I started my internship at Sun Valley Floral Farms May 18, 2015. I decided to fly out to the farm because my car would not have made it out to California from Kansas. I was met by Mary Bruhn, who is the HR of Sun Valley. She was nice enough to pick me up from the airport, show me the town of Arcata, and then took my grocery shopping. She then took me to the farm house, where I would stay for the three months of my internship. After getting settled in, I met my three roommates. Two were from Pennsylvania, who were there working at the Willow Creek vineyard, which is owned by Sun Valley. My other roommate was from California, working as part of the maintenance crew on the farm.

This was the farm house that we all lived in during our stay at Sun Valley. It was very roomy, and was a common place that we all felt comfortable staying in.

After getting situated in the house, Mary asked me to come to the main office the next day so that I could receive my badge and do orientation. During orientation, we went over the goals of the farm, guiding principles, and what was expected of us. I then got to meet the production manager Tim Crockenberg, and his assistant Tanner Allen. They took me on a quick tour of the almost 500 acre farm, showing me the different divisions and the variety of crops that they grow. At Sun Valley, they grow bulbous crops, such as lilies, tulips, and callas. While I worked there, these were the main crops that I worked with.

My first day on the job was working in the lily sleeving department. The first thing that all of us team members did was do stretching exercises and go over the production goals of the day.

This is what the lily sleeving line looked like. We put the lily bunch into plastic sleeves and then sent them down the line, where someone would then put the sleeved lilies in buckets of water to go into the cooler.
One thing that I learned very quickly was how fast-paced everything had to be in order to be as efficient as possible. This was a theme throughout my time at Sun Valley. What was awesome to see was how innovative people were at coming up with quicker and better ways to get a task done. The team members in the lily sleeving department were really nice and showed me their personal “tricks” on how to be quicker. I was only on the sleeving line for one week, but I felt like I made progress on becoming faster at the job.

The next week I started in the tulip greenhouse. This was probably my favorite place to work. In the beginning, I was tulip tipping. I was required to take off all the damaged leaf tips of the tulips to make them look nicer.

Here is a before and after shot. It was important to leaf tip so that it made the flower more presentable for the customer. The leaf damage was occurring from them being damaged when put in the crates. While I was at Sun Valley, new planting techniques were being applied so as to minimize the damage of each bulb.

I leaf tipped for about three days and then was put on the tulip picking crew. With a partner, I had to pick 80 stems of one variety and put the bunch into one crate. There were 10 crates per donkey (which is like a carrier), in which I would do five crates and my partner do the other five. Under normal circumstances, people had to hit the 45% mark, or 18 crates individually, every two hours for their first week of working in tulip picking. The next week, you would have to hit 68% (27 crates) every two hours. The third week you would have to be at 80% (32 crates) every two hours. These were the standards that the worker would have to meet to be able to stay on the tulip picking crew. If the requirements were not met, you would be moved to a different part of the farm. It was very stressful to try and keep up with everyone else because I didn’t want to slow them down and keep them from reaching their goal. However, just like in the sleeving department, the people I worked with were more than willing to help me out and were very nice. I stayed with this group for almost two months.
These three pictures show the donkey, what the donkey looks like when full, and then the cart that the crates go on when the go into the tulip bunching room.

A few times, I got to go out into the hydrangea hoops and cut flowers for orders. For hydrangeas, the flowers were based on head size. Grade 0 would be head sizes of 10"+, Grade 1 was 8-10", Grade 2: 6-8", Grade 3: 4-6", and Grade 5 was anything below that. As orders would come in, our crew leader would tell us the grade size, and we would go in and cut the stems of the hydrangeas to fill each order. It was hard at first depicting the head size, but after a week or so of doing this, it was easy to catch on and eyeball the size. After cutting the stems of the hydrangeas, I had to bunch the stems by color. There were five colors to sort by: blue, purple, bicolor (indigo), white, and pink. I enjoyed cutting in the hydrangea hoops and learning how to grade the flowers. I enjoyed working with the others as well because it didn’t feel like we were working. We were talking and having fun while cutting and bunching the flowers, making the day go by faster.

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I went out with a small crew and picked the calla lilies. These were probably my favorite flowers to work with. It was 150 stems per bucket, and separated by the stem length. Some callas were very tall (about 3 feet), while others were small (1-1.5 feet long). I loved working in the callas because it was easy-going and it was awesome to be surrounded by the flowers for the first 5 hours of the day. I eventually was part of the lead team because I really took the time to learn about the quality that was expected of these flowers, and got to help direct the new workers where to go, and show them how to tell whether a flower is ready to be picked or not. I enjoyed being on the lead team because I was able to become more confident in my leadership skills, as well as improve on my public speaking, which was one of my goals for my internship.

There were seven hoop houses that the callas were grown in.
In my last month, I got to work with the head grower and work in the propagation house with two other workers. What was interesting about this was that the workers were both Hispanic. The husband could speak English, but his wife could not. Working with her helped me to practice my Spanish, another goal that I had. I feel that if I would have been there for another three months, I would be able to speak Spanish fluently because I used it so much. With this small group, I worked with an automated seeder, plant hydrangeas, weed out the outdoor fields, plant ornamental kale, and go on tours with the growers. Going on the tours was my favorite part of this internship because I got to listen and talk with them about how all of the cut flowers around the entire farm were doing, and what could be improved for each crop. Part of the tours included going to the DRM meetings. At these meetings, every team leader within each crop department would come to the Production Manager's office and report what was going on in their team. Things that were discussed included safety, quality, how many tours each leader did, ideas for improvement, and the expected outcome of flowers picked/planted. It was interesting to see how close the department heads were, seeing as how the farm is close to 500 acres and very spread out. It was like a family setting. It was great to see how the management part of the farm worked as a team and came together to solve problems.

Here is a picture of the automated seeder that we used to seed hydrangeas.

At the end of my internship, I was offered a job to work as the Quality Assurance lead. This requires me to do research with vase-life testing, as well as going through all the coolers and looking for blown product. I am super excited to get back to Sun Valley to start my career as a horticulturalist.
Overall, Sun Valley was a great company to work for. This internship was easily the best thing that I have ever done. I learned so much about the different crops and how to handle them. It was great getting to meet everyone and feel welcomed, especially when I was halfway across the country from anyone that I knew. I hope that more students choose to do their internship here.

Cutting the Astilbes

My favorite calla, var. "Memories"

My favorite lily, var. "Dixie Jass"

There was a farm meeting that was required for all employees to go to every month. Lane DeVries, the owner of Sun Valley, would go through the production of each month and compare it to last year.
This is Warehouse B, where flowers are shipped from the cooler to the trucks. This is where I will be spending a majority of my time when I go out to work at Sun Valley.