



# Plant Partners



# Employee Handbook

## **Plant Partners, Inc.**

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# Employee Handbook

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## Our Vision

We will use excellent leadership skills and flawless execution to exceed our customers' expectations, providing the absolute best service value with the highest level of professionalism.

## Our Mission

To be the most respected and trusted vendor partner by providing innovative solutions and the highest quality service.

## Our Values

**Trust:** Trust is the foundation of all our relationships. We are accountable to each other for openness, honesty and good faith efforts.

**Respect:** We treat each other with respect, recognizing that innovation springs from our unique perspectives.

**Integrity:** We are honest, ethical and accountable for our decisions, actions and results.

**Teamwork:** Teamwork produces more than the sum of individual efforts. Full participation and collaboration by everyone makes us stronger.

**Excellence:** We challenge ourselves every day to achieve exceptional performance. We learn from our experiences and strive to continuously improve.

**Innovation:** We reject complacency by embracing continual improvement, creativity and innovation.

## Our Commitments

**Commitment to our customers** – We are passionate about supporting our clients: their success is our primary goal and a key measure of our success.

**Commitment to our employees** – We are committed to providing opportunity for employees to develop and succeed. Each employee is valued, unique and contributes to our corporate mission.

**Commitment to our Stakeholders**– We are committed to our organization and support the vision, mission and values.

## Plant Partners Code of Conduct

We believe that good ethics and good business combine to generate the best possible long term benefits for both our employees and our customers. Business principles reflect who we are, our processes and the way we behave. We practice our core values in our daily actions to reflect our commitment to be the best at what we do. The business principles listed below cannot totally encompass all possible aspects of conduct, however through them we work together to perpetuate the ideals that make Plant Partners a great company to work with and for.

We, the members of Plant Partners, Inc., understand the personal responsibility we have to our profession, our customers and the communities we serve, do hereby commit to being ethical and professional in conduct and agree while in the course of employment with Plant Partners to:

- Behave honestly and with integrity in all aspects of our positions
- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy and without harassment
- Act with care and diligence in all aspects of our position
- Comply with all state and federal laws
- Comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the Company who has the authority to do so
- Perform all assigned tasks with the highest level of quality
- Aim to make a positive impact through business relationships
- To assist colleagues and co-workers in their professional development and to support them in this code of conduct
- Avoid real or perceived conflicts of interests whenever possible and to disclose them to the affected parties when they do exist
- To avoid real or perceived appearances of impropriety and, when they do exist, to disclose them our supervisor
- Act in good faith towards the Company and our customers
- Accept responsibility in decisions concerning the safety, health and welfare of public and property, and promptly disclose factors leading to the endangerment of such
- To seek, accept, and offer fair criticism of any work and to acknowledge and credit properly the contributions of others

*Our measure of success is the value we create for our customers,  
and we can only maximize this value if we recognize the importance  
of the trust and accountability placed on our team.*

## **1:1 Welcome to Plant Partners!**

Plant Partners is an energetic and creative group, dedicated to high standards of excellence and quality.

## **1:2 Introduction**

Plant Partners, Inc. is a family-owned company founded in 2003 by Metrolina Greenhouses in Huntersville, NC. As the premier live goods merchandising company on the East Coast, Plant Partners continually strives for and demands excellence.

The basic purpose of merchandising live goods is to help clients display plants in ways that increase sales more than enough to justify the cost of merchandising: consistent execution of merchandising techniques, product organization and maintaining high standards of product quality lead to increased sales, enhanced customer loyalty and increased shelf life of live plants.

## **1:3 Company Website**

Important information about your employment with the Company can be found on the company website at [www.plant-partners.com](http://www.plant-partners.com). We encourage all employees to log on and read this information at their earliest convenience and to use the site as a starting point for any research needed.

## **2:1 Purpose of This Handbook**

This Handbook will familiarize employees with the privileges, benefits, and responsibilities of being an employee of Plant Partners, Inc. This Handbook only highlights and summarizes our Company's policies and practices, and cannot possibly cover all situations. For any questions or if there is need for more information, contact the **Human Resource Department, at 1-888-628-3958 ext. 202.**

Plant Partners reserves the right to make changes to any of the policies, procedures and other statements made in this Handbook at any time. Any of the statements in this Handbook should not be construed as any contract or any promise of employment, and there are no guarantees of continuation of any policies. The policies can change at any time, for any reason and without warning.

