

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

California produces some of the finest fresh cut flowers in the world. Over 80 percent of domestically grown flowers are grown in California, accounting for 20 percent of all flowers sold in the U.S. and directly supporting more than 10,000 jobs in the state. However, the number of our state's flower farms is shrinking rapidly due to federal trade policies beyond their control, specifically those with Colombia under the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA).

We write to bring these concerns to your attention, and ask that you keep this important California industry in mind as you work to advance the pending U.S-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (Colombia FTA). This letter is not intended to express our views on the Colombia FTA itself, which are varied, but rather to call your attention to how U.S. trade policies with Colombia have affected this valuable American industry.

According to a recent U.S. International Trade Commission report, ATPA countries, primarily Colombia, supplied 82 percent of the total value of U.S. imports of fresh cut flowers in 2009. In addition to these trade preferences, the Colombian government gave roughly \$210 million in subsidies and support to their cut flower industry from 2005-2009, according to the U.S. State Department, and USAID has given Colombia millions of dollars to assist in the development of its flower industry.

As a result, Colombian exports to the U.S. increased 89 percent between 2002 and 2010, resulting in a steep and rapid decline in the number of domestic flower growers. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the number of acres dedicated to cut flower production in the U.S. declined by 22 percent during the same period.

Recognizing this decline, the FY 2010 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Conference Report included language urging the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to "use all available resources to support domestic flower growers in their efforts to develop an efficient and environmentally friendly transportation, storage, and distribution system to better compete with foreign producers."

Although they continue to face steep competition from subsidized Colombian growers, California growers are working aggressively to overcome these challenges through innovation, diversification, and sheer determination. Working with the California Cut Flower Commission

(CCFC), the state agricultural commission that advocates on behalf of our flower farmers, they have worked to remain competitive by offering higher end products produced in an increasingly environmentally sustainable manner. They use the latest in horticultural science to increase yields and develop new varieties for the market, while also meeting California labor and environmental standards that are much higher than their foreign competitors. They are also in the final phase of developing a new transportation, logistics, and shipping system and center that would reduce their shipping costs by 30 to 40 percent.

We know that you share our goal of helping our domestic flower farmers overcome these challenges and ultimately thrive again. As you and your Administration work to advance the Colombia FTA, we respectfully ask that you keep California cut flower growers in mind, and do all you can to support this valuable American industry, including assisting them in establishing their transportation center, consistent with all relevant rules and regulations.

Sincerely,

Donna Petersen

Lisa Capps

Sam Farr

Mike Shea

Mark Thompson

Pete Stark

Bob Box

Bonnie Brundage

Brian P. Bilby

Jodi Spitzer

Conan Hunt

Louella Sanchez

Joy McMy

Carol Sum

Zoe Lipp

Grace F. Napolitano

Michael M. Honda

Lynn Woolsey

Howard L. Ben

Melanie White

Jim KA

Laura Richardson

Jody Chen

Ken Almed

Barbara Lee

George Miller

Brad Sherman

Paul Brock

Elton Gallefy

Al Schmit

Anda J. Sam

Di Kirby

Karen Baes

Harold Wayne

Mary Bow Mack

Lucille Bybel-Allard

Brian P. Gilman

Bob Fitt

John Hammond

Susan A. Davis

Donis O. Matzue

Jerry Leub