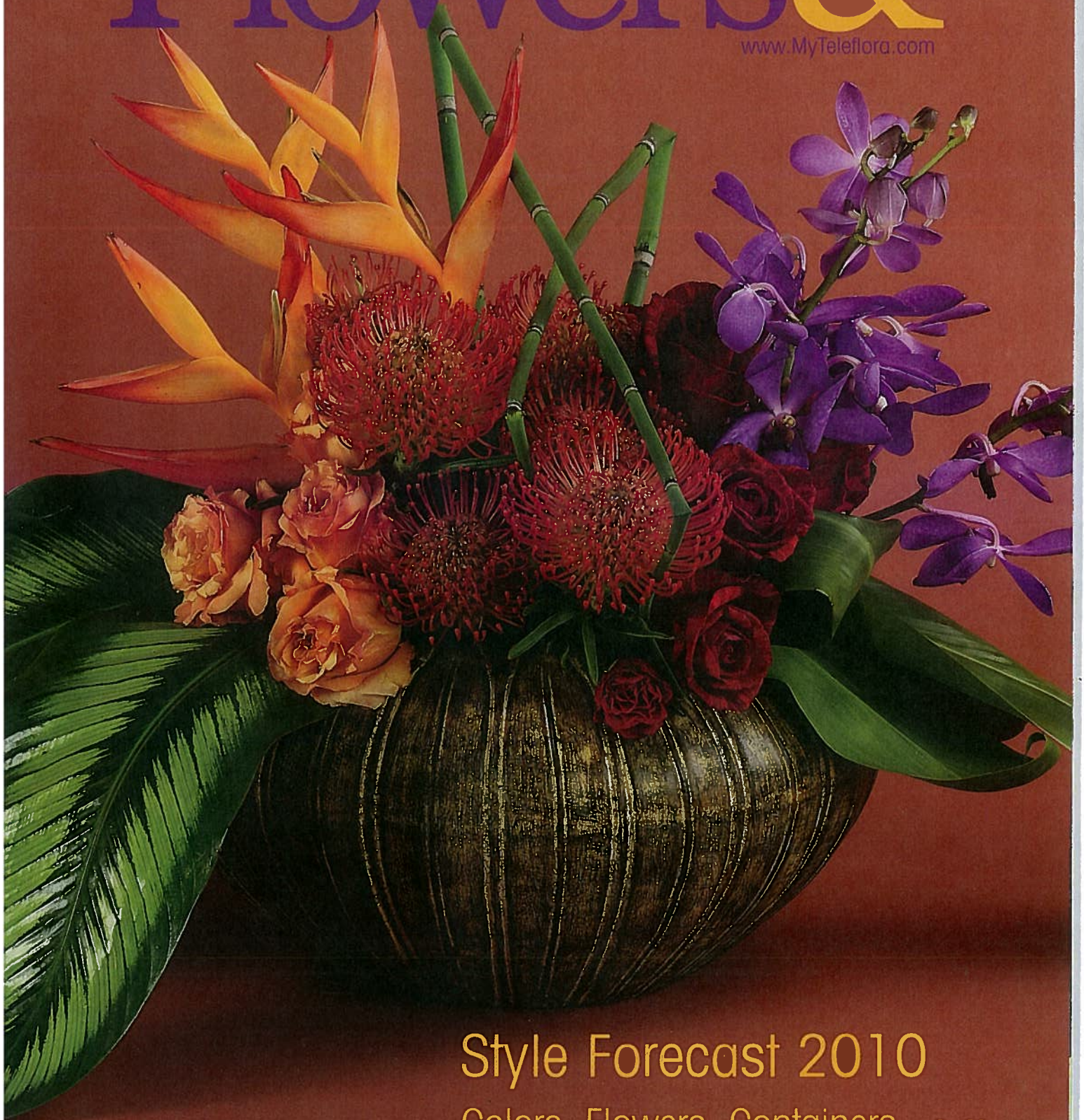


# Flowers &

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# A Green Label for Retail Florists

## VeriFlora® is the first. What could it do for you?

If you're concerned about the environment and "fair trade," chances are you're already aware of the VeriFlora® label. VeriFlora is a certification program that guarantees cut flowers and potted plants from certain growers have been produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. The VeriFlora program is based in the United States but covers growers both in the U.S. and in Central and South America. Colombian growers have their own certification program, FlorVerde®, as do growers in Ecuador (FlorEcuador®).