## **2:2 Employment At Will**

Plant Partners cannot make any guarantee about any continued employment with the Company. This handbook, or any other company document, does not infer to any contractual right, expressed or implied, to remain in the Company's employ. Nor does this document guarantee any fixed terms or conditions of employment. Employment is "at will", is not for any specific time, and may be terminated "at will", with or without cause and without prior notice by the company, or an employee may resign for any reason at any time, with or without notice.

No Company representative other than the Merchandising Director has the authority to change the at-will employment relationship or to contract with any employee for different terms of employment. Furthermore, the Merchandising Director can only change the at-will employment relationship with a written contract, signed by him/her and the employee.

### **3:1 Equal Employment Opportunity**

We are committed to providing equal opportunity in all of our employment practices including selection, hiring, promotion, transfer and compensation to all qualified applicants and employees without regard to race, color, religion, sex/gender, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability and any other status protected by law. If you are an individual with a disability and you desire an accommodation of any kind, please let the Human Resources Department know. We will be happy to assist you as required by law.

Our non-discrimination policy also extends to our customers. Every customer is to be treated with consideration and respect regardless of their race, color, religion, sex/gender, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability or any other status protected by law. Failure to comply with this policy is grounds for immediate dismissal.

### **3:2 Harassment**

It is our policy to provide our employees with a workplace free of harassment of any nature. Harassment, either sexual, physical and/or verbal, undermines our workplace morale and our pledge to treat each employee with dignity and respect. Accordingly, harassment of any nature will not be tolerated.

Sexual harassment can take many forms, including but not limited to any physical contact or other unwanted touching, posting offensive cartoons or pictures, using slurs or other derogatory terms, telling offensive or lewd jokes and stories, and sending email messages with offensive content. An unwanted sexual advance, requests for sexual favors, sexually suggestive gestures, jokes, propositions, email messages, or other communications all may constitute a form of sexual harassment.

If an employee experiences or witnesses any form of harassment in the workplace, they should immediately notify the Human Resources Department. The Company will not retaliate or allow retaliation against any person who reports any harassment, assists in a harassment investigation or files an administrative charge or a lawsuit alleging harassment. In addition, all managers are required to immediately report any incidents of harassment to the Human Resource Department.

### **3:3 Americans With Disabilities Act**

The Company is committed to complying with all applicable provisions of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). It is the Company's policy not to discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant with regard to any employment opportunity because of such individual's disability or perceived disability, so long as the employee can perform the necessary and essential functions of the position. In accordance with this non-discrimination, the Company will provide reasonable accommodations to a qualified individual with any type disability, as defined by the ADA, who has made the Company aware of his or her disability, provided that such accommodation does not constitute an undue hardship on the Company.

### **3:4 Proof of Work Eligibility**

In compliance with Federal laws, Plant Partners participates in E-Verify. Employees will be required to complete Federal Form I-9 and to show documentation proving both identity and eligibility to work in the United States. Plant Partners will retain this information in a confidential and secure manner in accordance with any state or federal laws and guidelines.

### **3:5 Child Support Reporting Requirements**

Federal and state laws require Plant Partners to report any basic information about new employees, including name, address, and Social Security number, to a state agency called the State Directory of New Hires. The state collects this information to enforce child support orders. If the state determines that you owe child support, it will send us an order requiring us to withhold money from your paycheck to pay your child support obligations.

#### **4:1 Background Checks**

To ensure that Plant Partners continues to hire the best possible candidates, the Company may check the employment references of the selected applicant prior to extending a job offer.

Plant Partners will also conduct a criminal background check on all new hire candidates. Once a hiring decision has been made regarding interest in an applicant, the offer will be contingent upon the satisfactory completion of background checks and/or reference checks. Reference results and background results will be held in strictest confidence. Background checks may include any of the following: Consumer Reports Checks, Investigative Reports Checks, Criminal Records Checks, Sex Offender Registry Checks, Inmate Records Checks, Motor Vehicle Records Checks, and any available Public Records Checks.

Subsequent background checks may be executed at any time during the employee's tenure with the company to meet our contractual obligations to our clients.

#### **4:2 Temporary Employee Status**

Individuals hired to work on projects of a limited duration are classified as temporary employees and are not eligible to participate in any of our Company funded benefit programs, nor can they earn or accrue any leave, such as vacation leave or sick leave. However, we will provide to temporary employees any and all benefits mandated by law.

