

years, there were a half-dozen flower eco-labels in Europe, Colombia and most recently Ecuador—but none took hold with American consumers.

Whole Foods hired Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) of Emeryville, California to analyze existing flower labels. SCS found a confusing mish-mash of principles. Even worse, no program actually prohibited growers from using the world's most toxic pesticides. Stan Rhodes, CEO of SCS, says, "All the existing programs caused farmers to use less pesticides but the chemicals they were actually using are more toxic and last longer. So the damage is actually greater."

The new and very stringent Veriflora label will be launched this fall by SCS and some of the biggest names in the industry. Prolman hopes the companies will encourage other supermarkets, florists and growers to go green.

SCS is still fine-tuning the protocols of Veriflora, which requires that all growers live up to the "best practices" possible. All growers must agree to full organic production within a certain timetable and, at the same time, stop using the most toxic, Category I, chemicals immediately. "Veriflora is a bridge that leads you to becoming an organic grower," says Prolman.

Veriflora's five basic principles begin with organic production but also include fair labor practices, ecology, water conservation and waste management. Veriflora ensures, for instance, that workers get at least minimum wage in their country, have the right to organize and get paid overtime. It also forces companies to mitigate any environmental damage they have done in the past.

SCS auditors will make unannounced visits to member farms and test everything from the compost to the streams running off the property. SCS hopes to eventually expand the program to include bananas, coffee, pineapples and avocados.

The Society of American Florists (SAF), which represents 23,000 U.S. florists, is so far not endorsing Veriflora. "We don't take a position on 'green label' programs because there's a multitude of them," says Peter Moran of SAF. "I don't see the problems on flower farms you read about in the newspapers. You don't eat flowers; it's not the same as food."



That kind of ambivalence is only one of the reasons why Veriflora backers will focus their marketing efforts on supermarkets instead of florist shops. Over the last 10 years, supermarket sales of flowers in the U.S. increased from 17 to 29 percent of overall volume, while florist sales dropped from 70 to 47 percent. "There are only 50 supermarket players that we have to convince in the U.S.," adds Peter Ulrich, CEO of Esmeralda. "That is a lot easier than dealing with 1,200 wholesalers and 30,000 florists."

But Ulrich also points to the next chicken-and-egg dilemma for organic flowers: American shoppers don't know enough about organic flowers to want them, and supermarkets may not be willing to spend the money to educate consumers. Ulrich predicts that the costs of producing organic roses will be about twice that of normal ones.

BioGarden, a small farm in Ecuador, is so far the world's only U.S.-certified organic flower grower. The company began selling roses, calla lilies and other flowers through Organic Bouquet two years ago. "We use chamomile as an insect repellent, along with crushed nettles, mint and milk curd," explains BioGarden owner Hernan Chiriboga.

BioGarden's biggest challenge so far is controlling diseases without synthetic pesticides. When BioGarden first began producing organic flowers two years ago, production dropped by 35 percent.

This year it will only be 25 percent less.

Other growers say it is impossible right now to grow certain flowers organically. But Prolman believes the technology will develop rapidly—just as it did for strawberries 20 years ago. "These growers can't see how close to organic they are," he says. "You get them on the right path and they will run, especially when the market is rewarding them for it." CONTACT: Organic Bouquet, (877)899-2468, www.organicbouquet.com; Society of American Florists, (703)836-8700, www.safnow.org.

—Ross Wehner

## Code Blue

*Mobilizing To Save the Oceans*

Two high-level commissions have issued a clear message in the past year: Americans are unintentionally destroying the oceans through pollution, over-development and over-fishing. These reports have generated a tidal wave of marine metaphors, with commentators talking about "a sea change" or efforts to "smooth troubled waters." Now ocean advocates are organizing to turn words into action.


The Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (COP) carried out the first broad assessments of ocean policy in more than 30 years. The Pew Commission (funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts) included a number of prominent environmental leaders, while the federally chartered U.S. Commission had more industry representatives, but both groups concluded that U.S. ocean resources are at great risk. Each commission recom-



The Japanese fishing trawler Minato Maru was detained in 1996 for fishing illegally in Ireland's territorial waters.

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mended a comprehensive overhaul of the agencies that make ocean policy, increased funding for research and conservation and better public education about ocean issues.

The reports differ mainly on how to achieve reform. Pew's recommendations focus on new laws and stronger enforcement of existing laws, primarily at the federal level, while the COP stresses coordination between agencies and gives states and communities larger roles in managing ocean resources.