Even if you're not aware of VeriFlora, you might already be purchasing VeriFlora-certified product. VeriFlora growers include some of the industry's best known: Esmeralda Farms, Farmers West, Green Valley, Ocean View, Passion Growers, Resendiz Brothers, and The Sun Valley Group, among others. Since 2005, the VeriFlora administrator—a company called Scientific Certification Systems (SCS)—has certified more than 1 billion stems of cut flowers and more than 300 million potted plants.

Clearly, "green" labeling has at least gained a foothold in the production end of the floral industry. But what's happening on the consumer end? Would your customers be more inclined to patronize your shop if they knew that you sell "green" flowers?

The folks at SCS are betting they would. This past fall they announced the launch of the VeriFlora Preferred Retailer Program—the first of its kind in the industry.

The program is being offered to both retail florists and garden centers. To become a VeriFlora Preferred Retailer, retailers need to:

- submit an application,
- provide documentation (such as invoices) showing that they purchase VeriFlora-certified product (they are not limited to carrying only VeriFlora-certified products),
- participate in online training about the VeriFlora program, followed by a short test (required of managers, encouraged for other staff), and
- sign an agreement and pay a fee to cover materials and administrative costs for one year.

What participating retailers receive in return is a promotional and educational program designed to help them sell more VeriFlora-certified product. The educational component includes an emphasis on quality control, including cold-chain management, designed to help retailers maintain the high standard that is required of VeriFlora growers. Fresh flowers that are produced in accord with VeriFlora guidelines may be a little more expensive—but, typically, they also look better and last longer than other flowers.

## A green direction

Green labels are popping up everywhere in the retail world. This summer Wal-Mart gave the trend a big boost, announcing its intent to create a rating system that will measure global sustainability for products sold in Wal-Mart stores. As time goes on, more and more consumers are likely to start noticing these labels and asking what they mean.

The biggest challenge with green labeling is credibility. So far, the Federal Trade Commis-

sion has not issued any pronouncements about the merits of the many green labels already clamoring for our attention. Independent websites like [www.ecolabelling.org](http://www.ecolabelling.org), [www.greenerchoices.org](http://www.greenerchoices.org), and others offer a third-party evaluation of green-label claims. But for the typical customer looking at products in the store, no one green label has general recognition and authority.

The situation is a little more advanced in Europe, where both environmental awareness and the floricultural market are more highly developed than in the United States. European consumers buying cut flowers and potted plants encounter a multiplicity of green labels; a couple of these, however, are pulling ahead of the rest. MPS-Florimark is a certification program that has become well established within the European trading system. At any of the Dutch auctions, for example, the invoice for a product purchase might be marked "MPS-A," indicating that the product is supplied by a grower who meets the highest standards for environmental sustainability. So far, MPS standards and labeling have been applied mainly to growers and wholesale traders. A version for florists, however, is currently in development, with the goal of providing one certificate for the whole chain.

Another European label, Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP), is likewise extending its reach. Conceived as a product label with consumer recognizability, FFP receives support from the European Community and its Horticultural Commodity Board. Flowers with the FFP label are available in some (not all) European countries, in select shops. Ambitious plans are underway to expand availability. The office of FFP has created promotional programs tailored to different types of clients, designed to raise the profile of FFP.

It's interesting to note that in Europe, traditional retail florists led the way in offering FFP products. Now, the bigger, mass-market retailers have caught on and are moving faster to promote sustainably produced flowers and plants.

## Making it work

"Going green" takes an effort, and sometimes an investment. For American florists considering any step in that direction, the questions arise: "Why am I doing this? As a marketing ploy, or because it's the right thing? Will it make me more profitable? Do my customers care?"

