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### TO AVOID DROP IN SALES OF FLOWERS

Abaco Flowers, in conversation with Miguel Pinedo from Pro Export, learned details about the effect the economic crisis is having on flower consumption on the United States. It is evident that not only Colombian flower exporters, but anyone related to the U.S-Colombia flower trade business, will be facing very serious problems if the sharp decline in the consumption of flowers in the U.S. is allowed to continue.

Sales of flowers to United States are predicted to decrease by 10 percent during 2009. Further deterioration would be devastating to Colombian exporters, and farmers, given that more than 80 percent of their sales are to the U.S. market. On the other hand, flower imports to the U.S, which last year exceeded 500 million dollars, are expected to decrease by 50 to 70 million dollars.

During a recent visit to major U.S. cities, Agriculture Minister Andres Fernandez met with various market players such as importers, wholesale traders, supermarkets and retailers, and raised the need to build a 'common front' to prevent further demand deterioration. " We are calling the attention of federal authorities and the local industry, especially in southern Florida, where flowers generate around 20,000 jobs; if we allow the market to drop we all lose, not only the flower exporters", he said.

Fernandez also met with major Florida flower importers to discuss the need to act in an integrated manner to revive demand. Marcos Ossa, Director of Asocoflores in Antioquia, said sales of chrysanthemums, the leading flower of the region, dropped by 11 percent during the last Valentine's Day. Agriflora's president, Alvaro Varela, warned that the problem of a deteriorating market could not be viewed solely as a phenomenon of part of the chain, be them producers or marketers, but of all involved in the industry. He said the market was in disarray, and urged everyone to work together to revive it.

Abaco Flowers hopes the effort taken by Minister Fernandez yield positive results, and that diverse market players in the U.S. and Colombia agree on measures to counteract this impending crisis.

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