



## Uganda's Flower Industry Is Up and Running

“Maintain the cold chain” is a common, insidious invocation of the flower industry. The time frame from when cut flowers leave the greenhouse to when they arrive at a cargo plane, the cold chain is vital to the quality of the product.

But during the early development of Uganda's horticulture industry, product quality was rarely maintained, and buyers often refused flowers and cuttings due to their poor quality, incurring freight penalties for the growers.

The first step to healing Uganda's bruised image in the world flower industry centered on maintaining the cold chain. Suddenly, a cold store built by USAID near Entebbe Airport became the missing link to Uganda's success.

In 1997 USAID helped build the cold store for Uganda's Civilian Aviation Authority, which then became the focus of renewed effort to consolidate and strengthen the flower industry. Added technical assistance from USAID horticulture specialists is often credited with making flowers work in Uganda — with the more than 4,600 tons of roses and chrysanthemum cuttings exported in 2003 cited as proof.

To consolidate local exporters' foothold in the market, USAID specialists helped organize 20 flower growers into Fresh Handling Limited (FHL), a powerful export association that established grades and standards and held the partners accountable for enforcing them. FHL gave startup advice, developed a statistical tracking system, and provided hands-on technical assistance with trial shipments, market information and contacts. FHL now employs 150 people — including 32 full-time employees — and controls 95 percent of all flower exports and half of all fresh produce exports.

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“We brought the growers together with standards, and we bought an auction block in Europe,” explained FHL Chairman Olav Boenders. “Just three years ago, everyone was shipping individually, dumping their flowers on the tarmac to rot in the sun. USAID helped us take over and we had immediate improvement and got reduction in freight costs of about 30 percent to 40 percent, door to door.”

FHL helps local businesses create a marketable quality product and maintain consistency in floriculture — all of which has helped Uganda emerge as a small, reliable competitor in European markets. Direct flights of Ugandan flowers to Europe now arrive at temperatures competitive with those of other regional suppliers, including Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. With USAID support, growers and exporters now are pushing for cheaper jet fuel, tax credits on fuel for refrigerated trucks, and slowly moving each farm toward the use of refrigerated delivery trucks to prevent premature temperature loss.



Photo: DGL Felo

Workers at the Fresh Handling Limited cold store move pallets of flowers to meet spiking European demand.

Success Story

