

# **EAGL Delta Track Tour 2025**

## **Side-by-Side Comparison of Participant Feedback**

### **Riverbend Nurseries vs. South Central Growers**

## **1. Overall Sentiment**

### **Riverbend Nurseries**

Overall tone: Warm, relational, and story-driven. Participants left inspired by Riverbend's culture, servant leadership, and resilience after the fire and ransomware events. Feedback emphasized the human side of the business and the way values are lived out in daily operations.

Concerns: No major negative themes emerged. Suggestions were framed as opportunities to build on what is already working well, rather than criticisms.

### **South Central Growers (SCG)**

Overall tone: Highly impressed and often benchmark-oriented. Participants saw SCG as a model of operational excellence, with particular praise for quality, organization, and automation. Feedback had a strong focus on systems and performance.

Concerns: No major negative themes surfaced. Opportunities mentioned were largely incremental and strategic, focused on growth, diversification, and optimization.

## **2. Primary Strengths**

### **Riverbend Nurseries – Key Strengths**

- Servant leadership and 'flipped pyramid' culture—leaders clearly serve their people and invest deeply in them.
- Strong integration of faith and values with business decisions; authenticity and vulnerability in sharing the Riverbend story.
- Resilience in rebuilding after fire and ransomware, turning adversity into a powerful and inspiring testimony.
- Clean, organized, and attractive physical layout, especially the office/potting barn and site flow.
- Generosity of time, spirit, and community involvement, especially in and after crisis.

### **South Central Growers – Key Strengths**

- Exceptional crop quality and uniformity; plants are consistently retail-ready and high confidence for customers.
- Extremely clean, tidy, and organized facility—often described as one of the cleanest or best-organized nurseries visitors have seen.
- Thoughtful and integrated use of automation and mechanization (e.g., conveyors, ISO sticking, RFID, reusable flats).
- Strong process discipline, including audits, efficiency tracking, and ROI-based decision making for improvements.
- Knowledgeable leadership and staff, with clear communication of goals and strategies and a culture of continuous improvement.

## **3. Key Opportunities Identified**

### **Riverbend Nurseries – Main Opportunities**

- Product & market: Expand offerings of perennials, grasses, and native plants where demand supports it; continue exploring or strengthening retail/direct-to-consumer channels.
- Space and infrastructure: Explore pallet racking, more intensive land use, selective

automation, and on-site worker housing (e.g., H2A housing, trailers) as appropriate.

- Market reach and logistics: Consider box trucks and related assets to push local/regional sales more actively.
- Brand and communication: Sharpen the mission statement into a short, memorable description; post core values and servant-leadership principles visibly; lean into logo and brand elements in signage and pots.
- Story and social channels: Use social media and other platforms to share Riverbend's story and leadership philosophy more intentionally.

### **South Central Growers – Main Opportunities**

- Product mix and capacity: Explore additional short-term or shoulder-season crops following major programs (e.g., post-poinsettia).
- Market diversification and scale: Evaluate opportunities to replicate the model in a second location or new regions; continue diversifying the customer base so sales are not overly concentrated.
- Pricing and margin: In an inflationary environment, review whether pricing fully reflects the value provided; ensure freight and accessorial charges are captured and cart loss is minimized.
- Space, flow, and infrastructure: Refine yard, dock, and staging flows; consider visibility and window placement in shipping; investigate alternative substrates and other input choices where there may be advantages.
- Risk management: Continue to monitor and manage customer concentration risk and maintain contingency plans for market shifts.

## **4. What Visitors Are Taking Home**

### **Inspired by Riverbend Nurseries**

- Study servant leadership more intentionally and embed it in their own organizations.
- Invest more deliberately in culture so that employees feel valued, appreciated, and cared for.
- Reflect on resilience and crisis response, using Riverbend's story as a practical example of rebuilding and leading through hardship.
- Adopt better storytelling about their own 'why,' including faith and values where appropriate.
- Consider community engagement and generosity as strategic strengths, not afterthoughts.

### **Inspired by South Central Growers**

- Pursue additional automation and mechanization—conveyors, ISO sticking, cart tracking, reusable flats, and similar tools.
- Implement more structured, data-driven process improvement programs, including audits and ROI-based evaluations of projects.
- Revisit facility layouts, dock operations, and internal flow using SCG's discipline and clarity as a benchmark.
- Examine customer portfolios and be willing to 'part with' customers who do not fit the long-term model or margin requirements.
- Treat quality and consistency not only as operational goals but as strategic differentiators in their own markets.

## **5. High-Level Positioning – How EAGL Visitors Seem to See Each Operation**

### **Riverbend Nurseries – 'Heart and Story'**

Riverbend is primarily viewed as a powerful example of people-centered leadership, faith-based

values, and resilience. The operation itself is clean and well run, but visitors were most deeply impacted by the culture, servant leadership, and the way Riverbend rebuilt after adversity. Riverbend shows peers what kind of leader they want to be and what kind of culture they want to build.

### **South Central Growers – ‘System and Scale’**

SCG is primarily viewed as a benchmark for operational excellence. Visitors were struck by the consistency of product quality, the extreme cleanliness and organization, and the sophisticated integration of automation and data-driven decision making. SCG shows peers what a highly disciplined, scaled operation can look like and provides concrete models for process and infrastructure design.

## **6. Using This Comparison with Hosts and the EAGL Group**

For Riverbend Nurseries, the comparison highlights that their greatest impact on EAGL participants is in the realm of leadership, culture, and story. Feedback suggests that Riverbend can confidently lean into these strengths while exploring select operational and market opportunities, such as product mix, space optimization, and expanded storytelling through brand and social channels.

For South Central Growers, the comparison underscores their reputation as a model of quality and operational discipline. Feedback suggests that SCG can continue to refine its systems while keeping an eye on pricing, asset utilization, and customer diversification as strategic levers for long-term resilience.

For the EAGL Network, this side-by-side view reinforces the value of touring contrasting but complementary operations: one that exemplifies heart, story, and servant leadership, and another that exemplifies systems, scale, and operational precision. Together, Riverbend and SCG offer a holistic picture of what ‘excellence’ can look like in the nursery industry.