

Frontiers in Floriculture -- Central America

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Floriculturally, South America and Central America are divided into two categories, namely those presently exporting flowers to the United States and those presently not exporting. Common to the countries of Costa Rica, Colombia, and Ecuador, which are now exporting to the U.S., are certain advantages and problems. Their present success is directly related to the following: 1) Excellent natural climates for specific crops, 2) air space for shipping the products to the U.S., preferably on direct flights, 3) accessibility to international airports, and 4) know-how on culture and varieties from North Americans.

Also common to these export growers are relatively low labor costs. Problems experienced by all of these producers include: 1) labor inefficiency, 2) difficulties in importing supplies and equipment and the high costs involved, and 3) shipping problems such as petal burn, heating or freezing of the flowers in transit.

Costa Rica

Three American firms are presently operating out of Costa Rica. The American Flower Corporation at Alajuela (near the airport) located there slightly over three years ago and is presently shipping chrysanthemums and some carnations to the family owned wholesale firm in New Orleans and Miami. They have also planted an acre or so of leather leaf that will be shipped when ready. Miniature carnations do well for this company, and the possibilities of expansion of this part of carnations seems excellent. Their success with regular carnations leaves something to be desired, as the climate in this area is slightly warm for carnation culture. It is also a bit too windy and dry for roses during the dry season of midwinter. The chrysanthemum operation is highly successful and on a large scale of ten acres or more.



Fig. 1. Chrysanthemums grow well at American Flower Corp. near San Jose, Costa Rica.

The Hathaway firm that located about 5 years ago near Heredia is not as successful at this time. Their original plantings were in an area that was too cold. They have since relocated and problems of climate have plagued them continually. The third firm in Costa Rica, operated by Claude Hope, is Linda Vista Ltda. Hope located near Cartago in the latter part of the 1940's. He has since become a Costa Rican citizen and enjoys an excellent relationship with Costa Rican authorities. This is a very large and modern operation whose primary purpose is to produce hybrid seed for American and European export. Hope is presently doing some very fine breeding work on F-1 hybrid Impatiens and Coleus. He is also branching out into

the production of certain hybrid vegetable seeds and may produce practically the entire world supply of the seed of *Cobaea Scandens*, a very popular vine for hanging baskets in Europe.

Linda Vista has produced cut flowers for many years, primarily as a source of supplementary income. Their production of carnations is of mediocre quality because the climate is slightly warm for this crop. They produce chrysanthemums on short stems without light for sale in the local markets, and they have produced for many years roses in the open field for cut flower sales and rose bushes for sale to gardeners.

A related corporation began planting roses in the field on land owned by Linda Vista during the summer of 1968. This planting is projected as a 20 to 30 acre operation, but the present growth will necessarily be slow until adequate air space can be developed that is direct from the San Jose airport to points in the U.S.



Fig. 2. Garnette-type roses in the field near Cartago, C.R.

Presently, about an acre and a half of roses are being harvested for shipment to points in the U.S., about equally divided between Sweetheart roses and the variety Forever Yours. Some five acres are being propagated for planting in 1969, harvesting during the winter of 1969-70. Shipping costs on flowers from San Jose to New Orleans and Miami run in the order to 7 to 8 cents per pound on a commodity rate basis. Without a commodity rate, the charge is about 21



Fig. 3. Rose cv. Forever Yours with banana and other tropical plants as a windbreak.

cents per pound. Boxes of roses weigh approximately 83 pounds and will hold either 56 bunches of 25 Sweethearts or 42 dozen large roses. This shipping cost averages out to about 1/2 cent per Sweetheart rose or close to 1 cent each for large roses.

In summary, Costa Rica has an excellent climate for chrysanthemums or roses. Temperatures seldom go below 60° or above 80°. Polyethylene cover is used for chrysanthemums and is needed for carnations. So far, roses are grown in the open, but effective cover during the rainy season will be under test this coming year. The advantage of being near the airport is offset by more dry winds and a slightly warmer climate. Cartago is just over the divide near the top of the east slope of the mountains and gets more rainfall including moist air and some rain during the dry season. This climate seems ideal for roses, but may not be as good for chrysanthemums. I am sure there are good carnation climates in Costa Rica, but it is possible that to get a cool enough climate during the dry season, may require some heat during the rainy season.

Your editor,

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