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Executive Director's Message

Esteemed Members,

I am delighted to extend the 06th issue of 2025 UFEA Newsletter with updates from the secretariat on issues of great relevance to your businesses and activities done during the month.

The month of June marks the close off the first half of the year 2025; yet beginning of a new financial year 2025/2026. We are keenly watching the changes in the new financial year which may impact the businesses.

Important note: UFEA previously collaborated with the former Uganda Free Zones Authority (UFZA) in the development and regulation of seven Free Zones within Uganda's floriculture sector (2017–2018), as well as with the Uganda Export Promotion Board (UEPB) on the creation of the flower catalogue and QR-code marketing initiative, the 2 agencies have now been merged into the Uganda Free Zones and Export Promotion Authority (UFZEPA), under Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives.

We stay optimistic about the recent merger to bring together complementary mandates under one authority; with enhanced coordination in one roof, we are following up on streamlined support for the established free zones and their management; we shall keep you informed on initial engagement to understand their new operations.

Your Feedback column

<https://forms.gle/QgXyfNdwb9wMLibJ7>

Sincerely,

Esther Nekambi

1.0 Regulatory Compliance

1.1 Experience Sharing and Learning meeting for Farm Compliance Managers.

1.1.1 Highlights from the UFEA Compliance Managers Sharing & Learning Forum Held on 5th June 2025

UFEA's Executive Director emphasized the growing alignment of voluntary market standards and called for the need to harmonize standard requirements. She noted MPS's adoption of a floor wage as a sign of shifting and merger of compliance criteria for each of the certification bodies. Farms are requested to prepare all the required support documentation for audits, e.g. updated list of agro-chemicals, copies of request letters for importation of unregistered products and if there's need for more information, let UFEA know in advance for timely support. Not to wait till a non-conformity (NC) is issued.

1.1.2 Strengthening Occupational Health & Safety (OHS)

Key strategies for building an effective OHS system were shared:

- Strong **management commitment**
- Ongoing **staff training**
- Active **OHS Committees**
- Comprehensive **Action Plans and Waste Management**
- Clear **PPE policies**

Farms were reminded to obtain a **Letter of Good Standing** from MoGLSD and tap into available online trainings.

1.1.3 Safety & Hygiene

Farms were urged to conduct:

- **Regular hygiene audits**
- **Kitchen and staff inspections**
- **Medical exams** for food handlers

These steps are critical for meeting food safety standards and minimizing health risks.

1.1.4 PPE Management & Risk Assessment

Participants stressed the need for:

- Defined **PPE replacement schedules** based on risk and manufacturer guidelines
- Monitoring **misuse of PPE**
- Applying the **hazard control hierarchy** and using **risk matrix tools**

- Tailoring **agrochemical risk assessments** to both NEMA and market standards (e.g. MPS, Fairtrade)

1.2 Environmental Compliance & NEMA Challenges

Compliance is now central to sustainability, brand reputation, and market access. UFEA remains committed to equipping member farms with the knowledge and networks needed to excel in a fast-evolving global market.

Common issues shared during the meeting include **slow report approvals** and **poor consultant work**. To improve compliance there's need to:

- Vet consultants you are hiring carefully and read reports thoroughly before submission to NEMA.
- Ask the consultants to give you reference numbers to support engagement with NEMA directly and follow up on progress of approval process.

ELMIS Training Needed

Farms noted challenges navigating the **Environmental and Land Management Information System (ELMIS)** and requested targeted training to manage compliance submissions more effectively.

Waste & Water Management

Licensing requirements for **effluent treatment plants** were seen as burdensome. **Soak pits** were proposed as simpler alternatives. Concerns were raised over **borehole interference** from nearby communities, prompting calls for better regulation.

Key Takeaways

For Compliance Officers:

- Stay informed on national and international laws and standards
- Keep compliance documentation organized always
- There's a lot of expert knowledge among the compliance officers. Leverage support from UFEA and each other.

For UFEA & Partners:

- Provide **ELMIS training**
- Engage NEMA on simplifying requirements



1.3 Experiences from farm(s) Annual Certification Audits (MPS)

Insights from Recent MPS Audits

Several UFEA member farms recently underwent their **annual MPS certification audits**, offering valuable insights into emerging priorities and persistent challenges within the compliance landscape.

As sustainability and ethical practices gain momentum globally, auditors under the MPS scheme are taking a closer look at several key areas. Here are the highlights:

1. Crop Protection Authorization: Still Under Scrutiny

One recurring issue flagged was **crop protection authorization**. Farms are encouraged to ensure that all crop protection products are properly registered and used in accordance with national and MPS requirements. Documentation and traceability remain critical.

