

# Metrolina Greenhouses Internship Final Report

Anja Senn

As I neared my final year of undergrad, I felt I lacked a real sense of the horticultural industry. Although I gained valuable knowledge at university, I grew up in a suburban area where there weren't many resources for me to have been exposed to horticulture businesses. I felt that my lack of experience weakened my potential to get a job once I graduated. When I expressed this concern to one of my trusted professors, she handed me a brochure for the Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program through the American Floral Endowment. I went home that night and immediately applied. In a couple of months, I received notice that I had been selected for the program and had been paired up with Metrolina Greenhouses in Huntersville, NC. I would complete a 6-month internship with Metrolina as an assistant grower.

I arrived in North Carolina in mid-May and the first thing I noticed was how pleasant the weather was compared to Central Texas. My first day in the greenhouse was sunny, but cool enough to wear long sleeves in the morning. It got hotter in the summertime, but North Carolina was a beautiful place to spend six months. Spending six months working in the greenhouse also allowed me to see the changes in production as the weather shifted. I got to observe the venting and heating systems and learned how to work in any weather condition. I also got to work through full production schedules for several crops. I was mainly responsible for growing celosia, coleus, marigold, chrysanthemums, and poinsettias and I got to see these through from transplant to shipping.

As an assistant grower, the weekly duties didn't change much from crop to crop. Every week I had to gather soil samples for the lab, place and read sticky cards for pest populations, maintain the watering schedules for my section, and keep my section clean. The rest of my time was spent walking my crops to be able to check on the daily watering progress and map out what I would be watering the next day. All my watering was controlled through computer systems, but it's necessary to check these systems as they run through the day in case of breaks or clogs in the system. If the growing team didn't have any work to do that day, we would be sent to help other sections or to help ship. Shipping is hard, back-breaking work, but it can be fun every once in a while, to be able to meet people from other departments and chat while you work.

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Metrolina is not the type of business I see myself working for long-term, but I feel like I learned a lot and gained valuable experiences and working relationships while I was there. I was able to apply the knowledge I gained in school pertaining to crop identification, plant physiology, and small machine maintenance. On top of that, I gained worthwhile experiences with other horticulture professionals. One of my favorite things about my internship was my ability to interact with the international interns working at Metrolina. Because Metrolina is such a huge, well-known leader in the industry, they attract students wanting to learn from all over the world. I got to work with students from Colombia, Brazil, Vietnam, and Indonesia and was able to learn from their backgrounds and knowledge.

I returned home from my internship with a sense of accomplishment. I have accepted a future position with the USDA Farm Service Agency as a Farm Loan Assistant, and I believe my experience in production will provide me with invaluable insight into the business of horticulture. I truly believe that without the vital experience I gained through my internship with Metrolina Greenhouses I wouldn't have been able to land a job that requires such a broad awareness of agriculture and green industries. For that, I send many thanks to the kind hosts at Metrolina Greenhouses and all of the wonderful friends I made along the way. Thank you also to everyone at the American Floral Endowment and of course, Dr. Tina Cade for introducing me to such a transformative opportunity.