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the need for healthy nutrition. Food chain partnerships help to supply consumers with high-quality fresh produce, which forms the basis of a healthy diet. But such partnerships can only succeed if they involve every player in the food chain – from the farmer and processor to the exporter or importer and retailer. Bayer CropScience has the global experience and cutting-edge expertise to create a successful partnership at every level.



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