#### **4:3 Employee Reference Requests**

Plant Partners' employees may not issue reference letters for any current or former employee without the written permission of the Human Resource Department. Under no circumstances should any Plant Partners employee release any information about any current or former Plant Partners employee over the telephone. All telephone inquiries regarding any current or former employee must be referred to the Human Resources Department.

In response to an outside request for information regarding a current or former employee, it is the policy of the Company for the Human Resources Department to verify only the employee's name, dates of employment, job title, department and re-hire status. No other information will be released without the expressed written consent of the employee, except as required by law.

#### **4:4 Outside Communication**

Matters relating to our company and/or our customers must not be discussed with representatives of the media or any potential clients unless you are specifically authorized to do so as a part of your role in the company.

#### **4:5 Conflicts of Interest**

Outside employment is permissible, however we do not allow employees to engage in any activities or relationships that could create an actual or potential conflict of interest. Although it is not feasible to list each activity or relationship that could create any actual or potential conflict of interest, some examples of activities that could violate this policy include the following:

- Working for a competitor, customer or other vendor in any capacity
- Using the resources of this Company for personal gain
- Using your position in this Company for personal gain

Employees who violate this policy face disciplinary action, to be determined by the Company.

#### **4:6 Outside Employment**

Employees are requested to obtain approval from Human Resource Department before participating in outside work activities. The Company does not intend to inhibit your right to obtain and hold additional employment, however we reserve the right to determine any reasonable accommodations that may be applicable. Approval will generally be granted unless the activity directly conflicts with the Company's overall interests. Although it is not feasible to list all scenarios which may be in question, examples of outside work activities that are not allowed are when they:

- prevent the employee from fully performing work for which he or she is employed at the Company, including working scheduled days and/or times;
- involve organizations which are doing or seeking to do business with the Company, including actual or potential vendors or customers;
- Directly violate provisions of law or the Company's policies or rules
- working for another vendor or service group which also provides services to our customers (Lowe's, Home Depot and/or Walmart).

#### **4:7 Corporate Opportunities and Intellectual Property**

Plant Partners employees may not take for themselves personally any opportunities that are discovered through the use of corporate property, information or position, or use company property, information or property for personal gain.

#### **4:8 Confidentiality and Trade Secrets**

Plant Partners employees may not improperly disclose sensitive information, confidential information or proprietary information, whether by purpose or inadvertently, to anyone, either inside or outside of the Company. Disclosing information can occur by communicating, either verbally, electronically or in writing with people who work for our clients' competition or Plant Partners' direct competition. When employees are approached by anyone who is not directly affiliated with our client with whom they are working, they should refrain from sharing confidential information and refer them to the Human Resource Department. After leaving this Company, employees are still prohibited from disclosing personnel, personal, confidential and proprietary information pertaining to the Company. If an employee does disclose information, the Company can seek legal remedies.

#### **4:9 Employment of Relatives**

Plant Partners will not refuse to hire someone simply because he or she is related to one of our current employees, however the Company does not allow employees to be directly supervised by a relative who is currently employed by the company

If two employees become related while working for this Company and one of them is in a position of supervision over the other, only one of the employees will be allowed to keep their current position.

Under this policy, the term "relatives" will encompass husbands, wives, live-in partners, parents, children, siblings, in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles. This policy covers biological relationships, marriage relationships, and step relationships.

#### **4:10 Romantic or Sexual Relationships**

For the best interests of the Company, Plant Partners strongly discourages relationships of a romantic or sexual nature between a supervisor and an employee directly under his/her supervision. The Company does not intend to inhibit the social interaction that can be an important part or extension of the working environment. If a situation such as this arises, it is the responsibility and obligation of the supervisor to promptly disclose the relationship to the Human Resources Department. Upon being informed of or learning of the existence of such a relationship, the Company may take all steps that, in its discretion, are deemed appropriate.

#### **4:11 Acceptance of Gifts**

No employee may solicit or accept gifts (i.e., lunch, tickets, etc.), lavish entertainment or other benefits of any value from potential or actual customers, suppliers and/or competitors. Special care must be taken to avoid even the smallest appearance of impropriety.

#### **4:12 Fraud/Theft**

Plant Partners will not tolerate fraud or theft of any nature, including time fraud.

