

Media Release

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Esmeralda Ecuador Earns VeriFlora® Label Hilsea Group's Eight Farms Certified as Sustainable

Emeryville, CA - Esmeralda Farms, one of the largest importers of cut flowers to the United States, has added the 620-acre Hilsea farm group in Ecuador, which is comprised of 8 farms, to its VeriFlora certified farms. Key products grown at Hilsea Farms include roses and summer flowers such as *Hypericum* and *Gypsophila*. In order to be certified, environmental, social and quality management practices were independently evaluated by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) and determined to meet exceptional standards of excellence.



“Establishing VeriFlora certification at our Ecuadorian farms, to go along with our VeriFlora certified Colombian farms, is a vital step in continuing to push forward Esmeralda’s commitment to sustainability and social responsibility”, said Mark Dubner, sales manager at Esmeralda Farms’ office in Miami, Florida.

Esmeralda has been making continuous efforts to improve agricultural practices. Since it started transitioning its farms, the Esmeralda Farm group has cut its use of conventional pesticides by 40 percent and its conventional fertilization use by 50 percent.

Experimentation and field trials have given way to operational use of biological controls for major diseases and pests, and organic soil health practices. For example, recent research has led to use of a beneficial fungi strain of *Trichoderma* which, together with pepper and garlic extract sprays, fights pests. Nematicides that were once applied quarterly for some floral varieties have been eliminated. Non-chemical controls are also used for problematic insects, such as the bug-vacuum, which sucks leaf minor pests off the leaves.

Esmeralda Farms has been able to cut its commercial fertilization by over half. It is using organic fertilization alternatives such as Bokashi, Japanese for "fermented organic matter," a method of activated composting wherein the microorganisms promote the soil health

“The answer lies in Mother Nature. This is our secret. I have seen that the plants grow better when you don’t treat them with chemicals,” says Peter Ullrich, chairman of Miami-based Esmeralda Farms. “Our main reason for making the changes was for the people that work at the farms, not specifically



Esmeralda’s unique Jade Trachelium

because of market demand. Our workers don't like to spray and wear specialized clothing." Farm workers have been trained to notice color, shape and plant behavior, as the company strives to reduce conventional pesticide and fertilization products, he added.

Esmeralda Farms' management is proactive about improving the working conditions for employees in other ways as well. It has permanent doctors available on the farms, and continuous occupational health and worker training. Hilsea Farms provides day-care for children and has agreements with local health clinics. These services have provided important opportunities to many rural Ecuadoreans who otherwise might have had to leave the country to find better jobs.

"Esmeralda Farms' practices reflect a vision of sustainability that actively embraces and engages the workers," explained Roberto Boada, VeriFlora Certification Manager at the Andean Sustainable Agriculture Certification And Services Foundation (FAASCS), SCS's new Ecuadorean certification partner based in Quito.

Hilsea employees have worked to implement many of the company's sustainable practices, including:

- Energy savings: Replacing 1000 KVA grow lamps with 250 KVA lamps;
- Resource Conservation: Using a 100% biodegradable cut flower sleeves, called GreenSleeve™;
- Protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats: Creating buffer zones throughout the plantations with trees and native species, and ecological restoration to support ecosystem structure and functioning; and
- Protecting water quality: Treating wastewater with micro-organisms which act as biological filters and return clean water to canals.

Moreover, Esmeralda Farms has embraced product quality at every critical stage from the field through wholesale distribution. VeriFlora's approach to monitoring good cold chain management practices requires traceability mechanisms to be in place at every critical control point. For end users, traceability helps ensure quality control, supporting retailer promotion of product shelf-life.

"Product quality, sound agricultural practices, and environmental protection are core values at Esmeralda," said Mark Dubner. "We are thrilled to have achieved such a stringent and rigorous certification. Being VeriFlora certified is a value and merit that we are proud to pass on to our customers, who can be confident that when they supply flowers to their customers, they are providing fresh cut flowers of the highest quality available."

About Esmeralda Farms – In addition to its farms in Ecuador, Esmeralda's VeriFlora-certified Colombian farms include Flores Esmeralda and Flores de Tenjo. Esmeralda Farms is a market leader in the floral industry committed to breeding, growing, and distributing the highest quality fresh cut flowers. Esmeralda's headquarters, based in Miami, Florida, is dedicated to the sales, marketing and distribution of its flowers. Esmeralda only sells flowers grown by its operated farms in Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Peru to allow for the strictest standards of quality assurance and consistency. For more information visit www.esmeraldafarms.com or call 800-888-8994.

About Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) – SCS is an independent certifier of environmental, sustainability, food quality and food purity claims. Over two decades, SCS has developed internationally recognized standards and certification programs aimed at spurring the highest level of environmental improvements, social responsibility, and product performance. Its programs span a wide cross-section of the economy, recognizing accomplishments in agricultural production, food processing and handling, forestry, fisheries, flowers and plants, energy, green building, manufacturing, and retail. For more information about SCS and the VeriFlora program, visit www.scscertified.com or call 510-452-8021.