

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Metrolina Touts Sustainable Horticulture During Farm City Week

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In 2011, Thanksgiving week was proclaimed “Farm City Week” by President Obama, who asked Americans to “honor the individuals, families and communities who provide us the staple foods that sustain our Nation.” Great idea! It’s now celebrated across the country by groups like Cooperative Extension and Farm Bureau.

Debbie Hamrick—a North Carolina native and editor of our *NewTerrain* e-newsletter—attended a Farm City Week event at Metrolina Greenhouses in Mecklenburg County, where Abe VanWingerden spoke on November 17 at a luncheon Metrolina Greenhouses hosted with Mecklenburg County Farm Bureau and Mecklenburg County Cooperative Extension. The event cultivates relationships between agriculture and politicians, regulatory officials, agriculture-related non-profits and other VIPs.

Metrolina hosted this inaugural Farm City Week event with partners in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina’s most urbanized county, to help jump-start stronger ties and understanding between agriculture and the county’s political, regulatory and institutional infrastructure.

In his remarks, Abe focused on ways that Metrolina has built sustainability into their everyday business practices, such as recycling 7.8 million pounds of plastic from retailers last year, using rainwater harvested on property exclusively for irrigating their crop and using 100% biomass (waste wood) to fuel their boilers.

During his presentation, Abe pointed out that keeping all 4,000 of Metrolina’s seasonal and full-time employees who flow through the operation in a given year on the same page with corporate goals and the mission can be challenging.

One metric they use to keep employees in touch with core corporate values is simply to ask. Abe reported that 90% of Metrolina’s employees agree or strongly agree that they would recommend Metrolina as a good place to work. As proof, Abe added that 15 families have more than one family member working at the company.

Metrolina’s primarily East Coast customer base includes about 1,500 outlets spread among Lowe’s, Walmart and Home Depot. Fifty-four contract growers have helped them attain \$211 million in sales. And they’re in the

process of constructing 40 more acres of greenhouse in Huntersville. **GT**