

**Building a flower farm  
in Kenya**  
page 2-3

**Why you should buy  
(Kenyan) flowers**  
page 5+12

**Interview with Stella,  
packhouse manager at  
Bilashaka**  
page 4

# Bilashaka News

A Z u u r b i e r c o m p a n y p r o d u c t i o n



**1 day in the life of a  
rose sales manager:  
Bert Middelkoop**  
page 7

**Travel tip Kenya:  
Bilashaka lodge  
(& farm)**  
page 10

**WIN roses!  
& listen to songs  
about roses on Spotify**  
page 11

# How to build a flower farm in Kenya?

## Bilashaka flowers expanded with 19 hectares in just 1 year. How did they make this happen?

A new plot of land, 80 hectares, became part of the Bilashaka farm on the 20th of December 2021. Immediately, preparation of the land for building started. Previously, the land was used for crop farming and it had two large centre pivot systems. However, levelling was needed to create a 1% slope to construct the first 19 hectares of greenhouses.

### Managing the water

One of the first and major things was the design and construction of proper water management, to channel the large amounts of water. The construction of a huge water storage facility required excavating for 8 months, to a reach a depth of 10 meters. Its dimensions should enable most of the farm to be irrigated from the water harvested from the greenhouses throughout the rainy seasons. Its dimensions are 25,000m<sup>2</sup> and can store 150,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water. It is almost a little lake.

The soil excavated for the water basin is used for levelling the rest of the farm, and the stones are used to construct the roads within the farm. At several meters below the surface, a layer of pumus was present. This volcanic stone is used as a growing medium for crops. By January 2022, the construction of the first greenhouses started. Hectare no. 19 was delivered by October 2022.

### Piece of art

A special piece of art was designing and installing the irrigation system. All piping, pumps, filters, drainage system and rainwater channels, the fertiliser mixing room and the clear water installation are all part of this. It ensures a constant availability of quality water for the plants and a reliable water drainage during rainfall. Ultimately, 270,000 meter of dripline was used for irrigating the new farm.

### BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Henry Wanzala (a.k.a. Tango 1/ head Technical team): "I had to prepare the exact levels of the foundation pillars for the new grading hall, a building that is so extremely big. I had sleepless nights on these levels. The supplier of the grading hall strongly recommended to hire an engineer but our director believed in our skills since we have constructed all other buildings on the farm before, like the hospital and the main office.

Me and my colleague Georgi even called each other in the middle of the night to share a solution for the levelling procedure. The next day, we managed to finalise the task up to 100%. Ultimately, the supplier was very impressed what we achieved."



## (2) How to build a farm

Finally the new cuttings were planted in the first greenhouses in November 2022, almost a year after the work commenced.

Quite unique: most of the work in building the new farm was performed by the in-house technical team from Bilashaka flowers, managed by Mr. Henry Wanzala (standing, far right in photo). He manages more than 120 people that are part of the technical team, which includes plumbers, electricians, irrigation specialists, masons, carpenters, drivers, mechanics etc.

The actual construction team consists of approximately 25 people. Most are included in the photo.



### New farm, new varieties

Ten new varieties were planted on the Bilashaka farm expansion. Since its location is slightly higher in altitude, the production of a headsize of 4,5 cm can be achieved. The pallet of new colours shows a very elegant mix. The largest red in our collection is big **Madam Red®** and her slimmer sister is the new Athena look-alike **Infrared®**, a bright red with great vase life and excellent transport capabilities. The pure **Cherise-succes®** is a very bright cherise pink and **Crossfire®** is our 'cold bicolor' going from dark pink to white. **Tapdance®** another very elegant bicolor fades from bright pink in the middle to light pink on the outer petals.

**Kiss®**, is a good old name for a brand new salmon/apricot breed with great class and headsize. The greatest improvement in yellow is the **Njano®**, (yellow in Swahili) with its deep yellow colour and lovely scent. The warmer colours are represented by **Comanche®**, a true orange not fading while opening in the vase. The colour mix is completed by well-known white **Athena®** with its great supply chain performance. The shape of the heads of all new varieties is chosen to be cilindric, providing an excellent pack rate in the box, minimising damage and showing uniformity within the mix of varieties.

