

The New Black?

By Bruce Wright

A third substantial difference between airfreight and sea transport, along with timeline and the volumes required, is carbon footprint. Sanchez estimated the carbon footprint of airfreight to be three or four times that of sea transport. Terril Nell agreed that the carbon savings from shipping by sea could be in the neighborhood of 60 percent.

That's comparing the sea leg of the journey with the airplane flight. It gets more complicated when the entire trip is taken into account. Trucking from Bogotá or Quito to the coast uses up quite a bit of the carbon savings. On the other hand, if a sea freighter brings flowers all the way to Philadelphia or Houston, reducing the need for truck transport from Miami, that adds to the reduction in carbon footprint.

How important is that? Carbon footprint is emerging as the newest measure of sustainability to gain a high profile, according to Sanchez, Daum and Nell. In the past, buyers, regulators and reporters who care about sustainability would ask about pesticides, water use, and fair treatment of workers on flower farms. Today, carbon footprint is gaining traction as a priority. That's especially true in Europe, but there are signs that Americans will follow.

In this arena, too, mass marketers are taking the lead, some with their own internal programs designed to support a consumer guarantee of sustainability, others in accord with recognized green certifications.