According to some critics, the COP report does not include enough actions likely to lead to tangible results. "The COP articulates a need to set goals, yet it overlooks the fact that a reasonable goal—to have fishable, swimmable waters—was set more than three decades ago, under the Clean Water Act in 1972," says Jackie Savitz, director of Oceana's pollution campaign.

Ocean advocates generally prefer the Pew Commission's approach, but many also point to the COP's affirmation that the oceans are in crisis, especially because some critics cast the Pew report when it was released in 2003 as politically driven and inaccurate. The National Fisheries Institute argued that, far from collapsing, U.S. fisheries were "healthy and growing." Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA), chairperson of the House Resources Committee, charged, "Pew is naturally calling for more of what sustains it and every other radical environmental entity: bigger government and more regulation." A follow-up press release from the committee touted high fish levels in the mid-Atlantic, under the headline "Pew Continues to Eat Crow, Should Try Flounder."

However, in its 2004 report the COP identified much the same set of problems and solutions. "The era of excuses and denial is behind us," says David Helvarg, president of the Blue Frontier Campaign. "While one commission's recommendations aren't as strong as the other's, they both agree that it's time to act."

Restructuring ocean governance is a priority. Responsibility for ocean and marine issues is spread across a jumble of federal, state and local agencies, with no single office in charge of setting policy goals. Both commissions recommended putting the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the lead, directing offices to work together to manage ocean resources as whole ecosystems, and creating a National Ocean Council based in the White

House to coordinate activities.

Writing new ocean policies into law will be a multi-year effort. House Oceans Caucus co-chairs Tom Allen (D-ME), Sam Farr (D-CA), Jim Greenwood (R-PA), and Curt Weldon (R-PA) introduced H.R. 4900, the OCEANS-21 Act, on July 22. OCEANS-21 implements many of the broad governance reforms recommended by the commissions and creates a trust fund using revenues from offshore oil and gas exploration to fund ecosystem management activities. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) is expected to introduce similar legislation.

Narrower bills on issues including fisheries management and pollution from cruise ships are pending in both houses of Congress, and the commissions recommended numerous changes to statutes such as the Clean Water Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The Bush administration has not offered much reaction to the commission proposals, but is required to report to Congress on actions it will take in response to the COP report. The White House already supports one step recommended by both commissions: ratifying the Law of the Sea Treaty, which President Reagan refused to sign in 1982, citing restrictions on deep seabed mining that were later renegotiated to address U.S. concerns. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted unanimously this year to ratify the pact, but conservative senators have blocked further action, arguing that the treaty will hinder U.S. intelligence gathering and police actions and give too much authority to international organizations.

"For the Bush administration, this issue presents a choice between the uniformed military, which says the treaty will help in the war against terrorism, and a small part of its political base, which is opposed to nearly all multilateral obligations," says David Sandalow, a scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. and former assistant secretary of state. Sandalow and other observers hope that President Bush will override critics and press for a Senate vote on the treaty.

Other tasks will also be challenging. Many reform proposals, such as reducing local fishery management councils' power to set total catch limits and ending federal subsidies that support development in storm-ridden coastal zones, threaten entrenched saltwater interest groups. Finding more money for ocean programs within shrinking domestic budgets will be difficult. (COP estimates that imple-

menting its proposals would cost about \$3 billion annually.) The biggest task may be simply persuading lawmakers that the situation is urgent enough to warrant rewriting national policy.

Beyond the Beltway, ocean advocates and commissioners agree that much work is needed at the regional and local level to promote "a new era of ocean literacy," in the Pew commission's words. As a start, the Blue Frontier Campaign held a conference in Washington, D.C. last July to begin building a broad movement in support of new ocean policies, and plans to organize re-

gional meetings. Blue Frontier's Helvarg stresses the key role of "seaweed rebels" (marine grassroots activists): "Scientists have reported that coral can be used in human bone transplants, but for strengthening the backbones of politicians, we think direct heat applied in their districts is the best therapy." CONTACT: Blue Frontier Campaign, (202)387-8030, [www.bluefront.org](http://www.bluefront.org); Pew Oceans Commission, (703)516-0624, [www.pewoceans.org](http://www.pewoceans.org); U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, (202)418-3442, [www.oceancommission.gov](http://www.oceancommission.gov).

—Jennifer Weeks ▶

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