**Take a look at our separate flyer for an overview of all the rose varieties (24) we now grow at Bilashaka Flowers.**

# Stella Sella Wafula

## Interview with Miss Packhouse @ Bilashaka flowers



### **Q: What does it mean to be packhouse manager at Bilashaka?**

Every day, at the packhouse, we receive the roses from the field, (#300,000 stems per day from 60 hectares, 23 varieties). My team checks the quality and communicates closely with the field about this. Then the flowers are pre-cooled. We prepare the orders for our different clients, based on the daily schedule I develop in collaboration with our sales manager in The Netherlands (Bert Middelkoop).

I joined Bilashaka flowers in 2019, as greenhouse supervisor. Three years ago, there was a vacancy for packhouse manager, a key position in the company. They saw my potential, and happily I got the opportunity to show my skills in this position. Currently I manage 150 people that work at our packhouse, divided over 2 locations.

### **Q: What is the hardest thing about your job?**

The job is quite demanding. Maintaining quality while working with a deadline on a daily basis and training new people: that is the challenge. We are at the end of the production chain, and every day we have to process all flowers, as we don't stock up here in Kenya.

As we grow, we onboard new colleagues. Training new staff on the quality levels we aim for takes time. People are trained to deliver a constant quality for all our clients with a great variety of requests, related to cutstage, nr. of stems per bunch, sleeve type, flower food etc. Mistakes are easy, so I have to be on top of things.

### **Q: What makes a great day?**

First of all, I love the beauty of flowers. I have a degree in horticulture from Egerton University, so you can imagine, every day is a good day for me. But when I receive top quality flowers from the field and my team makes all orders on time, well, then I am even more satisfied!

I am challenged to keep looking for innovations and improvements in our processes. The freedom I have and encouragement I receive to try out new things is really motivating.

For example: how can we optimise the protection of flower heads while reducing waste and the cost of expensive materials. I love those challenges and it triggers my creativity.

# Why buy Kenyan flowers?

## Sustainability into perspective

**In the current heated debate about sustainability and climate change, what you should or should not do or buy, flowers from Africa are sometimes considered unsustainable and thus not worth buying. Time to understand what we actually talk about and to put things into perspective.**



### **Growing flowers in Kenya makes a lot of sustainability sense. Why?**

Sustainability is about many different social and environmental aspects. When zooming in on CO2 footprints, for local growers in Europe their footprint largely depends on the use of heating and lights in the greenhouse. Flowers from Africa are generally grown without lights and heating, but here air transport dominates the impact on the carbon footprint.

### **Calculations to put things into perspective**

An example: a freighter from Nairobi loads about 100 tons of flowers per flight. A large-flowered rose weighs approximately 50 grams, a smaller rose 25 grams, resulting in 2 to 4 million roses in 1 plane load. For a distance of 6,500 km (Nairobi-Amsterdam), an airplane uses 9 liters of kerosine/km, resulting in 1 kilo of CO2 emissions per bunch of 15 roses (large), or 0.5 kilo of CO2 emissions for a small bunch. Is that a lot? Or not really? Driving 10 km by car relates to 1 kg of CO2 emissions. 1 hour of streaming on Netflix is also responsible for 1 kg of CO2 emissions[1]. A (holiday)flight to the Canary Islands is responsible for 165kg of CO2 emissions/person. That is the same as buying flowers every 2 weeks for 12 years.

This is not a plea for doing nothing. The sector has its general and chain responsibility. Many initiatives are ongoing to reduce carbon emissions and other environmental impacts. At the same time the airline industry uses more and more biofuel. Modern aircraft like the Boeing 777-300 already create 20% less emissions than the 747. The Airbus A350, even shows a 50% reduction of kerosine use compared to the 777. Flower transport by sea freight (still very much in development) shows encouraging results and in future will result in even lower emissions.

### **Benefits of flowers from Africa**

This article is an encouragement for buying more flowers from Africa. There is a significant positive side effect. In Kenya, the flower sector employs over 500.000 people and impacts 2 million livelihoods directly. It is the most important export product for the country. Without a prospering horticulture sector, more poverty can be expected, which can lead to (regional) instability and ultimately large scale migration.

Meanwhile, producers like Bilashaka flowers should take their responsibility to keep innovating and improving: doing more with less. And we happily accept that challenge. For example, we already use solar energy throughout the farm, improve our packaging with less waste (see page 8), optimize our crop protection by using less chemicals and more organic fertilisers. Of course, we take care of our employees and our company and our products are Fairtrade certified (see page 6), Global Gap, KFC-silver and MPS-A certified. We prioritize sustainability and reduce our footprints continuously.



