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**RESENDIZ BROTHERS
PROTEA GROWERS**

SAN DIEGO COUNTY



FARM BUREAU

FEATURED FARM

Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers

WRITTEN BY TAYLOR ZUMSTEIN

I recently had the opportunity to visit Resendiz Brothers and speak to the man himself, Ismael ("Mel") Resendiz, and Diana Roy, who plays a vital role in operations. While there, I was invited to view the beautiful rolling hills of the Resendiz Brothers impressive cut flower business in Rainbow. Mel drove me up and down the hills, explaining the history, processes, accomplishments, and struggles of his farm and land.

Mel and his three brothers immigrated to California in 1977, beginning their careers within the floral world. Mel's passion for the industry blossomed while working at Zorro Protea Farms, where they grew a wide variety of South African and Australian cut flowers in the east hills of Rancho Santa Fe. Working his way up to Farm Manager, with many of his family members working at his side, Mel was educated and trained by California's best and most experienced protea growers. The two were Howard Asper Sr. and Dr. Peter Sacks.

In 1995, Dr. Sacks and Mel became partners of a ten-acre property in Rainbow. They quickly realized the value of the soil conditions and climate within that region and began to expand. In early 1999 Zorro Protea Farms went out of business, but Mel and his family continued their passion by establishing Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers LLC. Twenty-three years later, the ten acres has now expanded to over 150 acres in the back hills of Rainbow, where a beautiful variety of protea, pincushions, leucadendrons, banksia, filler flowers and foliage, and other plants are grown. Their goal has always been the same: to provide the newest, freshest, top-quality floral products and plants to all their customers.

I was surrounded by these particular varieties while on my journey with Mel. The spectacular views were accompanied by a glorious silence and peacefulness. There was none of the everyday buzz that usually



accompanies us. No cars or traffic, no sound of other people talking, no dogs barking - nothing. At one point Mel spoke all the way across a ravine, using a normal conversational tone, and a few seconds later one of his employees across the way cutting Protea responded. We could hear him as if he was standing right next to us.

Our adventure continued in Mel's old farm truck, with him answering my constant questions of "what variety is that?" and "how on earth do you get down (or in some cases up) THERE to harvest those?". Resendiz Brothers grows about 1,500 protea plants per acre on their steep and hilly slopes. Mel explained that the soil and weather conditions are very similar to what you would find on a South African protea farm. They produce more than 200 varieties of these unique plants, including their own hybrids and operate the region's largest Australian and South African wholesale nursery, offering more than 75 varieties of flowering plants and foliage from seed or vegetative propagation.

As for farming practices, Mel and Diana explained that they plant a variety of seed and also use cuttings and grafting. Grafting is the "quickest" way to produce, taking about three years until harvest. They have been using Pink Ice as rootstock and have found much success with that variety when grafting. Seeds

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take about 18 months before planting them on the hillsides, and take upwards of 5-6 years before they are ready to be harvested. However, after an average of 5 years, they will be able to harvest 70-100 protea stems and 75-150 pincushion stems from each plant, with the plants having to be replaced every 10-12 years.

Resendiz Brothers' growing and breeding practices allow them to harvest and ship nearly year-round to customers in the United States, Canada, Korea, and Japan. As for hardships, Mel explained that one of their largest struggles is labor – trying to find hard workers and keep them. Irrigation alone is a full time job. They also have to clear everything by hand when it comes to weeds, brush, and the removal of old plants since the hillsides are too steep to operate machinery. As you can imagine, this takes a lot of time and resources. They currently have 15 employees who work the field and harvest. Another issue they face is the current quarantine for citrus. Resendiz harvests a variety of foliage from mandarins, lemons, and limes for their arrangements and other ventures. However, they have not been able to sell the citrus foliage off the property for some time due to the Asian Citrus Psyllid quarantine.

In my discussion with Diana, she described the importance and growth of the California Protea Association (CPA) and how Resendiz Brothers has been able to help in marketing protea. The popularity of the crop has really only blossomed within the last 5 years, she explained. They have a very active presence



on social media, in newsletters, blogs, tradeshow, and interviews for shows and magazines. Diana also explained that educating the public, and even other farmers, about Protea has been a priority. They have worked very hard on maintaining a consistent and positive experience for people interested in their crop, and all that hard work has started to pay off. During the Valentine's Day season, Diana said that they sold twenty times more product than normal. She also showed me the 2017 issue of the "Farm & Flower Guide" by Certified American Grown where almost all of the featured bouquets had some sort of protea, pincushion, or leucadendron variety featured. Diana spoke about the close knit community of members of the CPA and how they collectively work together to bring up production and make an impact on the cut flower industry.

My visit was rounded out at Resendiz Brothers' warehouse, where Mel crafted a beautiful bouquet for me to take back to the office. We spoke briefly about the future plans of Resendiz Brothers, comprising of workshops, more wedding bouquets, and other events including a Field to Vase dinner that is coming up on Saturday, April 7th. You can check out the beautiful vistas yourself at the dinner – but be sure to be quick about reserving your ticket(s) as space is limited! You can visit www.americangrownflowers.org/fieldtovase for more information. 🌸