#### **4:13 Open Door Reporting Procedure**

In an effort to maintain a positive work environment, Plant Partners has an open door policy. If the employee has any questions or concerns, they should be discussed immediately with the supervisor. If for any reason an employee does not feel comfortable discussing the matter with their supervisor, they should raise the issue with any Company official.

### **5:1 Personnel Files**

All employee information is retained in a confidential and secure manner in accordance with all state or federal laws and guidelines.

### **5:2 Information Changes**

The information in employee personnel file is used to take actions on behalf of the employee, therefore it is important that the information in that file remain accurate. Please notify a member of the Human Resources Department immediately whenever any of the following changes occur:

- name
- mailing address (If you travel to multiple locations with the same day, you must notify the company with 48 hours of a personal address change.)
- phone number
- marital status
- change in dependents or number of dependents designated for income tax withholding
- change in the name and phone number of whom we should notify in case of an emergency
- any life status change for insurance purposes (if required), restrictions on your driver's license or lack of auto insurance coverage (if required).

### **5:3 Medical Records**

In accordance to HIPPA federal guidelines, we do not place any records pertaining to medical needs or insurance coverage in employee personnel file. All medical records are kept in a separate and secure manner.

### **5:4 Time and Attendance Records**

In accordance with all federal and state laws and rules, all attendance records are kept for the required period of time. The attendance records of all employees are recorded daily through a computerized IVR system. These attendance records are Company records used for payroll calculations.

### **5:5 Records Requests**

Current employees who request to review their personnel file must make an appointment with the Human Resources Department between the hours of 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. We will make every effort to give an employee an appointment within 48 hours. If an employee would like a representative to view his or her file, the employee must make the request in writing and also be present at the time of the appointment.

Former employees who would like to review their files must make a written request to do so. Current or former employees are not permitted to photocopy their file.

## **6:1 Job Performance**

Each and every employee of Plant Partners contributes to the success or failure of our Company. We expect everyone to perform to the highest level possible. Poor job performance can lead to disciplinary measures, to be determined by the Company.

In order to attract and retain a highly qualified and competent work force, Plant Partners has instituted a performance management program to compensate employees in a fair and equitable manner based upon demonstrated job performance and in accordance with its Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. Through this program, employees receive constructive work reviews designed to address performance and skill developmental needs and interests. These performance reviews do not imply or promise any commitments for a salary or hourly rate increase at any time, and there is no guarantee of any rate change.

## **6:2 Performance Management Program Schedule**

Because our employees' performance is vital to our success, we hope that, through these reviews, our employees will learn what we expect of them and we will learn what they expect of us. We require all employees to participate in this review process.

Employees may receive constructive work reviews on the following schedule:

Full-Time Salary Exempt Employees:

- a. 90-day work review upon new hire or change in position
- b. Annual work and salary review, completed by the first full pay period in September

Under normal and appropriate circumstances, employees should receive a performance review annually. If an employee's job responsibilities change substantially at any time after the annual work review, however, another review will be performed before the next annual review, 90 days after the new assignment has begun. There is no implied promise or commitment to any wage increases during or after a performance review.

## **6:3 Hours of Work**

Our Company's business is normally conducted during the times from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm, 7 days per week however the normal start time may be adjusted when appropriate during certain times of the year. We do not allow employees to start their shift prior to, or end the shift after these hours without the stated permission of our Merchandising Director.

All employees are expected to be on the job site, ready to start work, at the time they are scheduled. Supervisors are to inform employees of their work schedule, including start and finish time each day. If schedule changes are desired, the employee must discuss with their supervisor, and, although the Company will try to consider all requests, we cannot guarantee that any particular request will be granted.

## **6:4 Meals and Breaks**

Employees are allowed a paid 15-minute break during their shift after 2 hours of work. Paid breaks must be taken on the immediate job site (**within the store**). Employees are forbidden to leave the job site while clocked in: they are required clock out if they leave the job site. Failure to follow this policy could lead to discipline, to be determined by the Company.

Employees who are scheduled for more than 6 hours in a day are required to take a lunch break of a minimum of 30 minutes at mid shift. Meal breaks are unpaid, and employees must clock out for lunch periods. Failure to follow these policies could be viewed and determined to be time fraud and may lead to immediate termination.

## **6:5 Orientation**

Employees will be given an Orientation to the job on their first day of work. Compensation for time spent in Orientation will be included in the current payroll cycle at the employee's regular rate of pay with the following exceptions:

- If an employee completes an Orientation, but works four hours or less in their first payroll period, compensation for their time will be held until their next payroll period.
- If an employee completes an Orientation of four hours or less, then fails to return to work, they will not be reimbursed for the time spent in the Orientation.

