

# Flower Power

The Strength and Sustainability of Colombia's Floral Industry.

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**L**ong equatorial days, mild temperatures, and fertile soil establish a year-round growing season ideally suited for Colombia's blossoming floriculture industry. Located in Northwestern South America, Colombia boasts a strategic location mid-way between North and South America with easy access to global markets.

**Cultivating more than 50 types of flowers, Colombia is a major player** in global flower trade and the leading supplier of fresh-cut flowers to the U.S. Worldwide, the country ranks as the largest carnation exporter and the second largest exporter of flowers — exporting roughly 95% of their yield with 84% going to American markets thereby making flowers among the top five exports to the U.S. Flowers easily represent Colombia's biggest non-traditional agricultural export, accounting for US\$ 1.114 million exported in 2007 from some 18,000 acres. Approximately 75% of this acreage is devoted to roses, carnations and chrysanthemums.

Such a prominent economic force

translates directly into a leading source of income for many of Colombia's 4.3 million citizens. Nearly 99,000 jobs stem directly from floral work with an additional 84,000 jobs through allied floral industries. When combined, these 183,000 jobs impact the livelihood for one million of the country's citizens. Sixty-five percent of the direct and allied floral workers are women and floriculture comprises 25% of all rural jobs for Colombian women. This source of rural work has had a significant impact in terms of social welfare, stability, and security particularly surrounding Bogota and Medellin, two of Colombia's largest cities around which most flower farms are clustered.

Colombia understands floriculture's significance in providing social and environmental solutions to the country's development. Attention from government and trade members to ensure the industry's long-term viability has been elevated as a result.

**Asocolflores, the Colombian association of flower exporters** established in 1973, remains the strongest voice behind Colombian floriculture on matters of sustainability, market development, global floral dialogue and advocacy.

## Social Flowering

Asocolflores carries out its objective of social development through several initiatives:

- **Flowers are Home:** assists farm workers in obtaining housing loans or home improvement subsidies.
- **Child care:** Asocolflores-sponsored centers look after 18,000 children while parents work. The program also provides school kits, and promotes oral health to keep 35,000 children healthy.

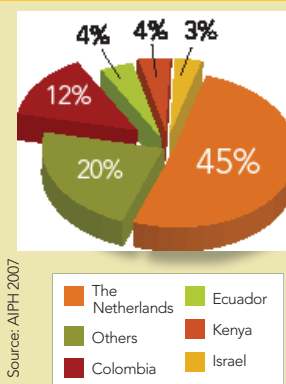
- **Professional training:** USAID, the U.S. Agency for International Development, works in partnership with Asocolflores to run a 12-month training program — School of Floriculture — that helps displaced people get back on their feet and become floriculture technicians and managers.
- **Family help:** Another USAID-supported program, Cultivating Peace

in the Family, teaches flower workers and families to solve conflicts through non-violent methods.

- **Florverde® certification:** Established in 1996 by Asocolflores, the program is designed to further improve Colombian workers' quality of life and ensure Colombian-grown flowers meet environmental compliance.

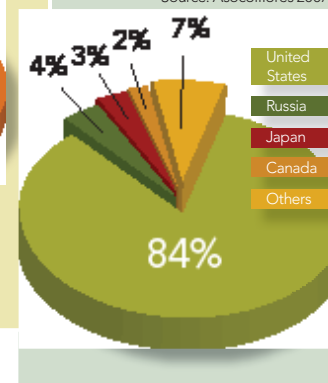
## Colombia is leading supplier of fresh-cut flowers to the U.S.

### Exporting Countries

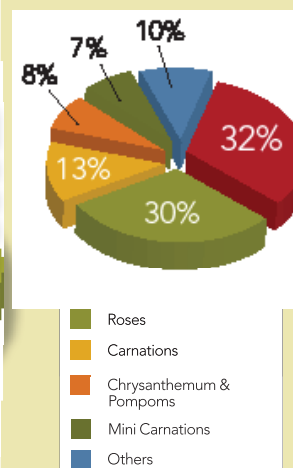


### Colombia Exports

Source: Asocolflores 2007



### Flower Products



The association's membership spans 350 farms representing 75% of exports. One of Asocolflores' most compelling aspects is its focus on the social development.

In 1996, Asocolflores established the Florverde® certification program designed to further improve Colombian workers' quality of life and ensure Colombian-grown flowers meet environmental compliance. Central to Florverde's credibility is its independent certification. To carry the Florverde label requires three levels of auditing: internal, initial advising by Florverde, and verification by SGS Group, a global agency in inspection, verification, testing and certification. Florverde also belongs to GLOBALGAP, a private-sector entity that sets voluntary standards for the certification of agricultural products worldwide.

As of April '08, 170 farms participate in Florverde, with 102 farms SGS certified and the balance completing certification. Florverde represents 46,000 workers on 7,413 acres that produce 700 million certified stems annually. Florverde member-workers benefit from social advancement programs that afford job longevity, full benefits and a minimum working age of 18 years. Health and safety programs provide on-site medical care, purified drinking water, and chemical risk prevention education.

Environmental care is another Florverde priority. The program's pesticide and integrated pest management (IPM) efforts have resulted in 46% reduction in pesticide use. Workers are trained in the safe use of pesticides, provided with protective clothing and gear, and protected under strict reentry intervals for working newly treated fields. Florverde-certified farms also operate consistently with U.S. regulations for the application and use of agrochemicals. Water conservation and disposal and control of chemical run-off are additional priorities.

**Center for Innovation in Floriculture**, is another branch of Asocolflores. Founded in 2004 to advance Colombian floriculture research and technology, Ceniflores strategies include competitiveness, plant health campaigns and representation in national and international research groups such as the International Cut Flower Growers' Association.

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is a U.S.-based trade association that also provides a valuable forum for floral suppliers and retailers conducting business in the mass-market side of the floral industry. PMA works with leading floriculturists to examine research, standards, and other floral issues. PMA's Floral Market Watch Reports, published for members four times a year, provide expert recommendations for increasing floral sales by analyzing sales benchmarks of Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, and the December holidays. PMA's website ([www.pma.com](http://www.pma.com)) offers more information about these floral reports and other resources available to PMA's members.

Research alliances with international floral trade associations, U.S. government support and Asocolflores' business intelligence has spurred Colombia's rapid growth in the global flower trade and delivers a vision of where Colombian floriculturists are leading their industry. Today, Colombia cultivates safe and sustainable floriculture that not only improves the lives of Colombian workers and protects its natural resources, but also yields an abundant, year-round supply of beautiful flowers for world markets to enjoy. 🌸