

Colombia Floral Market March 2015

With a total GDP of US\$378 billion in 2013, Colombia was the fourth largest Latin American country, accounting for 6.2% of the region's total GDP. As annual real GDP growth touched 4.7% in 2013, up from 4.0% in 2012, Colombia surpassed the Latin American average real GDP growth of 2.7% (year-on-year) in 2013.

Floral Production:

Colombia's flower industry is firmly established in the high, sunny plateaus outside of its two largest cities, Bogota and Medellin. The Bogota Savannah accounts for 73 % of flower production in Colombia and the Rionegro Valley close to Medellin accounts for 24%, with the remaining 3 percent scattered throughout the central and western parts of Colombia. Mild temperatures, fertile soil, long equatorial days, and abundant labor help Colombia grow roses throughout the year without expensive hot houses.

Colombia grows 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres) of flowers. Around 7,000 hectares are cultivated under greenhouse conditions while 1,000 hectares are produced outdoors.

There are more than 400 floral growers although roughly 300 farms are producing flowers for export. Around 50% of these farms are between 20-50 hectares (50-125 acres) while 50% are greater than 50 hectares. The association Fedeflores represents the medium- to small-sized Colombian-owned farms. Asocolflores (the Colombian Association of Flower Exporters) represents over 75% of the countries flower growers.

Exports

Flowers are Colombia's second leading agriculture export, distributed to 89 countries, making Colombia the number two exporter worldwide - second only to Holland. One tenth of the world's flower exports originate from Colombia. In 2005, Colombia's flower exports worldwide were \$906 million. In 2013, Colombia exported \$1.34 billion worth of flowers.

Most of Colombia's flower production goes to the US including four-fifths of Colombia's carnations and a third of its roses. Colombia exported more than two billion flower stems and 50 types of flowers to the US in 2006 totaling \$418 million. By 2012 this figure rose to US\$1.188 billion. In 2013, 65 percent of all cut flowers imported into the U.S. were from Colombia, up from 55 percent a decade earlier. Roses were the primary export flower, at \$365

The flower industry is dominated by a few major countries.

Floral Production:

- Holland (83% of the world's cut flowers and 40% of production value),
- Colombia,
- Ecuador and
- Kenya;

Floral Imports:

- Germany (73% of the cut-flower production is imported by Germany)
- UK,
- US,
- Holland, and
- France.



million, followed by carnations at \$156 million and chrysanthemums at \$147 million. (The U.S. imports 70% of its cut roses, 98% of its chrysanthemums and 99% of its carnations and Alstroemerias from Colombia.)

While the US is the most important market export market for Colombia's flowers, with a 77% share of total exports, Russia (5.4%), Japan (3.7%), the UK (3.4%) and Canada (2.8%) are also destinations.

The most popular Colombian flowers in the Canadian market are roses, mini carnations and pompons, which are mainly distributed in Canada's big cities; Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In fact, over half of all roses found in Canada come directly from Colombia, while the same is true for 97% of carnations, and 90% of Chrysanthemums. In 2014, Canada imported more than \$85 million USD worth of flowers from Colombia according to Canadian government data.

Colombia exports US\$2.9 million in flowers to Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) and another US\$2.9 million to Central America and the Caribbean. Three percent of flowers purchased in Europe come from Colombia.

Employment

Floral production in Colombia generated 111,000 direct and 94,000 indirect jobs for Colombian men and women. Sixty percent of the floral farm work force consists of women. Asocolflores promotes its Floraverde program, which is similar to the widely recognized Fairtrade initiative. Floraverde member farms give welfare of worker high priority.

Technology

Some floral operations supplying the export market are technologically advanced and use custom-designed dethorning machines, refrigerated storerooms, and automated conveyor belts. Their packaging warehouses are quick paced all the while the photosynthesize process for the flowers is slowed. New cleaning and cutting technology lowers the amount of stress placed on a worker's lower back. Reducing costs through automation opens producers up to new issues related to the risk of operational losses. Given the fragile nature of their product, flower producers must find a delicate balance between automation and manual labor so that both operational expenses and operational losses are minimized.

Cut roses are sorted into uniform stem lengths by dozens of workers in lines, dipped in an antifungal preservative solution, and hurried off by the churning belts into storerooms set at 34 degrees Fahrenheit.

Pesticides are rarely used anymore. Many farms in Colombia are beginning to recognize the competitive edge the "all natural" label provides in North American and European markets.



Techniques such as mint bushes at the end of every row of roses prevent pests or smoldering tobacco leaves are often waved through the bushes as another alternative repellent.

A splicing technique is employed to ensure the rigor and longevity of the species. The seedlings, grown from seeds developed in Dutch labs, are placed in a mountain bush native to Colombia. The seedlings then become parasites, launching their genetic material into the bushes, sprouting buds that are ready to harvest in approximately 12 weeks.

Logistics

About 150 flower importer-distributor companies are in the U.S., mostly in and around the Miami area to handle flowers from Colombia. Cut flowers are Miami International Airport's, Bogota's, and Medellin's most important cargo item. Bogota's international airport handles 200,000 tons of flower-related air freight annually. Flowers are carried by eight airlines, flying mainly to US. In the US, about 30 companies operating hundreds of trucks haul flowers daily to hundreds of cities.