## **6:6 Pay Day**

Plant Partners' work weeks are 7 days, Sunday-Saturday. Employees are paid on a bi-weekly basis for the preceding 2 weeks worked. We do not hold checks or hours to pay at the end of employment. Pay will be deposited on Friday of every other week. If a payday falls on a holiday, employees will receive pay on the last workday immediately prior to the payday.

A statement of earnings indicating gross pay, taxes and any deductions will be available to each employee via [www.plant-partners.com](http://www.plant-partners.com).

## **6:7 Payment of Wages**

Employees are paid only through direct deposit at their bank of choice that has direct deposit capability. To activate direct deposit, a Direct Deposit Authorization must be completed online and filled out to its entirety. If there are any questions on how to fill out the form, employees may seek the help of a representative from their bank or by calling the Human Resources Department.

In the event of a lost or miss-directed pay deposit, the Human Resources Department must be notified in writing as soon as possible before a replacement check can be issued.

Employees must submit any time punch corrections to their supervisor within 24 hours of occurrence.

## **6:8 Payroll Deductions**

Payroll deposits reflect the total employee earnings for the pay period, as well as any mandatory or voluntary deductions. Mandatory deductions are deductions that the company is legally required to take such as federal income tax, Social Security tax (FICA) and any other applicable state taxes. Voluntary deductions are deductions authorized by the employee.

If you wish to change your withholding form (Form W-4), complete your change forms online at [www.plant-partners.com](http://www.plant-partners.com).

## **6:9 Wage Garnishments**

Wage garnishments are ordered from a court or government agency to pay child support, spousal support or alimony, tax debts, outstanding student loans or money owed as a result of a judgment in a civil lawsuit. Please note that the Company is legally required to comply with these orders.

If we are instructed by a court or agency to garnish wages, the employee will be notified of the garnishment immediately. The employee must contact the court or issuing agency to dispute or question the amount of a garnishment. Plant Partners will not discontinue the wage garnishment until completion of garnishment or unless directly contacted by the department who authorized the garnishment.

## 6:10 Overtime

On occasion, we may ask employees to work beyond their regular scheduled hours. We will try to give advance notice when overtime work is necessary, however it will not always be possible.

Nonexempt employees are entitled to payment for overtime, according to the rules set forth below:

- **All overtime work must be approved in advance by the employee's supervisor.** Working overtime without prior permission violates Company policy and may result in disciplinary action.
- For purposes of calculating the number of hours an employee has worked in a week, our work week begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday.
- Non-exempt employees will be paid 1½ times their regular hourly rate of pay for every hour worked in excess of 40 hours. Only time actually spent working counts as hours worked. Vacation time, sick days, holidays, or other paid time during which an employee did not actually work will not count as hours worked in the computation of overtime.

## 6:11 Expense Reimbursement

From time to time, employees may incur expenses on behalf of Plant Partners, Inc. The Company will reimburse employees for actual work-related expenses incurred, as long as those expenses are reasonable and approved by the employee's supervisor. Employees must follow these procedures to get reimbursed:

- Get permission from their supervisor **before** incurring an expense
- Keep a receipt or some other proof of payment for every expense
- The purpose of purchase and any related info needs to be written on receipt
- Submit the receipt for payment within 30 days of expense

### Procedures for Travel Expenses

If employees are required to travel beyond their normal scope of duty and area for work, the Company will reimburse for travel expenses, including:

- the cost of travel to and from, including parking expenses and tolls
- the cost of airline or train tickets or an economy rental car, if necessary and approved
- the cost of lodging, keeping safety and moderation in mind, depending on location (the company reserves the right to determine the amount of an approved expense)
- the cost of meals, up to and no more than, a per diem limit of \$40/day

Employees must request advance approval of all travel expenses from their supervisor and follow the procedures above to have their travel expenses reimbursed.

## 6:12 Mileage and Drive Time

Plant Partners has certain job classifications who are allowed to claim mileage and drive time as part of their benefit package. Employees in these job classifications will be reimbursed these expenses for mileage every four weeks. Any other approved expenses will be included with this payment if the receipts are turned in on time. Travel time will be added to the normal work hours submitted during each 2 week work cycle.

