

Support Organizing Flower Workers!



A flower worker in Colombia holds a sign that says, "Dole: We are workers, not slaves" at a protest outside of Dole's headquarters in Bogotá, Colombia on June 2, 2005.

Join US/LEAP and the International Labor Rights Fund in the campaign to support flower workers' own efforts to improve working conditions and wages through the formation of independent democratic trade unions! Here's some campaign and industry background, plus how you can support flower workers in Latin America.

The Flower Industry

Colombia and Ecuador are the two largest flower exporters to the U.S. Colombia is the second largest producer of flowers globally and its flower industry employs over 174,000 workers, more than 90,000 of whom work on flower plantations. Around 60% of the flowers sold in the U.S. are from Colombia. The Ecuadorian flower industry employs nearly 60,000 workers, 20% of whom are estimated to be underage workers.

U.S. consumers spend over \$18 billion on flowers annually. Flowers are cultivated on plantations owned by national and multi-national corporations, such as the U.S.-based Dole Food Company which owns 20% of Colombian flower production. Companies like Dole often sell the flowers to major grocery store chains, including Albertson's, Safeway, Costco, and Wal-Mart, in some cases displacing local florists.

Working conditions

- **Wages:** Colombian workers generally earn the minimum wage of about \$150 per month, leaving them with \$5 a day to sustain their families. In addition, recent pushes to increase production through the use of quota systems have required workers to put in extra hours of unpaid overtime to finish high quota requirements.
- **Health and Safety Violations:** Two-thirds of Colombian and Ecuadorian flower workers suffer from work-related health problems, including headaches, nausea, impaired vision, conjunctivitis, rashes, asthma, stillbirths, miscarriages, congenital malformations, and respiratory and neurological problems, according to the Victoria International Development Education Association. Improper use of pesticides is a rampant problem in the flower industry; 20% of the chemicals used in Colombian flower production are known carcinogens or toxins that are restricted or prohibited in Europe and North America.
- **Lack of Worker Benefits:** Flower workers are commonly employed under temporary contracts regardless of how long they have worked at a plantation. This means that workers are denied many benefits and it's nearly impossible to organize independent unions.
- **Lack of Respect for Women's Rights:** The majority of flower workers are women, many of whom are single mothers. In Ecuador, 55% of female flower workers reported sexual harassment on the job. Obligatory pregnancy testing, although illegal, is still common. CACTUS (an organization supporting flower workers in Colombia) reported that an average of two women workers come to them everyday reporting that they lost their jobs when their supervisors found out they were pregnant. Women workers rarely receive pregnancy leave and suffer higher-than-average occurrence of miscarriages, premature births, and congenital malformations, according to the Colombian National Institute of Health.



How You Can Support Organizing Flower Workers!

Join US/LEAP and the International Labor Rights Fund in the campaign to support flower workers' own efforts to improve working conditions and wages through the formation of independent democratic trade unions.

There are virtually no independent flower worker unions in Ecuador and Colombia, but workers have begun several new organizing initiatives that continue to make headway. However, they need the support of allies in the U.S.—where most of their flowers are purchased.

Flower workers are not asking for consumers to boycott flowers at this time, but instead to support them in their organizing campaigns by applying consumer pressure to the U.S.-based flower companies and retailers.

- **Sign-up to receive US/LEAP email alerts** on flower worker organizing campaigns in Colombia and Ecuador by sending an email with your name, email address, phone number, and mailing address to flowers@usleap.org.

- **Take Action!** Write to key U.S. companies asking them to ensure that flower workers are allowed to exercise their basic worker rights, including the freedom to form independent trade unions.



"No more work overloads at Dole plantations" reads the sign held by a Dole worker at a protest against Dole in Bogotá, Colombia in early June.

Dole Food Company, Inc.

Ms. Sue Hagen, Vice President
One Dole Drive, Westlake Village, CA 91362
Fax: 818-879-6602
E-mail: dole_consumer_center@na.dole.com

Costco

James D. Sinegal, President and CEO
999 Lake Dr.
Issaquah, WA 98027
Fax: 425-313-8103

FTD

Michael J. Soenen, President and CEO
3113 Woodcreek Dr.
Downers Grove IL 60515
Fax: 630-719-6170

Safeway

Steven Burd, CEO
5918 Stoneridge Mall Rd.
Pleasanton, CA 94588-3229
Fax: 925-467-3230

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Eduardo Castro-Wright, President and CEO
702 Southwest 8th Street
Bentonville, Arkansas 72716-0860
Fax: 479-273-1917
E-mail: ethics@wal-mart.com

Albertson's

Lawrence R. Johnston, CEO
250 Parkcenter Blvd.
Boise, ID 83726
Fax: 208-395-6631

For more information and/or comments and questions, please contact:

U.S./Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP)

P.O. Box 268-290, Chicago, IL 60626
Tel: 773-262-6502, Fax: 773-262-6602
Email: info@usleap.org, Web: www.usleap.org

