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## Cut Flower Growers Meet in Fairbanks

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A fledgling organization tentatively named The Alaska Peony Producers Association, met at a statewide conference 1-2 Feb in Fairbanks to learn about organizing a cooperative association for exporting cut flowers to world markets. Sponsored by the Alaska Division of Agriculture, the UAF Georgeson Botanical Garden and UA Anchorage Center for Economic Development, the meeting included an experienced cut flower grower, economists, marketing specialists, disease and insect researchers and horticulturists who talked about the realities of trying to start a world export market from scratch. All of the discussions centered around field grown, fresh cut peonies which have the potential to be a thriving export market since Alaska's peonies bloom at a time when few others in the world have them. Combined with the significant air cargo shipping opportunities in Fairbanks and Anchorage (together they are the third largest cargo airport in the world), there is a distinct possibility Alaska growers just might be able to find a niche market for Alaska-grown products. More than 50 people attended the conference, and growers now exist from Fairbanks to Homer. Fairbanks is the warmest location with blooms beginning 18 June, but flowers mature in late July and August in Homer. It is hard to curb our enthusiasm for this project, but the reality is, we are not the ones risking hard earned dollars on a totally new venture for Alaska. One grower near Soldotna has already planted 7000 peonies! Imagine that! The GBG will continue to support the efforts of the Alaska Cut Flower Growers by continuing research into plant cultivation and harvesting methods. Combined with efforts from the USDA Agricultural Research Service and the Alaska Division of Agriculture, we will try to provide as much support as possible to this new organization.

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