### Drive Time Reimbursement

If eligible hourly employees are required to travel during their normal scope of duty and area for work, they will be compensated by the Company for required drive time at the same rate of pay as for standard work.

- Drive time is reimbursed when an employee is required to travel to multiple locations in a day.
- Drive time includes all travel time beyond the first assigned location.
- Drive time is calculated using a computerized mileage/travel time program. Any discrepancies in this program will be researched and corrected immediately, if it is warranted and with proper notification. Grievances can be filed by contacting the Human Resources Department.

## 6:12 Mileage and Drive Time, continued

### Drive Time Reimbursement

If eligible hourly employees are required to travel during their normal scope of duty and area for work, they will be compensated by the Company for required drive time at the same rate of pay as for standard work.

- Drive time is reimbursed when an employee is required to travel to multiple locations in a day.
- Drive time includes all travel time beyond the first assigned location.
- Drive time is calculated using a computerized mileage/travel time program. Any discrepancies in this program will be researched and corrected immediately, if it is warranted and with proper notification. Grievances can be filed by contacting the Human Resources Department.
- Drive time is included in any calculations for the computation of overtime pay.

Drive time between work sites is considered as time worked, and as such will be treated with the utmost care in making sure employees are being fairly and consistently paid for their time.

### Mileage Reimbursement

If eligible employees are required to travel during their normal scope of duty and area for work, they will be reimbursed by the Company for mileage at the rate per mile currently used by Plant Partners. Employees are not entitled to receive separate reimbursement for gas, maintenance, insurance or other vehicle-related expenses, as the reimbursement rate above is intended to encompass all of these expenses.

Mileage is reimbursed for door to door travel distance, **less 40 miles per day** of travel distance. Travel distance is calculated using a computerized mileage/travel time program. Any discrepancies in this program will be researched and corrected immediately, if it is warranted and with proper notification. Grievances can be filed by contacting the Human Resources Department.

## **7:1 Professional Behavior**

Our employees' behavior toward our customers and vendors influences the success of our Company. We expect you to act in a professional manner whenever you are on Company or our Client's property, conducting Company business or representing the Company at business or social functions.

Although it is impractical to give an all-inclusive list of everything that professional conduct means, it does at a minimum include the following:

- following all of the rules in this Handbook which apply to you
- refraining from rude, offensive, or outrageous behavior
- treating co-workers, customers, and vendors with patience, respect, and consideration
- being courteous and helpful to others
- communicating openly with supervisors, managers and co-workers

Individuals who act unprofessionally will face discipline, to be determined by the Company. It is impractical for us to list every instance of behavior that we would expect you to follow, so please use general acceptable social standards as a starting point when deciding whether something is right or wrong.

## **7:2 Progressive Discipline**

Plant Partners expects our employees to be mature, reasonable and behave in a businesslike manner that is appropriate to the workplace. Occasionally employees fail to meet or have some difficulty meeting their obligations. The handling of a particular situation and/or action to be taken in a particular situation will be determined at the sole discretion of Plant Partners.

Any employee conduct which in the opinion of the Company interferes with or adversely affects our business is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action. Disciplinary action may range from oral or written warnings, as well as, immediate discharge. Our general policy is to take disciplinary steps in the following order:

1. Oral warning
2. Written reprimand
3. Suspension
4. Termination

However, we reserve the right to alter the order described above, to skip steps, or to create new and or additional steps as needed or warranted at our sole discretion.

## **7:3 Employee Appearance and Dress**

Plant Partners has a traditional business attire dress code that takes into consideration the nature of the work we perform. We ask all employees to use their common sense when dressing for work and to wear attire that is professional and appropriate. We also expect our employees to maintain a neat and clean appearance at all times.

The following list is a guideline of what attire is appropriate and inappropriate. Please keep in mind that our clients may also have a dress code policy that may be more stringent than ours, and we must comply with each client's requirements.

All employees are expected to comply with this dress code.

### **APPROVED**

- T-shirts (solid colors only), with sleeves
- Walking shorts (no cutoffs, no jean shorts)
- Sturdy work boots or hiking boots which cover the ankles and have slip-resistant soles
- Clean denim jeans and or Khaki colored work pants

## **Employee Appearance and Dress, continued**

### **NOT APPROVED**

- Short shorts (must be no higher than 3" above the knee)
- Logo clothing or other advertising logos (sport teams, cartoon characters)
- Sandals or other slip on shoes, sneakers
- Halter-tops and muscle t-shirts, T-shirts with sleeves rolled up

Employees who report to work in inappropriate attire will be asked to leave work for the entire day, and the event will be documented for future consideration.

