

400 Years Tulip



1994 is a historic year for the Dutch tulip, which is celebrating its fourth centennial. The story of the flower's European origins has much of the fable to it.

THE tulip originally came from Asia Minor, and Persian poets sang its praises as early as the twelfth century. In 1554 the Austrian ambassador in Turkey, travelling to Constantinople, was offered flowers: hyacinths, daffodils and another kind he had never seen before. The guide remarked on their resemblance to a turban, 'tulipan', but the ambassador (whose Turkish was apparently far from fluent) wrote home that he had seen strange and marvelous flowers, without scent, but in a great diversity of colours, which the Turks call tulipan. With his letter he sent bulbs back to Vienna, which were planted in the gardens of Emperor Maximilian II. When the garden's curator, the Flemish botanist Carolus Clusius, was appointed head of the botanical gardens at the Dutch university of Leiden in 1592, he in turn brought tulip bulbs with him. Planted in the fall of 1593, the first tulips flowered in 1594.

There was an aura of mystery to tulips. They were deemed to have medicinal properties, and the first people to trade in them were pharmacists. The Dutchman Emanuel Sweerts was the first to export them, at the autumn fair in Frankfurt, and in 1612 he published the first catalogue, the 'Florilegium'. Within decades the tulip trade assumed astronomic proportions: as early as 1623 a buyer was willing to pay one thousand guilders for a bulb of the widely popular Semper Augustus tulip. Between 1634 and 1636 prices increased twentyfold. At the height of this so-called 'tulomania' the staggering sum of thirty thousand guilders was paid for three bulbs — three

times the price of a canalside house in Amsterdam! One bulb was even bartered for two loads of grain, two loads of rye, four fat oxen, eight fat pigs, twelve fat sheep, five thousand litres of wine, 35 litres of beer, 1500 kilograms of butter, 500 kilos of cheese, a bed, a silver beaker and a woollen suit.

921 Million Guilders a Year: Inevitably, in 1637, the bulb market turned bear and sent the speculators tumbling into a financial abyss. But flower bulbs are still big business and they prosper in Dutch soil. Four hundred years of experience handed over from father to son undeniably attributed to their welfare. The Netherlands produces 8.8 billion bulbs a year — of which 1.9 billion are tulips — with a total production value of 921 million guilders a year and an export value of 1.1 billion.

In the bulb district — roughly comprising the area around the towns of Lisse, Hillegom and Sassenheim, located between Haarlem and Leiden — some 3000 companies cultivate bulbs on 16,300 hectares of land. Two-thirds of the bulbs (6.4 billion) are exported directly, and of the remaining third, most are cultivated in Greenhouses and then exported as cut flowers. Last year alone, 285.5 million guilders' worth of tulips were exported. The Netherlands is responsible for 85 per cent of the world export of bulbs and flowers, and sells to nearly a hundred countries. "Holland itself is relatively speaking not such an important market," says J. van Nimwegen, director

of the International Flower Bulb Center in Hillegom. "The biggest buyers are Germany and the United States, both at approximately 190 million guilders a year, followed by France, Great Britain, Sweden and Japan." Japan is the fastest growing market of all; it has risen to the fourth place on the export list and now imports for some one hundred million guilders' worth a year. "For a long time Japan claimed to have no restrictions on the bulb and flower import, but it did have very strict quarantine laws that required that you first plant your bulbs in Japan and let them flower there."

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explains van Nimwegen. "But in the last five or six years the Japanese inspect the bulbs also here in the Netherlands. They now also grow flowers from our bulbs in their own Greenhouses." The Japanese market remains very difficult, however, with a fragmented distribution system and finicky customers. "They are prepared to pay seven guilders for one stem of lilies, but only if it is absolutely perfect."

Fluctuations in Fashion: "Bulbs and flowers are a pure addition to the Dutch balance of trade," says van Nimwegen. "This is a product the country

can produce all on its own, without importing any commodities, that provides some 40,000 people with work." In the bulb district are now located not only a large number of growers and the International Flower Bulb Center, but also a laboratory, a horticulture school, a privately financed museum and two auction houses — not to mention the 'green' auctions held in the field before the harvest.

There is another lucrative spin-off to the bulb business: tourism. In the spring the long lines of cars are a familiar sight, many of them decorated with wreaths of flowers, driving at a small's pace along the fields with their glowing strips of colour between Lisse, Hillegom and Sassenheim. And of course there's the Keukenhof, the tulip lover's Mecca founded in 1949. It draws 900,000 visitors a year, 350,000 of whom spend the night in the country, bringing in an extra 125 million guilders in revenue. At the end of the Second World War, in the famine winter of 1944-1945, bulbs proved unexpectedly useful: the starving population was reduced to eating both bulbs and sugar beets.

