My name is Joshua Craver and I am a student at Mississippi State University studying horticulture. This summer, I had the opportunity to attend an internship at Metrolina Greenhouses in North Carolina. This greenhouse is one of the largest in the country and supplies a variety of plant materials businesses such as Lowe’s and Wal-Mart. The greenhouse was very different from anything I had ever seen before and was much more massive than I had imagined. My grower, Russel, really stated it best when he explained to me how this place was far from a typical greenhouse. With the amount of plant material that must be moved to supply businesses such as Wal-Mart and Lowe’s, Metrolina operates much more like a plant factory.

Overall, I feel that the internship was a great way to apply much of the knowledge I have acquired throughout my years of schooling. Much of what I did and saw was nothing new, but seeing how many of these machines and processes are actually used was both exciting and beneficial. Much of the work that I was responsible for completing included watering, spraying, shipping, and various other tasks specific to each plant species. These specific tasks or projects included things like cutting back verbena, replacing dead plugs in mixed containers, or pinching plants such as snapdragons. While much of this was very repetitive and not always the most exciting work, I realized that all of these elements were necessary to produce a quality product, especially in such mass quantities.

My usual day of work started with hand watering the plants on the side of the greenhouse without booms. While the majority of Metrolina is highly automated, the section of the greenhouse where I was assigned only had boom sprayers on one side. The other side required that the plants be watered by hand or rainbirds (an overhead sprinkler system). This took the majority of the morning to complete, for towards the end of the summer literally thousands of plants were on this side of the greenhouse. After the watering my grower would then assign me and the other assistants projects for the week or day that we would complete.

Russel would also take the time to show me little things as we were working to help me in furthering my knowledge of the greenhouse and its processes. I really appreciated him taking the time to explain much of what we were doing and specifically why many of the tasks had to be completed in certain ways. Additionally, he also sent me to other areas of the greenhouse to get a better feel of how other grower’s sections were run. My personal favorite of these “field trips” was when he sent me over to a section where poinsettia cuttings were currently being grown. These cuttings had been stuck only a day before I got there, and so the boom sprayers were running constantly to keep the plants moist and to maintain an incredibly high relative humidity. It was really cool to help set-up the spraying schedules for the booms and to see how this intricate process of getting the plants to root was achieved.

Looking back, I feel that I learned a great deal by working for this company and I view at as being a highly beneficial learning experience for me as I continue my major. The work was many times very repetitive and far from easy, but in the end I am incredibly thankful that I was able to partake in an internship at such a large and productive greenhouse.