[1] Rodriguez-Silva, ElMallah, Makonin, Przedpelski, and Marks. 2022. Calculating the Carbon Footprint of Streaming Media, Beyond the Myth of Efficiency. In LIMITS '22.

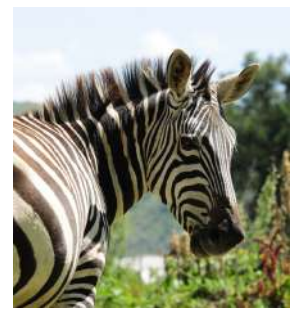
# Wildlife at our farm

**100 zebra, 17 hippos, 14 buffalo, 77 impala and 1 hyena (July '23)**

Bilashake farm is situated on the shores of Lake Naivasha, a beautiful environment with a huge wildlife population, more than 200 bird species and extraordinary biodiversity. In order to preserve this amazing nature and allow farm-economics to work, certain measures have been taken to support the wildlife. The volcanic crater rim and the remains of a small volcanic lake on the farm forms the natural separation between the greenhouses and the area dedicated for nature conservation.

The fence with neighbouring farms has been opened at several places to enable the wildlife to roam freely along the riparian land. This resulted in an unusual rich amount of animals. On a monthly basis, all mammals are counted to keep track of any changes. As they move around freely, the numbers change all the time.

If you want to enjoy this great environment, please visit us and book a stay at **Bilashaka lodge** (see page 10).



## What does Fairtrade look like in reality?

**Bilashaka has been certified as Fairtrade farm for already more than 10 years! This is not just a logo or tick in the box.**

Fairtrade certification means employees at flower farms have improved working conditions, better pay, and protection of their basic rights, such as fixed contracts and a safe working environment, including the safe use of chemicals and a ban on dangerous pesticides.

The Fairtrade Premium (collected per flower transaction) creates an annual budget for employees to improve their lives and invest in social, education and infrastructure projects. Everyone can come up with suggestions. Projects and trainings are decided on by the 'joint Fair Trade body' of Bilashaka flowers, where representatives are democratically chosen.

In 2023, the Fairtrade budget from Bilashaka (over 10 mio Kenya shilling), was invested in:

- Secondary school fees
- University / college school fees
- Disabled fees
- Community needy children fees
- Primary school class room construction
- Capacity building / training, incl:
  - Catering
  - Hair and beauty
  - Carpentry
  - Driving
  - Electrical
  - Plumbing



This contributes to the wellbeing of our people and their families.

# A day in the life of Bert

## Middelkoop



**A word from Bert Middelkoop, sales manager at Zuurbier International for almost 13 years: “No working day is the same. I enjoy the challenge of matching supply and demand.**

**This requires customisation and tailor making, in which I depend on many links in our processes such as the harvest from Kenya and transport. I am thrilled when all comes together in a good way, resulting in a satisfied customer”.**

### **An average day at work**

The day starts early, even before the auction clock is running. First I start up Clockview, read the emails and see what has already been sold. Meanwhile, the clocks start running and the first prices are known. With that, I can create our supply list with the corresponding prices and the Floriday-link, so the customer can buy our roses from 7:30 am. Soon the first orders come in for today but also specific requests for the longer term. This determines the further course of my day.

### **Not just behind the laptop**

Meanwhile, I make a tour around the cold store and the processing area. This way I keep in touch with our product and its quality.

Back at my desk, I communicate with our team in Kenya to go over orders and details and agree on schedules.

Around noon I prepare the webshop containing our new supply from Kenya for the next day. The day ends with the clock presales.

### **A warm heart for Zuurbier & Co**

I think Zuurbier is a wonderful company to work for; They have the most beautiful flower farm in Kenya.

They not only have an eye for our beautiful product but also for the people and the environment.

### **Personal touch**

In the highly digital world in which we operate, I really love to touch base in person with our clients for a cup of coffee between the flowers. Please feel welcome to visit our office!



# Coming soon!

## New packaging for our flowers!



After more than two decades of using the same, very recognisable blue packaging (a classic rose printed in the bright blue company colours), Zuurbier & Co will change its flower wrapping very soon, so stay tuned!

