

For Immediate Release

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Potted and Bedding Plant Growers Recognized as Sustainability Leaders

Seville Farms and Neal Mast & Son Earn VeriFlora® Certification from SCS

Emeryville, CA – Marking the new year, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), a recognized third-party certifier of sustainability claims, announced the names of two new companies earning VeriFlora® certification — Seville Farms of Mansfield, Texas and Neal Mast & Son Greenhouses of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The VeriFlora label signifies potted and bedding plants and cut flowers that have been produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner while meeting the highest standards for freshness and quality.

Seville Farms and Neal Mast & Son are among the first growers in the potted and bedding plants sector to achieve VeriFlora certification. Both companies learned about VeriFlora as participants in a collaborative initiative launched by Ball Horticultural Company for Wal-Mart aimed at identifying products meeting rigorous sustainability standards.

Neal Mast & Son's VeriFlora certification applies to its complete selection of indoor holiday and promotional plants, garden and bedding plants grown at its two locations in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Combined, the two locations add up to about 600,000 square feet of production. The company has distinguished itself in a number of sustainability accomplishments, including a water conservation system involving an "ebb and flood" underground system in which all water gets recycled. Neal Mast & Son also exhibits significant progress in the use of biological controls, such as a product that fights root rot while reducing the need for fungicides. In addition, the company is noted for its low employee turnover, and its annual donation of 10 percent of taxable net income to charities.

Jim Mast of Neal Mast & Son said, "Environmental and social responsibility initiatives are extremely important to us. We believe that this is the direction that everyone in our industry eventually will go. VeriFlora certification helps us communicate to our customers our commitment to quality management, such as with our team-oriented 'weekly walkarounds.' Through this program, we make sure that every one of our products meets spec."

Seville Farms has earned VeriFlora certification for all its potted and bedding plants at the largest of its four facilities, the "Mansfield facility south of Dallas-Fort Worth. This facility



encompasses approximately 650,000 square feet of covered operations and another 300,000 square feet of outside growing operations. Certified products include perennials, specialty annuals, bulb crops, herbs, and mixed containers.

Seville has achieved significant sustainability accomplishments, particularly in regard to energy conservation. Together with several other producers, Seville has established a rack recovery and distribution system in which it collects and redistributes shipping racks rather than having trucks make one-way trips while empty. The company's "cross-docking" initiative with nurseries on the east and west coasts also reduces travel. Overall, these savings in truck mileage help companies save fuel and energy, save money, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants.

In addition, Seville Farms has a system in which waste water is separated from other water and siphoned into reclamation ponds in on-site natural lagoons and wetlands. They also have begun to use biological controls at the Mansfield location and plan to introduce these practices at their other facilities. Further, as participants in the Earth Essentials program, Seville uses biodegradable rice hull pots.

Mark Clemmons of Seville Farms, remarked, "The VeriFlora certification process is extremely comprehensive. Fortunately, we already had undertaken part of the requirements needed for certification. Still, thanks to Wal-Mart, Ball Horticultural, and the VeriFlora program, we've implemented additional beneficial measures."

The VeriFlora program has gained widespread recognition since its launch in 2005, first in the cut flower sector, and now in the potted plant and bedding plant industry, leading to increased demand by retailers, grocery stores, nurseries and garden centers for certified products. Growers are certified under eight categories of sustainability performance, including crop production, ecosystem protection, resource management and energy efficiency, integrated waste management, fair labor practices, community benefits, product quality and product safety.

"Sustainable agriculture" is a broad concept encompassing farming practices that promote environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability. The VeriFlora standard has served as a template for SCS-001, "*Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standard for Food, Fiber and Biofuel Crop Producers and Agricultural Product Handlers and Processors*." This draft standard for trial use is now undergoing a formal, consensus-based review under the recognized ANSI (American National Standards Institute) process.

Currently, about 45 growing operations in the US, Ecuador and Colombia are certified, with dozens more in the pipeline. Also among the potted plant and bedding plant growers certified is Ball Tagawa Growers of Arroyo Grande, California. Ball Tagawa is a joint venture of Ball Horticultural and Tagawa Greenhouses, producing small liner plants and plugs for sale to wholesale nurseries. More than 750 million stems of cut flowers have also been certified. In addition, certified handlers include three of the largest floral distributors in North America: Delaware Valley Floral Group, Savoir Fleur, and Sierra Flower Trading, Ltd., as well as on-line retailer OrganicStyle.com (Organic Bouquet).



About Neal Mast & Son

As a premier grower of holiday plants, indoor bulbs and flowering and potted annuals for spring and summer, Neal Mast & Son Greenhouses, Inc. has been providing quality plants for over thirty years. Their Grand Rapids, Michigan greenhouses cover twelve acres of indoor space as well as twelve acres of outdoor space in two locations, servicing regional and national retailers. Bringing a better value to buyers and end user customers is the driving force that keeps Neal Mast constantly striving for new items, better methods and greater efficiencies.

About Seville Farms

Seville Farms Inc. of Mansfield, Texas is a producer of perennial varieties, specialty annuals, bulb crops and mixed containers. It supplies large box accounts as well as independent nursery and landscape markets. Seville was established eleven years ago and has four Texas production locations as well as contract grower arrangements.

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. For more information about VeriFlora and SCS, visit www.VeriFlora.com or call 510-452-8000.