

BLOOMIN' NEWS



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Cousins Michelle Castellano Keeler and Michael Anthony Mellano at the Mellano farm.

Mellano & Company 90 Years of Fresh Cut Flowers

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Flower-Themed Place Card Holders Double as Guest Favors

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From left, Jim Mellano, Bob Mellano and Jin Lee in the Mellano facility at the Original Los Angeles Flower Market.



MELLANO & COMPANY

90 Years of Fresh Cut Flowers By Peggi Ridgway

MELLANO & COMPANY'S 90-year legacy of vision, innovation and quality began with a simple "aha" moment for their founder and patriarch Giovanni Mellano, an Italian immigrant to Central California.

A laborer harvesting evergreens in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Giovanni, who also loaded the greens onto railcars and sent them south to Los Angeles, realized he might just ride that train to Los Angeles himself and see where his greens ended up. Where they landed was the American Florists' Exchange, the Original Los Angeles Flower Market. So Giovanni landed there, too.

In 1925, Giovanni opened a counter in the building on the south side of the Flower Market at 766 Wall Street. He sold the evergreens and before long, cut flowers he and his family grew on six acres just a stone's throw from the Market, in Artesia.

— The Family.

The children of Giovanni and Maria, daughter RoseMarie and sons Michael and Johnny, would grow up working in their flower fields and riding with Dad in the truck to deliver and sell floral products at the Market. In the early 1960s and 1970s, after military service and college, Johnny and Michael went to work in the business. In addition to managing the Mellano & Company wholesale location on Wall Street, Johnny became manager of the entire Los Angeles Flower Market. Michael & Battista (RoseMarie's husband) found their calling at the 300-acre flower farm at San Luis Rey in north San Diego County, which the company now operated.

As the company grew, yet another generation took the reins. Today, Johnny's son Bob manages the Los Angeles operation, while his brother Jim serves as CFO; and brother Michael Anthony Mellano manages the San Luis Rey farm. Michael's son, Mike Mellano, Jr. serves as company president; while RoseMarie and Battie's daughter Michelle Castellano Keeler, has served as Legal Counsel & Governmenta relations out of the

San Luis Rey farm office. Other family members have played various roles in the company's growth.

— Innovation is Key.

Giovanni's one-counter operation evolved into a multi-location operation many times its original size. At the Wall Street address where Giovanni began, Mellano & Company customers can now select the freshest products in a 3,000 square foot walk-in cooler. There's also a 3,000sf packing cooler and a 5,000sf main distribution cooler that services the company's wholesale facilities in Carlsbad, Santa Ana, Las Vegas and Phoenix. Deliveries are made nightly to those locations, for an almost 24-hour-a-day operation.

Perhaps the most significant recent innovation is the launching of Mellano & Company's "buy direct" website at <http://www.mellano.com/farm-direct>. At **Farm-Direct**, customers can order from any of the farms (in California, Peru, Ecuador, Holland) which supply Mellano & Company's wholesale operation. Just-In-Time inventories and fulfillment rates are monitored and customers can track the status of their orders. Inventory is fully computerized and online.

A full-time employee in Ecuador is available to assist customers when they order directly through Farm-Direct. Mario always has his finger on the pulse of inventory, shipping and delivery, using the company's web-based system and his on-site knowledge of the farm operation. A crucial personal inspection occurs before products leave the farm, a step that pays off nicely with highest quality Valentine's Day roses.

— Quality is the Result.

The floral industry's heavy emphasis on "cold chain" management has greatly contributed to long-lasting beauty and quality of cut flowers across the country, but Mellano & Company's quality is at the very top, worldwide. It doesn't matter if you're ordering roses (Mellano &



Shopping at Mellano & Company in the Flower Market.

Company is extremely selective about this “king” of the catalog, roses), cymbidia, dendrobium, peonies (now available almost year-round), myrtle, agonis, a white solidago called Estelle (Mellano & Company has the exclusive right in California for this product), seasonals like tulips, poinsettias, ranunculus and alstroemeria (Mellano & Company is the top provider of this gorgeous bloom that competes with roses in popularity) or any of a host of other blooms and fillers in the company’s wide range of products. Cold chain measures are practiced religiously and customers notice the long-lasting results.

In addition to its 97-percent-plus on-time fulfillment rate, Bob Mellano, the founder’s grandson, says Mellano & Company is “cold-chain compliant. Proper temperature controls in the cut flower and greens departments,” along with strict cold-chain management from the farm through packing and transportation, mean customers get the very highest quality and longest-possible life for their products. In many cases,



Working the Mellano flower fields in north San Diego County

packing and shipping occur on the same day as harvesting. A florist can literally receive certain flowers the day after they are picked.

— Agri-tourism Delivers Visibility.

At Carlsbad’s Palomar Airport exit from I-5, within sight and cool evening breezes of the ocean, 100 acres of Flower Fields entertain thousands of visitors every Spring, treating them to a visual smorgasbord of ranunculus. This seasonal flower field (open mid-March through mid-May) is grown and managed by Mellano & Company. Michael A. Mellano says you’ll also see blueberries, hops, olives, coffee, wine grapes, and, of course, cut flowers; not to mention booths manned by craftspeople and artists, outdoor music concerts and tractor rides through the flowers for everyone.

Mellano & Company also participated recently in a Field to Vase Dinner and Tour in which several dozen people enjoyed a relaxing dinner and program at tables set up in the field, among the growing ranunculus.

For many years, colorful and beautiful Rose Parade floats have gotten their fresh flowers and fillers from Mellano & Company. And now there’s an emphasis to recognize floats that are decorated with a minimum of 85 percent California-grown floral products.

“We believe the Governor’s Trophy should be awarded to the float winner certified by the California Secretary of Agriculture as being decorated with California Grown products,” says Michael A. Mellano. It’s a nod to the ever-growing, popular movement to “buy local” and the state’s emphasis on “California grown.”

— A Scarce Resource: Water

Of the long, hard drought that has affected nearly every resident and business in California, farm manager Michael A. Mellano, who needs a lot of water to grow floral products, says, “We buy water from local water companies, and it’s expensive. This is a cost-driven situation. We tailor our crop schedules in consideration of available water.”

Mike notes that the Carlsbad desalination plant is now under construction. Touted by local experts as the nation’s largest, most technologically advanced and energy-efficient seawater desalination plant,” the \$1 billion project may supply about seven percent of the water available from the San Diego County Water Authority. “But it will be expensive.”

“California is much better off than inland states which do not have an ocean like we do,” says Mike, who also points to the fact that the output of agriculture products per gallon of water has improved tremendously... Water is very expensive in San Diego – it’s like gold. So not much water is wasted or runs off our property given the high prices.”*

* From UC Food Observer interview with Michael Mellano, 07/07/2015.

Mellano & Company Leads in Innovation

Mellano & Company was one of the first flower farm operations in California to:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive cold chain management program, assuring the freshness of flowers from field to consumer
- Integrate pest management and scouting for pests
- Install irrigation systems to minimize water flow and runoff
- Install a pre-cooling system so flowers can be shipped at their optimal freshness
- Use smaller boxes for packaging flowers, resulting in more quality control and improved handling.

Other innovations that further efficiency and quality include:

- Incorporating an electronic labor tracking system to easily calculate productivity and track allocation of labor and supplies in specific areas
- Inventory control from farms, whether their own or a partner farm in Ecuador, Peru or Holland, tracking products all the way to the florists
- The buy direct program (<http://www.mellano.com/farm-direct/>) allowing florists to order directly from the farms and track their orders.