2. Employee Safety in Agrochemical Handling

Auditors emphasized the importance of **protecting workers who handle agrochemicals**. Farms must go beyond basic compliance by understanding and implementing **manufacturer-recommended safety protocols**. This includes proper PPE, training, and monitoring exposure risks.

3. Environmental Compliance at the Center Stage

Environmental regulations are now a **core component of the MPS audit**. Farms are expected to demonstrate clear alignment with **Uganda's National Environmental Laws and Regulations**. This shift reflects the growing global emphasis on responsible natural

resource use and sustainable farming practices.

4. Calculating the Floor Wage

The **floor wage requirement** continues to be a focus area. Farms must show accurate wage computations that reflect current MPS benchmarks. Transparent documentation and consistency with local labor laws are essential for compliance.

5. Managing Invasive Species: Local & Global Awareness

Farms are now required to demonstrate awareness of **both national and international regulations on invasive species**. This includes identifying risks, taking preventive action, and integrating this awareness into broader environmental management plans.

Moving Forward: UFEA's Role

UFEA encourages all member farms to **engage proactively with audit findings**, and to seek support in addressing complex compliance areas. We remain committed to facilitating knowledge sharing, and advocating for practical alignment between market requirements and local realities.

1.2 Monthly Phytosanitary Inspections at the farms for May

Main Recommendations

1. **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):**
 - Sustain and strengthen IPM strategies.
 - Manage specific pests like spider mites, mildew, helicoverpa, botrytis, and agrobacterium.
 - Replace mass traps as needed.
 - Monitor pest populations to evaluate IPM effectiveness.
2. **Scouting & Monitoring:**
 - Increase vigilance of scouting teams to meet standards.
 - Conduct post-spraying scouting to evaluate pesticide effectiveness.
 - Enhance sampling to prevent pest carryover to export phase.
3. **Greenhouse Infrastructure:**
 - Maintain greenhouse integrity and repair as necessary.
 - Continue installation of self-locking double doors.
 - Replace torn screen nets and fully cover transportation trolleys.
4. **Traceability & Recordkeeping:**
 - Streamline traceability for all harvested commodities.
 - Enforce strict use of traceability codes.
 - Keep complete records at all quality control checkpoints.
5. **Training & Capacity Building:**
 - Provide continuous refresher training, especially in grading areas.
 - Train staff on pest identification.
 - Urgently train greenhouse and grading hall workers.
 - Equip quality controllers with magnifying glasses to identify quarantine pests.
6. **Sanitary & Phytosanitary Measures:**

- Maintain good agricultural and sanitary practices.
- Encourage compliance with market standards.

7. Specific Practices:

- Remove open flowers consistently.
- Conduct continuous weeding and debris removal (including agrobacteria galls).

2.0 Networking, Lobby and Advocacy

2.1 Uganda-Japan Trade Investment Forum, Osaka on 19th June 2025

On June 19 2025, UFEA's Executive Director participated in the Uganda participated in the inaugural Uganda-Japan Trade and Investment Forum held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Osaka, Kansai region, Japan. This event was part of the larger Expo 2025 Osaka, which hosts over 165 countries showcasing their trade, tourism, and investment potential until October 2025.

Organized by the Uganda Free Zones and Export Promotions Authority (UFZEPA) in collaboration with Uganda's Embassy in Japan, the forum aimed to strengthen economic ties between Uganda and Japan by sharing insights on branding, marketing, and promoting nations on the global stage. A highlight of the forum was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UFZEPA and the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

I had an opportunity to make a presentation on Uganda's flower sector to the Japanese business community by highlighting the country's rich natural endowment and the production of over 50 varieties of flowers. Highlighting the investment potential within Uganda's floriculture industry.



2.2 Awareness meeting with Flowerwatch on Cold Chain and Sea Freight

On 23rd June 2025, the chairman organized a meeting for members of the Uganda Flower Exporters Association (UFEA) with Flowerwatch to create awareness on emerging innovations in cold chain logistics—with a strong focus on the evolving opportunities in sea freight for fresh flower exports. Sharing from Kenyan experience.

Although sea freight offers an alternative to the skyrocketing freight costs, which make up nearly 50% of flower production expenses; the convenience is mostly for Kenya and Ethiopia being near the coast; compared to Uganda as a landlocked country. However, Flowerwatch shared valuable insights on why the sector should pay close attention and if this is successfully implemented may ease the stiff competition for airfreight.

