

# The Flower Trade

- 1 When you **purchase** cut flowers from your local florist, do you think about where they came from? Common sense might tell you that they were grown close by, because cut flowers can't survive a very long trip. The reality, though, is that your cut flowers might come from places
- 5 like the Netherlands, Ecuador, or Kenya!

▲ Tulips brighten the countryside of the Netherlands, the world's leading exporter of cut flowers.

## The Cut Flower Leader

- Flowers can now travel long distances thanks to air freight<sup>1</sup> and high-tech cooling systems. Even the most delicate<sup>2</sup> orchid<sup>3</sup> can be shipped to arrive fresh in most places on Earth. This allows
- 10 Americans, for example, to import some 70 percent of the cut flowers they buy.

- The country that **exports** the most cut flowers is the Netherlands, which **dominates** the world cut-flower **trade**. There, seven auction houses<sup>4</sup> **handle** about 60 percent of the world's cut-flower exports.
- 15 Some auction houses are very large indeed—Aalsmeer, near Amsterdam, is an auction house in the sense that Tokyo is a city or Everest a mountain. Its scale is daunting. About 120 soccer fields would fill its main hangar, which holds five auction halls. Nineteen million cut flowers are sold here on an average day.



▲ The heart of the global flower trade, Aalsmeer processes 19 million flowers every day.

- The Netherlands is also a world leader in developing new flower varieties.
- 20 Dutch companies and the government invest a **considerable** amount of money in flower research. Their scientists try to find ways to lengthen a flower's vase life.<sup>5</sup> They also try to strengthen flowers to **prevent** them from being damaged while traveling on rough roads and to strengthen flowers' natural fragrance.

<sup>1</sup> **Air freight** is the business of sending things from one place to another by airplane.

<sup>2</sup> If something is **delicate**, it is easy to harm, damage, or break and needs to be handled or treated carefully.

<sup>3</sup> **Orchids** are plants with brightly colored, unusually shaped flowers.

<sup>4</sup> **Auction houses** are companies that hold auctions, which are public sales where the price of an item is not yet decided and customers compete to buy it.

<sup>5</sup> **Vase life** means the amount of time a cut flower remains in good condition after being placed in a container with water.



▲ A laborer in California loads freshly cut flowers for shipment to a flower market.

## 25 The Benefits of Climate

Despite Holland's dominance of the flower market, there are many places with a better climate for growing flowers, and the climate of Ecuador is almost perfect. Mauricio Dávalos is the man responsible for starting Ecuador's flower industry some 20 years ago. "Our biggest edge is

40 nature," he **claims**. "Our roses are the best in the world." With predictable rainy periods and 12 hours of sunlight each day, Ecuador's roses are **renowned** for their large heads and long stems. The flower industry has brought **employment** opportunities and a stronger economy to regions of the country. "My family has TV now. There are radios. Some people have remodeled<sup>6</sup> their houses," says Yolanda Quishpe, 20, who picked roses for four years.

45 In recent years, local growers in Ecuador have faced growing competition from greenhouses built by major international companies. Despite this, Dávalos feels that the world cut-flower trade is large enough to allow both high-tech international companies and smaller national growers to succeed—at least for the time being. But not all local growers are as optimistic. Lina Hale is an independent rose grower in the United States whose business is now under constant threat from cheaper imports from large companies. In the 1980s, her father predicted the situation would get worse: "I see a freight train coming down the track," he warned her, "and it's coming straight towards us."

<sup>6</sup> When a house is **remodeled**, large improvements and changes are made inside and/or outside.

### Tuesday, 7 A.M.

Roses are cut in the cool mountain air, and moved quickly to indoor cooling houses.

### Tuesday, 1 P.M.

Workers categorize the roses based on length, shape, and color.

### Wednesday, 6 A.M.

Roses are boxed and transported to Bogota Airport for the 3.5-hour flight to Miami.

### Wednesday, 8 P.M.

Roses are checked by officials, then transported by truck, train, or plane.

### Thursday, 4 P.M.

Roses arrive at large markets in major U.S. cities, where they are purchased by flower sellers.

### Friday, noon

At journey's end, flowers are displayed in store windows. Once in a vase, most rose varieties last up to ten days.

