

Sun Valley Internship

American Floral Endowment Final Report

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Through out summer and fall 2011, I worked full time at The Sun Valley Group in Arcata, California. The Sun Valley Group is the largest flower production company in The United States. They have four different farms, the largest and oldest one being in Arcata. The other three are in Oxnard, CA, Willow Creek, CA, and the newest one in Canada. Growing flowers is an endless cycle. There is never a day where flowers are not being planted, picked, and shipped simultaneously. The farm has many different departments with lots of different teams who work together to make it possible for consumers enjoy flowers. During my internship, I worked in the tulip picking, tulip bunching, warehouse, hydrangea, lily, Willow Creek, and planting departments. Each department has a team leader who is in charge of making sure all the workers are doing their job well and meeting the daily attainment goals.

The first department I worked in was tulip picking. The pickers pick tulips and put large bunches of around 100 tulips into crates. Each picker is in charge of keeping track of how many they pick so that the daily attainment percentage can be calculated. The crates of tulips are put into carts where they are then taken to the cooler and stored until they are taken to be bunched. The second department I worked in was the tulip bunching department. It is here where the tulips are brought out from the cooler and put into bunches according to what is ordered. The tulips in each bunch need to be even and the stems have to be of similar length. After they are bucketed, they are taken to the warehouse where the quality is checked and the bunches are mailed out.

The next department I worked in was the warehouse. In the warehouse, the labels are printed, the boxes are made, and the orders are organized so that they can be mailed out on the proper date. Each flower has a different way of being packed and some are more

delicate than others. After the warehouse, I worked in the oriental lily department. The lily department is in charge of picking, bunching, and sleeving the product. When picking the lilies, a pole with a knife at the end is used to saw off each stem. The pickers bunch the lilies in the greenhouse while they pick according to the orders for that week and what grade they are (based on bud count and stem count). To separate the grades, a different color rubber band is used to tie them off. The pickers keep these rubber bands around their wrists so they can access them easily. The oriental lilies also need to be picked at the correct stage or else the flowers are not saleable. It takes a lot of prior planning to make sure that the lilies bloom in a way that the pickers can pick out the whole greenhouse without losing a lot of product. Once the lilies are picked and bunched, they are brought out, placed on a table, counted, and taken to the sleeving line. Because lilies are so fragile, there are many opportunities for them to be bruised before they are sent to the cooler so everyone dealing with them needs to be careful.

Once I finished working with the oriental lilies, I worked in the hydrangea department. This department is in charge of picking and bunching the hydrangeas according to the week's orders. Hydrangeas grow on a bush rather than a single stem so picking them is a little different. They have three grades depending on the size of the flower head. Since the hydrangeas are grown outside in a hoop house and not forced in greenhouses, they are a seasonal crop. In springtime, they are colorful and bright. During fall time, they begin to change colors into what they call "antique." In winter, hydrangeas are not picked, but the bushes are pruned and cut back for the next springtime.

After working with the hydrangeas, I worked at the farm in Willow Creek. This farm is another division of Sun Valley and is 45 minutes away from the Arcata farm. This farm

grows crops such as rose hips, cotinus, Chinese lanterns, ilex, and snow berries. Also, the farm has no greenhouses and everything is grown outside.

After working on the Willow Creek farm, I came back to Arcata and worked on the planting line.



This is the assembly line where all of the lilies, tulips, hyacinths, and other various bulbs are planted. All of the bulbs are planted in crates and they are all spaced differently according to what type of flower and variety they are. It is important to make sure they are planted roots down and in straight lines. Those are all of the departments that I worked in while I was at Sun Valley.

I feel that this internship did provide me with experience beneficial to my education program. It is important to see what is learned in school out in a real business environment. Doing the work first hand provides experience that you cannot attain in school. I am very pleased that I did this internship and working here gave me the opportunity to see how each department works together and provided me with an experience that I have never had before. Sun Valley was a great host and allowed me to work a lot of hours all around the entire company. Now that I am done with this internship, I plan to finish school at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and once I graduate, find a job in the floricultural industry.