The company has gone through many changes over the last decades, from growing roses in the Netherlands to producing 100% of the flowers in Kenya. The company combines the craftsmanship of the family business founded in 1967, with the Kenyan flavour of optimism, African style and plenty of wildlife. The new design reflects both.

The combination of a zebra pattern referring to the great abundance of wildlife at Bilashaka farm, living in harmony with greenhouse crop cultivation. A more softened but still bright blue colour remains our company colour, which is so recognisable in the flower market. The waves represent the constant dynamics in the floriculture industry.

It reminds us to always improve and innovate. The lower stripes refer to the rich tradition of the swahili culture, visible on Kanga fabrics, famous in Kenya and abroad.

### Circular economy

The type of packaging also changed. It is our responsibility to minimise the volume of waste. The new sleeve will be much thinner, 25% less material use per bunch and sleeves are made from 40% recycled plastics. We also introduced a new shape of carton box for transport, which is suitable for palletizing, thus contributing to a circular economy.

We strongly encourage our clients to share their packaging wishes with us to avoid unnecessary waste in the supply chain, all for a better environment.





# Facts & figures



## 14,400 cabbages/ year

All of the almost 1100 employees (data end Oct. 2023) of Bilashaka flowers receive a hot meal every day. The kitchen prepares a menu of ugali, rice, githeri and steamed vegetables for approximately 850 people on a daily basis. The team at the canteen consists of 13 people.

The kitchen uses approximately 1200 cabbages, 1250 kg of rice, 1250 kg of beans, 2000 kg of unga and 250 kg of maize per month.

## Proud friends of Eburru forest

Bilashaka flowers is a proud friend of its backdoor neighbours: the beautiful and unique ecosystem of Eburru Forest. Through the support from Bilashaka flowers and others, Eburru Rafiki is able to protect and restore the indigenous mountain forest to its original pristine state. This includes:

- indigenous tree planting programme
- protecting this vital water tower for the future
- promoting the forest as an eco-tourism destination and conserve it
- maintaining hiking tracks, roads, picnic and camping sites



## 80 years!

In 1967, Cor Zuurbier started the Zuurbier company in Heerhugowaard, The Netherlands. He began with the cultivation of carnations, but quickly specialised into roses. The flower farm expanded into one of the largest and most innovative rose flower farms in The Netherlands.

The founding father of Zuurbier & Co and Bilashaka flowers turns 80 in November 2023! He still enjoys the flower business, and you can find him in the greenhouse in Aalsmeer every day.

# Visit Bilashaka lodge and explore Kenya

**A little piece of paradise! Located on the shores of lake Naivasha you find Bilashaka Lodge. With only five rooms, you will feel at home really quick.**

From your own private veranda you can sit and watch the wildlife walk by. We have giraffes, zebras, warthogs and waterbucks. During the night you might wake up by the sounds of hippos.

Our swimming pool will give you a nice cool down time after a bike ride in Hell's gate National Park, a boat ride on the lake or a hike up to Mount Longonot.

Also don't forget to book a birdwalk and discover the many species around the lodge. Our chef Henry will prepare some tasty meals for you and Gladys and Hannah will make sure your rooms are tidy and clean.

Because the lodge is located on the flower farm it is possible to go on a farmtour. Many of our guests say this is one of the highlights of their holiday in Kenya.

You can find more information about our lodge on the website [bilashakalodge.com](http://bilashakalodge.com). Don't forget to follow us on **Instagram** (@bilashakalodge). If you want to make a reservation or if you have more questions you can send Ingrid an email at [karibu@bilashakalodge.com](mailto:karibu@bilashakalodge.com).

**We look forward to hosting you at our little paradise!**



# Win fresh flowers!

S	E	R	O	S	E	Y	T	E	I	R	A	V
S	U	N	F	K	A	L	A	N	C	H	O	E
A	S	R	V	A	R	Q	U	A	L	I	T	Y
G	S	U	U	I	I	N	F	E	B	P	L	G
R	E	W	S	A	R	R	O	L	E	P	O	R
E	N	I	E	T	L	O	T	I	O	O	D	E
E	I	L	S	A	A	G	N	R	T	W	G	N
N	S	D	O	U	I	I	A	M	A	C	E	E
H	U	L	R	R	T	I	N	Y	E	D	U	R
O	B	I	A	R	B	E	Z	A	N	N	E	A
U	F	F	R	E	S	H	U	L	B	E	T	L
S	F	E	H	E	C	T	A	R	E	L	K	O
E	T	N	E	M	Y	O	L	P	M	E	E	S

Cross off every word once: horizontal, vertical or diagonal. The remaining letters create the solution.

