

## 20 Title: Mother's Day Flowers

**Abstract:** This video explores the thriving flower industry in Ecuador and the implications of that success for workers and the environment.

**Key Concepts:** theory of comparative advantage, global economy, globalization, ethics, trade

**Notes:** Flowers are an important part of Mother's Day in the United States. On that day, many mothers will receive roses – roses imported from Ecuador or Colombia. The United States imports almost 90 percent of the roses it sells, most of which come from the foothills of the Andes. The flower plantations in Ecuador are beautiful with flowers growing straight and tall. However, despite their outward beauty, the plantations may be masking some significant issues in the industry.

Environmentalists have raised concerns about the chemicals used in the growing process, many of which are unregulated, and their effect on the environment and on workers. Recent studies show that as many as 60 percent of plantation workers suffer from poisoning symptoms like dizziness, headaches, and nausea as a result of their exposure to the chemicals. Growers use the pesticides to ensure their flower exports pass the strict no pest policy of the United States. One grower however, believes there is a better way to grow flowers. John Nevado promotes a greener approach to growing roses – one that benefits workers and the environment. Nevado's plantation has more organic and fair trade certification than any other grower on the continent. His commitment to protecting the environment is visible in many areas. For example, he uses greenhouse pipes to collect and recycle rainwater, organic matter is used to make natural compost, and pesticides are used only on a very limited basis.

The market for organic flowers in Europe is large, but the notion of organic roses is new to many Americans, something Nevado would like to change. Nevado is hoping to create a greater awareness of the problems in the flower industry. If more people buy organically-grown flowers he believes the industry would be forced to change. Nevado's efforts have already helped his employees who not only have a safer environment in which to work, but also get paid significantly more than the average worker.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why are 90 percent of the roses sold in the United States grown in Ecuador? What does this situation imply about Ecuador's factors of production?
2. What does the rose industry mean to Ecuador? What does this tell you about the benefits of free trade?

3. Reflect on the concerns of environmentalists regarding the rose industry. Why are environmentalists so worried? In your opinion, who should be responsible for ensuring the safe use of pesticides in the industry?
4. How do policies set by the United States on trade and customs procedures impact the flower growing process? Should the United States change its policies? Why or why not?
5. How does the success of Ecuador's rose industry benefit other countries that export to Ecuador? How has the success of the industry hurt rose growers in the United States?