

Mercer Botanicals earns VeriFlora certification

EMERYVILLE, CA — Mercer Botanicals, Inc., wholesale ornamental plant nursery in Zellwood, FL, has achieved VeriFlora certification, the sustainability benchmark for potted plants and cut flowers sold in the United States and Canada. Garden centers, florists, dish-garden manufacturers, wholesalers, and interiorscape contractors can give their customers the VeriFlora Certified Sustainably Grown guarantee on a variety of labeled tropical foliage plants.

Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), a global leader in third party certification of sustainable achievements, developed and administers the VeriFlora certification program, and awarded the certification to Mercer Botanicals (MBI). The VeriFlora standard establishes performance criteria in environmental sustainability, social responsibility, product quality, and economic viability.

The MBI sustainability story starts at the nursery's front entrance. A wind barrier of Crape Myrtle trees lines the front, along with a Podocarpus hedge. Establishing a tropical look and feel while supporting carbon sequestration, the company's sign sits against a back drop of Washingtonia Palms and the latest Croton varieties, a major MBI crop. The paved road is flanked by curbs, which funnel rainwater to a large retention pond. All told, the 50-acre nursery contains five acres of ponds, which capture 100 percent of rain water during Florida's summer storms.

Resource conservation engineering is one of numerous investments owners Christine and Wayne Mercer have made since forming the nursery in 1989, but Wayne Mercer says, "most importantly, we want our customers to know that MBI products are grown using the latest environmental practices, put into operation by valued, competent and loyal employees. The VeriFlora auditor came through here with a fine tooth comb to verify our practices, and it has already made us even better at what we do."

In 740,000 square feet of indoor greenhouses, MBI produces Syngonium, Dieffenbachia, Crotons, Neanthe Bella Palms, as well as 15 other species. Integrated pest management (IPM) devotees, MBI not only releases over three million beneficial insects annually to control pests, but also uses a less common yet more proactive IPM tool: The banker plant system, which has the potential for reducing costs of biological control agents.

Zero water leaves the MBI nursery. In addition to rainwater collection ponds, the operation has 17 acres of low volume drip irrigation and overhead systems, with distribution uniformity (DU) ratings that exceed the State of Florida, Best Management Practices. While all nurseries are vulnerable to nitrate runoff, a potential source for groundwater contami-

nation, MBI tenaciously minimizes runoff potential with a four-point strategy: Lowest recommended rates of controlled release fertilizer, with PH and EC driven liquid supplements; a highly hydroscopic 100 percent Sphagnum Peat Moss substrate that has been shown in their growing operations to decrease irrigation and fertilizer runoff when compared to conventional substrate mixtures; low volume irrigation heads with DU greater than 85 percent; and buffer zones surrounding the entire operation.

Whether pursuing more aggressive resource conservation practices or new pest management techniques, the Mercers are quick to acknowledge that, "educated employees are the cornerstone of business success and sustainability achievements." MBI invests heavily in its workforce, from skills development to safety classes, to leadership training. When it comes to charitable giving, employees collectively choose an organization to which MBI makes a donation.

Currently 250 million pots and 900 million stems of cut flowers are VeriFlora certified. With VeriFlora, consumers receive the beauty they expect in a flower or plant, plus the added gift of knowing they are protecting the environment and supporting fair labor.

Mercer Botanicals is a wholesale nursery supplying high quality indoor tropical plants to Garden Centers, Florists, Foliage Brokers, and other wholesale plant suppliers. Tropical plants include Crotons, Dieffenbachia, Ardisia, Syngonium, and Neanthe Bella Palms.

For more information, visit www.mercerbotanicals.com or call 352-735-9696.



VERIFLORA

Certified Sustainably Grown

Meets Draft American National Standard for Trial Use (SCS-001) Sustainable Agriculture

