

UNREST IN ECUADOR DISRUPTS FLORAL INDUSTRY SUPPLY CHAIN

> Ecuador's President Lenín Moreno moved the government out of Quito in early October amid violent protests that also disrupted the floral industry supply chain.

Benito Jaramillo, president of Valleflor S.A. in Quito, said on Oct. 9 that most of the farms in the southern Lasso region had temporarily shut down operations.

"The intensity of the strikes there is completely out of control with farms being assaulted in the past days," he explained. "In the northern Cayambe region, most farms are working with extreme difficulty and having major problems delivering the flowers through alternate roads. In the vicinity of Quito, we have been able to work, with some difficulty. All our people arrived to work safely, and the flowers have reached the cargo agencies."

Jaramillo added that the impact of the situation was significant, amounting to "hundreds of millions of dollars lost" for the country's overall economy. Ecuador comprises 20 percent of floral imports to the United States, valued at \$254 million, behind Colombia (60 percent, \$745 million) and ahead of The Netherlands (6 percent, \$74.1 million).

Protests, many of them organized by transportation workers and indigenous groups, began in early October after the government rolled back some workforce protection laws and put an end to a 40-year fuel subsidy program as part of a



PROTESTS ERUPT Two weeks of protests in Ecuador earlier this fall temporarily affected the industry.

broader austerity plan stipulated by a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Ending the subsidies caused prices to increase — gas prices in Ecuador have more than doubled — and led to violence. By mid October, the government had reached a deal with opposition groups on the subsidies, stopping the violence.

The floral industry was not immune. During the two-week period of intense protests, Expoflores, the national industry trade association in Ecuador, posted updates regularly to its social media pages. The group shared video footage showing "threats and acts of violence" against truck drivers carrying cargo in

Cotopaxi province, in the central part of the country. Other industry companies shared updates on the status of production, logistics, worker safety, farms' difficulties in receiving supplies and worries about the short- and long-term repercussions of the current situation.

Tim Dewey, group vice president of procurement, e-commerce, marketing and quality for DVFlora, said his company was closely monitoring the situation. "Many of the farms [closed] to ensure the safety of their employees, so shipments being delivered to airlines may be very small," said Dewey, a member of the Society of American Florists' Wholesalers Council. 🌿

BLOOMNET ESTABLISHES FUND WITHIN AIFD FOUNDATION

> In honor of its 40th anniversary, the American Institute of Floral Designers Foundation announced its capital campaign: the Lifetime of Learning Fund, an initiative of collective giving to provide continuing education and inspirational experiences. BloomNet is the first organization to respond to the call, establishing the Floriology Institute Fund powered by BloomNet within the AIFD Foundation, which will cover up to six premium registrations for Vision 2020, AIFD's next annual symposium, July 2-7, 2020 in Chicago.

Once it reaches a threshold of \$30,000, the fund will be endowed

and will award Symposium scholarships in perpetuity.

"All of us at BloomNet are thrilled to congratulate the members of AIFD on the 40th anniversary of the AIFD Foundation, an innovative and dedicated organization that shares our commitment to continuing education," said Dinesh Popat, president of BloomNet, Napco and 1-800-Flowers franchising. "We are excited to join together with them in helping to foster the artistic expression and expand the creative vision of floral designers throughout the industry."

AIFD Foundation CEO Lynn Lary McLean, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, TMF, thanked BloomNet for its contribution, which will offer new opportunities for floral designers and elevate the caliber of professionally designed arrangements consumers see.

"Oftentimes, it is the floral designer who brings forth new product ideas to enhance all that we do," she said. "Floral design education is key — not only for individual prosperity, but for our collective success."

To donate, visit aifdfoundation.org. For more information, email aifdfoundation@icloud.com. 🌿

SENATE COMMITTEE BACKS INDUSTRY RESEARCH FUNDING

> The powerful Senate Appropriations Committee has signaled its support for two core issues backed by the Society of American Florists: increased funding — and an expanded reach — for the Floriculture Crops Report and stable funding levels for the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI).

The Floriculture Crops Report provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of the floral industry, giving professionals in all segments insights into production trends and allowing them to better plan for the future. FNRI supports research in crop protection, breeding, mechanization and other areas. SAF members have lobbied Congress for support on both issues.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved the fiscal year 2020 Agriculture Appropriations Bill on Sept. 19.

“The Senate bill contains language specific to the floral industry, including a recommended \$500,000 increase for USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics

Service to complete the Floriculture Crops Report and to include Alaska in its overview — an addition this year that reflects SAF member input and one that will help ensure a more comprehensive final report,” said Drew Gruenburg, SAF’s chief operating officer. “The committee’s language also emphasizes the economic importance of the floriculture and nursery sector and the industry’s need for continued innovation while committing to funding levels on par with 2019 for FNRI. These are both significant, positive signs for the industry.”

The House Appropriations Committee approved their 2020 Agriculture Appropriations Bill earlier this year. That bill maintains funding for USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service and directs USDA to complete the Commercial Floriculture Crops Report. While the House committee bill does not include additional funding for the Floriculture Crops Report, it does maintain funding for FNRI at the 2019 level.



RESULTS DELIVERED Martin Meskers, AAF, of Oregon Flowers in Aurora (center) and Scott Isensee of Frank Adams Wholesale in Portland meet in the office of Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) during SAF’s Congressional Action Days in March. Sen. Merkley is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

After a congressional conference committee resolves differences between the House and Senate versions of the 2020 Appropriations Bills, each chamber must vote again to approve the final version. Once each chamber approves the bill, the legislation goes to the president. 🌿

COLOMBIA’S PRESIDENT EXPRESSES INDUSTRY SUPPORT

> A healthy rate of growth in the Colombian floriculture industry over recent years helped to foster an upbeat, lively mood at the international trade fair Proflora, held Oct. 2-4, 2019, in Bogotá, Colombia.

Organized by Asocolflores, the Association of Colombian flower exporters, and held every two years, Proflora has long welcomed exhibitors and visitors from all over the world. This year it included a VIP speaker: Colombia’s President Iván Duque Márquez, who delivered the keynote address during the trade fair’s inauguration ceremony.

In 2018, Colombian flower exports increased 4.2 percent (in value) over 2017, thanks in part to a favorable exchange rate and to strong demand from U.S. consumers. President Duque’s participation in the event underscored his belief that flowers play an important role, not just in Colombia’s economy, but also in its national identity.

“I have no doubt that the more progress is made in this sector, the more economic equality can be achieved in the places where it operates,” said Duque. He presented a plaque to Lucie de Velez, the founder of a social program called Peace in the Family, created 20 years ago with the goal of combating and preventing domestic violence. The program, which gives training in skills to resolve conflict, originated with support from flower growers but has spread to other economic sectors. “It has changed the way more than 50,000 Colombians live,” said Duque: “peace in Colombia, starting from our homes.”

In his speech, Duque also congratulated Asocolflores on its 45-year history of promoting floriculture as an industry that has served a social as well as an economic agenda in Colombia and commended flower growers and exporters for lifting many Colombian citizens out of poverty and in particular



VIP SPEAKER President Iván Duque Márquez (left) and Augusto Solano of Asocolflores.

empowering women, many of them heads of household. An estimated 65 percent of the employees at Colombian flower farms are women, which makes commercial floriculture the largest employer of women in rural areas. 🌿

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