The movement toward organic and locally produced foods has burgeoned in recent years. So far, awareness of similar issues surrounding cut flowers and plants has a long way to catch up. But every major floral holiday brings more news stories and editorials on the use of pesticides, fertilizers, water and energy in cut-flower production—not to mention the treatment of workers at flower farms around the globe.

Thanks to programs like VeriFlora, FlorVerde, MPS and FFP, some growers can point to a very high standard of sustainability. To protect the reputation of the entire industry, however, those claims will need to be reinforced at the retail level. And it makes sense that retailers could benefit from projecting an environmentally and socially conscientious profile. So far, VeriFlora and other green labels in the floral industry are only just beginning to gain recognition by the public at large. Retail participation is exactly what it will take to make green labeling a floral-industry success, all the way through the chain.

For more information on green labels and green issues in the floral industry, check out the following websites:

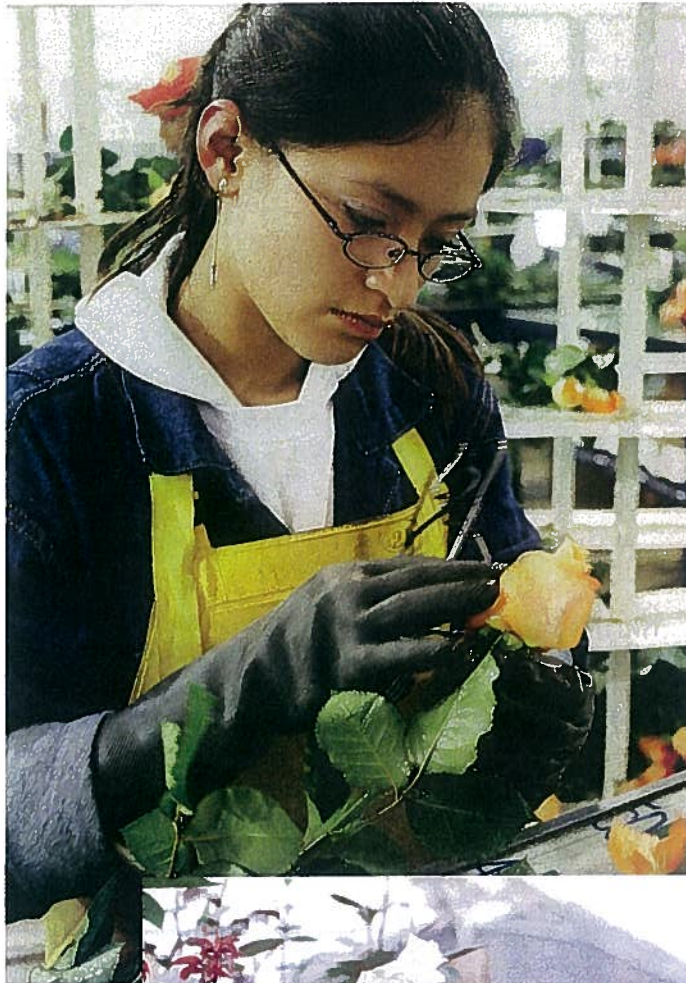
VeriFlora®, [www.veriflora.com](http://www.veriflora.com). To apply for the VeriFlora Preferred Retailer Program, contact [JWatters@scscertified.com](mailto:JWatters@scscertified.com).

Fair Flowers Fair Plants,  
[www.fairflowersfairplants.com/home-en.aspx](http://www.fairflowersfairplants.com/home-en.aspx)

FlorEcuador®, [www.expoflores.com](http://www.expoflores.com)

FlorVerde®, [www.florverde.com](http://www.florverde.com)

MPS-Florimark, [www.my-mps.com](http://www.my-mps.com) 🌿



*Green labels are meant to reassure consumers that the products they buy have been produced without harming the environment and without unfair or inhumane treatment of workers. Photos courtesy of VeriFlora®.*