Keeping It Cool: The Cold Chain Conversation

Beyond freight methods, Flowerwatch also highlighted its work in temperature monitoring along the flower supply chain. Despite having state-of-the-art cold storage facilities, some farms were found to have sub-optimal temperature control, leading to post-harvest losses.

A major concern is botrytis, a fungal issue that significantly affects flower quality during storage. Flowerwatch introduced the “15°C – 15 hours” rule:

If flowers are stored above 15°C for more than 15 hours, the likelihood of botrytis increases dramatically.

This rule reinforces a simple principle:

Make cool. Keep cool. Re-cool.

Reflection on discussion

During his closing remarks, the chairman of UFEA acknowledged that cold chain management is often taken for granted at the farm level. Key reflections included:

- Interest in improving cold chain practices both on-farm and at the Fresh Handling facility.
- Recognition that Uganda still needs to closely monitor Kenya’s experience before scaling up sea freight adoption.
- Suggestion to include other horticultural aggregators in future engagements to broaden learning.
- Observation that UFEA members maintain solid control only up to the airport cargo handover stage—indicating room for improvements beyond that point.



2.3 UFEA & Hortifresh Strategic meeting

On June 30, 2025, the Uganda Flowers Exporters Association (UFEA) and HortiFresh Association a strategic meeting at HortiFresh offices in Mengo, Kampala.

Both associations committed to deepening collaboration to tackle cross-cutting challenges in Uganda's growing horticulture sector. Key outcomes included:

- ✓ Plans to establish a coalition to drive joint advocacy and sector reforms
- ✓ Proposal for quarterly engagements with key government leaders
- ✓ Agreement to address freight and logistics challenges at Entebbe's export facility
- ✓ A concept for a National Horticulture Exhibition set for September–November in Kampala
- ✓ Joint efforts to boost sector visibility through storytelling and media campaigns
- ✓ Steps toward a formal MoU focused on advocacy, joint events, knowledge sharing, and sector self-regulation

This alliance marks a bold step forward in positioning Uganda's horticulture for growth, innovation, and stronger market competitiveness.



3.0 JNC MEETINGS

3.1 PROGRESS UPDATE

JNC meetings started on 04th April 2025 to negotiate review the Collective Bargaining Agreement on Terms and Conditions of Service and so far, 6 meetings happened.

Unfortunately, on the 6th meeting held on 27th June 2027, the union representatives walked away alleging many clauses were left pending because the employer's representatives don't seem to have a mandate to make decisions.

The employers' representatives will consult on all pending issues since we started the process, and this should give a Mandate to make decisions during the next meetings. Our target was to have negotiations complete by end of August 2025; we still hope delays should not spill beyond November 2025.



2.4 Important Update: New Sample Handling Guidelines from Eurofins Agro

UFEA wishes to inform members of recent updates from Eurofins Agro regarding the submission of plant samples for laboratory analysis—particularly for plant health testing.

As part of strengthened biosecurity measures, European Union (EU) authorities have introduced stricter import regulations on plant materials such as leaves and stems. Eurofins Agro has notified UFEA that any plant samples sent from outside the EU must comply with these new requirements. Failure to meet the guidelines may lead to delays or even destruction of samples by European inspection agencies.

To ensure compliance with the requirements and hence continued smooth processing of samples, UFEA is doing the following:

- Acquires the necessary permits for sample export,
- Follows-up approval from agricultural inspectors prior to dispatch,
- Ensure samples are properly packaged and clearly labeled with full traceability details.
- Keeps track of shipment from dispatch to the point it is taken to the laboratory for analysis

Farms will soon receive detailed information on the range of tests available—including plant health testing, DNA Multiscan, and virus detection—to help them determine the most relevant diagnostics for their needs.

By adhering to these guidelines, we will continue benefiting from high-quality diagnostics and laboratory services of Eurofins while ensuring compliance with international regulations.

For further guidance, please contact the UFEA Secretariat.

5.0 Upcoming Events for June 2025

- Finance Managers meeting -date TBC
- Owners get together **August/September 2025 (date TBC)**.
- Session on understanding sample analysis reports by Eurofins – date TBC

Your Feedback column

<https://forms.gle/QgXyfNdwb9wMLibJ7>

UGANDA FLOWERS EXPORTERS ASSOCIATION

ed@ufea.co.ug/ufea@ufea.co.ug/www.ufea.co.ug

+256 39 3263321,

Twitter: @UFEAUganda, LinkedIn: UFEA