

# THE PRODUCE NEWS

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## Miami flower importers, feds worked together for Mother's Day

by Christine Boldt | May 24, 2013

In March, the U.S. Congress implemented the sequester, mandatory across-the-board budget cuts upon most federal agencies, including the Customs & Border Protection Agency, because Congress was not able to get a budget passed.

The Association of Floral Importers of Florida began to worry about Mother's Day (May 12), the biggest floral sales holiday of the year.

The sequester imposed cutbacks to all CBP locations and, since Miami has such a large staff because of its international passenger volume and its ranking as the number one perishable cargo airport, we knew that this would have a great impact on the ability to inspect and clear the additional volume of flowers being flown in for Mother's Day.

In 2012, for example, 5.04 billion stems were imported into the United States and 90 percent of those stems came in through Miami. For the run-up to Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, CBP usually gets an additional 10 to 15 agricultural inspectors to help with the high-cargo volumes on the 15 to 20 flights per day. We knew this inspection capacity was at risk for Mother's Day 2013 because of the sequester budget cuts.

AFIF contacted the CBP assistant port director for agriculture, Michael Wright, and the station chief, Linda Cullen, to pre-plan for the holiday in case the scheduled employee furloughs and additional staff cutbacks went into effect. AFIF, the airport cargo people, a few key airline staffers and CBP managers met and worked on plans for the high-volume Mother's Day holiday.

Not only were contingency plans developed and put in place to handle the backlog of product, but the flower industry prepared to bring products in a little earlier to compensate in case there were delays in getting the agricultural inspections done.

Fortunately, the furloughs were put on hold and the key CBP personnel in the Miami Field Office were able to get an additional 12 people from other CBP locations to come to Miami temporarily to work. This was a major accomplishment, since all CBP offices had cutbacks and it was feared that they wouldn't be able to give up additional people.

AFIF is very thankful to the Miami CBP staff that were able to make this Mother's Day season a very smooth holiday. The great working relationship that AFIF has with the CBP personnel has made it easier to work together at times like this because both sides, trade and governmental agency, are able to work together to put solutions in place.

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