

SUCCESS STORY

Ethiopian flower grower discovers new high-value flower

Marginpar Ethiopia Plc. is one of the few flower farms that doesn't grow roses in Ethiopia. Situated at an altitude of 2,500 meters, the farm grows peas and three varieties of the blue thistle "Eryngium" on 18 hectares. The stems are exported by air to the prime markets of Europe through the Dutch auction system.

The farm is a graduate of the USAID-AATEP agronomic training system, and the program continues to help them with product diversification. Since 2007 Marginpar and USAID-AATEP have been working on a pilot project to introduce Gentiana flowers to the Ethiopian floriculture sector. Gentiana are deep blue alpine flowers that grow at high altitudes. To date commercial production is restricted to New Zealand and the Netherlands. Sustainable production from Ethiopia would be a first for the African floriculture industry.

USAID-AATEP provided Marginpar with financial and technical assistance for the trial, including help with establishing the irrigation and fertigation system and a cost-sharing grant for the initial 3,200 tissue culture plants and plotting materials.

"The trial involves high-tech manipulative systems for flower production, which made it a complex, time-consuming project. The precise requirements for different temperature regimes to initiate Gentiana flowering have to be developed from scratch. That is why we asked USAID-AATEP for help," said Arjan van Roessel, General Manager of Marginpar Ethiopia.

In late 2010, the farm sent its first trial Gentiana shipment to the Netherlands. The farm exported 872 stems for an average price of 40 cents (Euro) per stem. They plan to build a 2,500 m² greenhouse so they can start commercial production in 2012. The market potential is at least 50,000 stems per week, which would require nearly 6 hectares. A full-scale Gentiana production unit could create jobs for 25 to 30 farm workers per hectare.

"There is high demand for Gentiana in the world, so it will not be a challenge for Marginpar to penetrate the market," said Roessel.

The export flower industry is the newest growth sector in Ethiopia and has grown rapidly since 2005. Ethiopia's natural resources and geographical proximity to the major markets of the Middle East and Europe make it an attractive hub for agribusiness investment.



Photo by Fintrac Inc.

Marginpar Ethiopia's farm is conducting a trial on Gentiana flowers with the help of USAID-AATEP.

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