Now, like any other consumer product, flowers are subject to fluctuations in fashion, and even though there are already 3,500 registered varieties of tulip, growers are continually searching for something new with which to stimulate the consumer's jaded palate. (Incidentally, it was not until 1927 that the industry discovered that some of the

favourite 'aberrations' in the petals, such as stripes and the so-called 'flames', were caused by a virus. It can take up to 25 years to develop a new variety. The grower then takes two kilos of tulips and 35 guilders to the Nomenclature Commission of the Society for Flower Bulb Cultivation in Lisse. Once approved, the new variety is added to the Classified List and International Register of Tulip Names. The list, started in 1914, now counts some four to five thousand names, among them the Lambada, the Glasnost, the Alfred Heineken and the Barbara Bush. Ever since 1850 there has been a recurrent myth about the black tulip. Experts say it's a biological impossibility, but perhaps that's precisely what makes it so intensely desirable. For the time being flower vendors draw customers with a dark purple variety.

In the spring the Rijks museum will show its rare collection of seventeenth-century drawings and 'tulip books'; in the fall the Nieuwe Kerk on Dam Square will hold an exhibition including ceramics, prints, watercolours, textiles, jewellery and paintings to promote tulips. For the occasion the church will be filled with 'ice tulips' which have been kept on ice in order to manipulate the moment at which they bloom. The tulip, cliché or no, has an undeniable emotional appeal. The stripes of colour cutting across the flat Dutch landscape are said to have inspired many an artist. Therefore, to see tulips flower you don't necessarily have to visit the fields. Cultivating tulips is an art also expressed in paintings and shown in museums. But then again, you may want to be inspired yourself.

The Netherlands' Share of Europe's Economy

On the Map of Europe, the Netherlands is not very impressive in terms of size. Its area compares with that of Switzerland. Contrary to what one would expect from the geographical size and its popu-

The Netherlands and the European Union

THE European Union, in which 12 European countries are currently united, has developed very rapidly in recent years. The twelve governments have growing closer with increasing speed. From the very first the Netherlands promoted the cause of the economic and political unification of Europe. As early as 1951, the Netherlands was one of the participants in the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) along with West Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg. From that moment the work started on the integration of the national European economies into a single European economy. As a result, in 1957 the European Economic Community was founded, with the signing of the Treaty of Rome. At the same time, the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) was founded. In 1967 the three Communities (the EEC, ECSC and Euratom) merged in the European Community.

On 1 January 1973 the European Community was enlarged when United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined. These were followed in 1981 by Greece, while Spain and Portugal became members in 1986. On 7 February 1992 the 12-member states of the European Community signed the treaty of Maastricht. This marked the beginning of a new period towards a union of European nations, not only economically but also increasingly in financial and political terms. To emphasize this the name of the European Community was changed into the European Union. The value of total Dutch exports is equal to that of Switzerland and Sweden together.

The major export markets are the European Union (75.3 per cent of total exports) followed by the EFTA countries and the US (4.5 per cent of total exports). Within the European Union, Germany is the largest export market. In this sophisticated, very demanding market, the Netherlands is the second biggest supplier of industrial high tech equipment and consumer products. The Netherlands' share of

Germany's imports is greater than that of the United States or the United Kingdom. Another illustration of the strength of Dutch exports is the fact that the Netherlands is one of the very few countries in the world with a trade surplus with Germany.

The Netherlands as Transporter for the European Union

In addition to the export of goods produced by domestic manufacturers, the Netherlands has an extensive commercial services sector, which is very international in outlook. When one looks at last year's figures it is striking that invisible exports rose faster than visible exports. The services of transport companies and construction companies were largely responsible for this.

Its geographical situation destined the Netherlands to be the port of entry for goods traffic by sea from the United States to Europe. Its theoretical distribution potential was translated into commercial success when trade barriers were abolished in Europe and the Netherlands became the port of entry for transhipment to the European hinterland. This entrepot function also attracted many foreign production companies. Thanks to the infrastructure and the storage facilities offered by the sea and airports, the Netherlands has become a major transhipment location for goods traffic from America and Asia to the industries of the European hinterland.

This has given transport companies a large share of the European transport market.

Developments in aviation have meant this transport and distribution function has grown into a commercial operation which today reaches far beyond Europe alone. Schiphol airport, for example, also functions as a location for the distribution of goods from America to the Middle East and North Africa. This has helped to make Schiphol the fourth biggest airport in the European Union in terms of freight and in terms of passenger movements.

Warmest Felicitations to Her Majesty the Queen and the friendly People of the Netherlands on their National Day



H. M. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands



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