- |             |            |             |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| AUCTION     | GIRAFFE    | LODGE       |
| BUSINESS    | GREENHOUSE | QUALITY     |
| EMPLOYMENT  | HECTARE    | ROSES       |
| ENVIRONMENT | HIPPO      | SOLARENERGY |
| FAIRTRADE   | KALANCHOE  | SUSTAINABLE |
| FLOWER      | KENYA      | VARIETY     |
| FRESH       | LAURUS     | WILDLIFE    |
|             |            | ZEBRA       |

## Solution:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Email your answer to: [info@zuurbier.com](mailto:info@zuurbier.com), and maybe you will be the lucky winner of a bunch of beautiful fresh Zuurbier roses.



## Top 10 songs about roses:

- You never promised me a rose garden** (Lynn Anderson)
- La vie en rose** (Edith Piaf)
- Bed of roses** (Bon Jovi)
- Een roosje, m'n roosje** (Conny Vandenbos)
- The rose** (Bette Midler)
- Roses are red** (Mac Band)
- Kiss from a Rose** (Seal)
- Mother Rose** (Patti Smith)
- 'n Bossie rooie rozen** (Alex)
- A rose is still a rose** (Aretha Franklin)

Check our complete 'roses' playlist on Spotify by scanning the code:

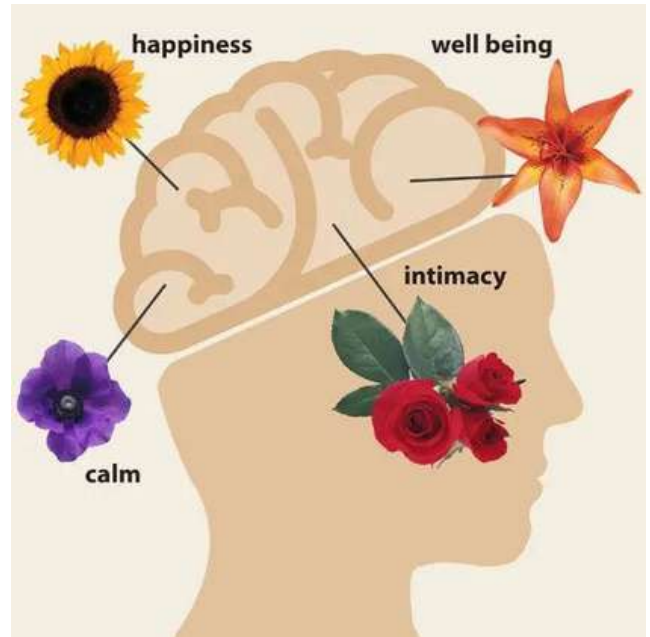


# Flowers make you happy and improve general well-being

A team of researchers explored the link between flowers and life satisfaction in a 10-month study of participants' behavioral and emotional responses to receiving flowers. The results show that flowers are a natural and healthful moderator of moods.

1. Flowers have an immediate impact on happiness. All study participants expressed "true" or "excited" smiles upon receiving flowers, demonstrating extraordinary delight and gratitude. This reaction was universal, occurring in all age groups.
2. Flowers have a long-term positive effect on moods. Specifically, study participants reported feeling less depressed, anxious and agitated after receiving flowers, and demonstrated a higher sense of enjoyment and life satisfaction.

3. Flowers make intimate connections. The presence of flowers led to increased contact with family and friends.



**“Common sense tells us that flowers make us happy,” said Dr. Haviland-Jones. “Now, science shows that not only do flowers make us happier than we know, they have strong positive effects on our emotional well being.”**

*Source: <https://safnow.org/aboutflowers/quick-links/health-benefits-research>*

## Follow us on social media! Get in touch or visit us

Instagram



Bilashaka\_flowers

**Netherlands:**

✉ info@zuurbier.com  
Mijnsherenweg 33,  
1433 AP Kudelstaart  
+31 (0) 6 13123301 (Bert)

**Kenya:**

✉ Bilashaka.flowers@zuurbier.com  
Moi North Lake Road, Naivasha  
+254 (0) 7 28995279 (office)