

VeriFlora™

Certified Sustainably Grown



Frequently Asked Questions

What is VeriFlora™ and what does certification mean?

VeriFlora™ is a sustainability certification program for fresh cut flowers and potted plants. The “VeriFlora™ Certified Sustainably Grown” label is your guarantee that flowers and potted plants have been produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner and meet the highest standards for freshness and quality.

How did VeriFlora™ get started?

The European market demonstrated interest in sustainably grown flowers beginning several years ago. In response to this interest, several sustainability labeling programs emerged in the import floral market. In 2003, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) was asked by a group of forward-thinking North American floral distributors and merchants, organized by Gerald Prolman of OrganicBouquet.com, to evaluate these programs. SCS was selected because of its extensive work in the development and implementation of sustainability standards in a number of market sectors. Based on this evaluation, SCS was impressed with the progress it found in the existing programs, particularly in the degree to which these programs had successfully raised awareness among floral producers about the need to consider environmental and social issues in their production efforts. At the same time, SCS found important differences in the way sustainability was approached, and identified important areas that were not adequately addressed. Ultimately, it was determined that a new standard should be developed that would fully meet the needs of the North American market. This new standard, “*Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standard for Cut Floral Products and Potted Plants*,” was developed by SCS, and the VeriFlora™ name was developed as the certification label for products complying to this standard.

What’s in the Standard?

The standard provides a series of requirements for producers and handlers of floral products to ensure that the most environmentally sustainable, socially responsible and quality-oriented practices have been used. Some features of the VeriFlora™ standard that set certified growers apart are as follows:

- The standard includes the most stringent protocols for agrochemical use among all flower label programs. For example, growers must eliminate the use of agrochemicals classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as 1a (“extremely hazardous” or 1b (“highly hazardous”).
- The standard sets down specific requirements to ensure the safe storage of agrochemicals and safe handling of hazardous wastes, in accordance with international guidelines (e.g., UN Food and Agriculture Organization) that can extend beyond the requirements of local laws.

- The standard requires growers to develop a plan for converting to organic pest management and soil fertility practices over time, creating a unified path for organic and sustainable agriculture in terms of crop production practices.
- The standard contains extensive ecosystem and water quality protection measures to ensure that farmers are not damaging the surrounding habitats and wildlife as a result of their production operations, again well beyond legal requirements.
- The standard includes social responsibility requirements that ensure a fair, equitable and safe workplace, invoking international guidance (e.g., International Labor Organization agreements) that often extends beyond the requirements of local or national laws, and in addition, is designed to create a climate of cooperation with the surrounding community, supporting education objectives, local infrastructure, etc.
- VeriFlora™ certification is available not just to farmers, but to everyone in the supply chain, including shippers, distributors, and retailers. This certification establishes that proper traceability and chain-of-custody procedures are in place, and establishes cold chain management and plant hygiene requirements intended to ensure product quality and vase-life, with the goal of enhancing the customer's flower buying experience.

Who is Scientific Certification Systems (SCS)?

SCS is an independent third-party standards development and certification company based in Emeryville, California. Founded in 1984, SCS launched its standards development and certification activities in the agricultural sector with a series of programs aimed at verifying excellence in the quality, safety and purity of agricultural products. Over the next two decades, SCS's certification activities expanded considerably, spearheading or participating in the development of standards to certify sustainability, environmental preferability, and environmental performance in the agricultural, forestry, fisheries, manufactured products, and energy sectors. Today, SCS is an accredited certifier under the U.S. National Organic Program, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and manages the accreditation of certifiers for the Starbucks' CAFÉ practices program. In addition, SCS is engaged in a variety of ongoing sustainability standard setting initiatives, is an active certifier of numerous environmental claims across many industry sectors, and is a recognized life-cycle impact assessment practitioner, studying the environmental impacts of industrial systems across the life-cycle. SCS was a logical choice to take the lead in the development of a new standard for the North American fresh cut flower market because of its leadership and extensive certification experience in the fields of agricultural practices, sustainability and life-cycle impact assessment.

Who are your certified growers and what motivated them to join the VeriFlora program?

