

For Immediate Release
July 14, 2008

Contact: Diane Dulmage
Communications Associate, SCS
ddulmage@sccertified.com
510-452-8003

Contact: Mark Yelanich
Director of Research, Metrolina
myelanich@metrolinagreenhouses.com
704.875.1371

Metrolina Tackles Sustainability on a Large Scale and Comes Out Ahead

North Carolina Family-Run Nursery Earns VeriFlora® Certification

Emeryville, CA – Think big. That’s what Metrolina Greenhouses Inc. did when it built the largest single-sited greenhouse in the United States. Spanning nearly 130 acres, the greenhouse is a state-of-the-art, temperature controlled facility operated with careful water and energy controls to optimize plant growing conditions while minimizing wasteful consumption. And now, it is the most visible symbol of Metrolina’s commitment to sustainability, independently certified under the VeriFlora® Certified Sustainably Grown eco-label.



“VeriFlora certification is only issued to companies that demonstrate outstanding achievements in terms of environmental sustainability, social responsibility and product quality,” said Dr. Michael Keyes, Certification Manager for Sustainable Agriculture at Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), administrator of the VeriFlora program. To be certified, companies are independently audited against a rigorous set of requirements, he explained. “Metrolina has demonstrated true leadership in all of these areas.”

Metrolina, a family-owned wholesale plant company, was started 1972 by Tom Van Wingerden. The business is now run by 2nd generation family members, including Tom’s sons Abe, President and Sales and Marketing Director, and Art, who serves as President and Chief Operating Officer. Together, the Van Wingerdens have grown Metrolina into a thriving greenhouse business doing over \$100 million in annual sales.

“VeriFlora provides a way for companies such as ours to get credit for the things we have been doing,” said Abe Van Wingerden. “At the same time, the certification process helped us identify new ways in which we could further improve our operations.”

Sustainability Highlights

The business, which operates in a region that has had seasonal droughts, recycles nearly all of it’s’ water, resulting in a virtually closed-loop system which saves both money and water. The

facilities, covering a total of 700 acres, use rainwater rather than groundwater for irrigation. Just one inch of precipitation collected from the roof system yields about 3,000,000 gallons of water. After passing through two large retention ponds used for clarification and filtration, water is then pumped for irrigation. Even in the midst of a historic drought, ponds still supplied the 700,000-800,000 gallons a day needed for Metrolina's plants, including spring bedding plants, summer annuals, fall mums, pansies, and winter Poinsettias. Any overflow from these ponds is released into surrounding wetlands, supporting populations of ducks, herons, deer and other species in the natural ecosystem. This nursery has also been purchasing additional property, buffering woodlands, to help maintain the natural biodiversity of the land.

Tom has spent his career designing machinery for the greenhouse industry. The automated "on-boom" irrigation, fertilization, and pest/disease control systems are exceptional examples. Many greenhouse operations water from the top only and excess water is wasted as it flows out the bottom of the pots. Metrolina's sub-irrigation system floods the floor and the plant bases, and excess irrigation water is captured in a tank that recycles the water. The tank can also be used to recycle when top watering.



Metrolina's extensive greenhouses and pond

Metrolina's research and development is also industry leading, with dedicated quality care research including trial species and varieties in their own experimental gardens. The company conducts active trials on compostable pots and sold two different types this year.



Additional environmental innovations include "energy curtains" operated by automated environmental controls; these radiative barrier curtains reduce heat losses by up to 50%, and are used extensively throughout the operation. Metrolina also runs an efficient fleet of vehicles that work nearly around the clock to fulfill regional needs – 60% of products go to stores in both North and South Carolina, while the remainder is largely shipped to the surrounding states. Customers include big box retailers, mass merchandisers and other greenhouses.

Abe explained that the company doesn't automate processes to reduce its labor force, but to eliminate back-breaking and time consuming drudgery work. They often move people into higher-skilled jobs and this year moved about 60 temporary workers to new full time positions. The intern program started by the company is still developing, and has 15-20 students from the United States and around the world who train to be assistant growers.

Dr. Keyes noted that "No grower has worked harder with its workers to ensure a high standard of living." Metrolina's social responsibility efforts are outstanding: salaries are tied to a Living Wage, well above minimum federal levels. Metrolina employs 500 people year round and 800 during spring and fall peaks. (www.metrolinagreenhouses.com). "We've been lucky to get people who could grow with us, which are rare in the agriculture industry," said Abe.

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 accountability 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, consumer and business product manufacturing, and retail. Additional information about SCS and VeriFlora can be found at www.scscertified.com and at www.VeriFlora.org.

###