Our certified growers include both small and large producers, producing both domestically and abroad. They are motivated to join for several reasons: Some are industry leaders in environmental and social responsibility who are interested in well-earned recognition for their accomplishments. These are innovators who have been leading by example and who understand that sustainable business practices result in the most productive workforces and the healthiest economy and environment. Other certified

growers recognize the critical importance of sustainability and look to the VeriFlora™ program to provide them with a road map for getting there. All participating growers and wholesalers recognize that in the long run, consumers will increasingly demand products that meet sustainable agriculture standards. They recognize that interest in sustainable products is a significant market trend, not simply a marketing fad.

How big is the VeriFlora™ program right now?

Right now there are approximately 521 million stems that are VeriFlora™ certified. There currently are 13 growers in Columbia or Ecuador, representing a total of 32 flower farms, that are either certified or close to being certified. In the United States, there currently are 6 growers representing 18 farms that are either certified or close to being certified. In addition, our certified handlers include two of the largest floral distributors in North America, Delaware Valley Floral Group and Sierra Flower Trading, Ltd., as well as leading online organic flower supplier, OrganicBouquet.com.

What is the *Draft American National Standard for Trial Use for Sustainable Agriculture*?

The VeriFlora™ floral standard has been so successful that it is now serving as the template from which a new national standard for sustainable agriculture is being developed. This standard —the *Draft American National Standard for Trial Use (SCS-001) Sustainable Agriculture* — is scheduled to be officially published and put into use within the next few months. The standard will contain a broad set of requirements applicable to food and fiber crops, with sector-specific addenda focusing on specific items such as floral products. These requirements address:

<i>Environmental Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable Crop Production - Resource Conservation & Energy Efficiency - Ecosystem Protection - Emissions and Waste Reduction
<i>Social & Economic Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fair Labor Practices - Community Benefits
<i>Product Integrity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Product Quality - Product Safety and Purity

In a nutshell, it is a voluntary standard that recognizes the efforts of farmers to produce crops in accordance with state-of-the-art environmental, social and quality standards that go well beyond legal requirements.

What is ANSI?

ANSI stands for “American National Standards Institute.” The ANSI standardization approach is extremely significant. It represents a clear path by which all stakeholders (industry, regulators, environmental and consumer advocates) can be engaged in the process, which creates the greatest likelihood that the standard will be practical, comprehensive and robust. Moreover, because ANSI standards are recognized as *de facto* national standards, growers from all over the world (as well as in the US) will have clear guidance about what it means to market products as sustainable in the U.S.

What are the benefits for growers, wholesalers, and consumers?

As you would expect, there is a wide range of performance in the floral industry, but an increasing number of domestic and import floral product producers have come to recognize the importance of sustainability as it relates to their industry. In response, we are witnessing a period of profound changes in agricultural, quality and workplace practices, which are resulting in measurable outcomes.

Through certification, these changes can be documented and highlighted, providing important precedents for others to follow. The VeriFlora™ certification process has:

- Inspired searches for organic materials and alternatives.
- Eliminated agrochemicals, resulting in cost savings and safer environments – as quantified by orders placed before and after certification.
- Resulted in community programs in health and education.
- Stimulated changes in work teams that resulted in a quantifiable reduction in employee turnover.
- Inspired employee training in problem solving and team work.
- Triggered changes in water management and erosion control.
- Stimulated changes in temperature quality controls to enhance product quality.

In this manner, VeriFlora™ truly is a dynamic force for driving industry improvement. Beyond these benefits, VeriFlora™ certification provides well-earned recognition for floral producers that are industry innovators. For other growers who recognize the importance of sustainability, VeriFlora provides a road map for how to get there.

For distributors in particular, VeriFlora™ provides a clear set of requirements pertaining to cold chain management throughout the chain-of-custody. These requirements help guide distributors in their efforts to protect product quality and extend vase life. On the flip side, consumers directly benefit from these quality handling procedures. In addition, consumers benefit by being given the means to translate their values directly into buying decisions. In this manner, they are affecting the floral market, and helping to spur further environmental and social progress.

Where can I get more information regarding VeriFlora™, including how to get certified?

Please go to our web site at www.veriflora.com. You may also contact program executives via email at veriflora@scscertified.com.