### **7:4 Punctuality and Attendance**

You are important to the effective operation of this business, and when you are not here at expected times or on expected days, someone else must do your job or delay doing his or her own job while waiting for you to arrive. As a result, we expect you to keep regular attendance and to be on time and ready to work on your schedule days and times.

Occasionally, things will happen that will prevent you from being able to arrive at work on time. If you are going to be more than 15 minutes late, call your immediate supervisor. If you cannot reach this person, call the Human Resource Department. Please give this notice as far in advance as possible.

If you are late for work or fail to appear without calling in as required by this or other policies in this Handbook, you will face disciplinary action, including possible termination.

### **7:5 Relatives in the Workplace**

It is inappropriate for minor children and other minor relatives of employees to be in the workplace during working hours. This policy has been implemented to minimize risk of harm to children, potential liability to the Company and our clients, and decreased employee productivity due to distractions.

As necessary, managers and supervisors may grant leave at their discretion in emergency or unforeseen circumstances.

### **7:6 Terms for Dismissal:**

The following is a list that includes, but is not limited to reasons for immediate dismissal per Plant Partners' policy. This stipulates unacceptable behavior both during and after work hours.

- Fighting, either physical or verbal
- Threatening, abusive or vulgar language
- Continuous unauthorized absences
- Possessing alcohol or illegal drugs on Client property.
- Being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while on Client property.
- Damage or destruction of Vendor or Client property or malicious conduct of any nature.
- Bringing personal firearms and/or weapons onto Client property.
- Engaging in theft of Client property.
- Time fraud of any nature, including not taking lunches as required.
- Insubordination or belligerence towards supervisors, any fellow employees or the Client's employees. Not following direction is considered as insubordination.
- Sexual harassment towards any customer, Company employee or Client's employee.

## 8:1 Drug and Alcohol Policy

Plant Partners, Inc. as a condition for initial and continued employment, prohibits its employees from reporting to work or performing their duties with any unlawful drugs or alcohol in their system. Employees also are prohibited from using, possessing, manufacturing, distributing, or making arrangements to distribute unlawful drugs or alcohol while at work, off site at training or meetings, in our offices (including in personal vehicles onsite), or during meal periods. Further, Plant Partners, Inc. prohibits all use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs, whether on or off duty, as drugs can stay in one's system and affect your work later.

To enforce this policy, Plant Partners, Inc. may, at any time where lawful, require as a condition of employment, any employee to submit to a physical examination and/or urine, breath, blood or other type of test to determine the presence of drugs or alcohol in his or her system. All drug testing will comply with the North Carolina Controlled Substances Examination Regulation Act.

The possible occasions for drug and alcohol testing include, but are not limited to:

1. When Plant Partners, Inc. has a reasonable suspicion that an employee has violated the Drug and Alcohol Policy;
2. When an employee suffers an on-the-job reportable injury or is involved in an accident;
3. When an employee seeks a transfer or promotion, or returns from a suspension or a leave of absence;
4. Or, as part of any random program of testing which Plant Partners, Inc. may implement.

Existing employees will be tested at an approved laboratory. We provide individuals to be tested with information on their responsibility and rights. If an individual tests positive, the individual may request a re-test of the original sample. The individual must pay all reasonable costs associated with the re-test. The employee may select any state-approved laboratory to conduct the re-test. When a positive test result occurs, Plant Partners, Inc. will provide the individual tested with a copy of the test results and information on re-testing. Plant Partners, Inc. provides this information within thirty (30) days of receiving the test results.

Employees who refuse to submit to a test, or test positive for alcohol or unlawful drugs may be disqualified for unemployment compensation benefits. Employees who refuse to submit to a test or who test positive for alcohol or unlawful drugs following a workplace injury may be disqualified for workers compensation benefits.

Although the proper use of medication is not prohibited, employees should consult with a physician and their supervisor when he or she is legitimately taking medication that he or she has reason to believe may affect safety or performance. Any prescription medication brought onto Plant Partners, Inc. property must be retained in its original container labeled with the name of the employee and the prescribing physician. No employee may take another person's medication. The law treats the abuse of prescription medication as unlawful drug use.

In order to protect the safety and property of all employees, we reserve the right to inspect employees' motor vehicles and any other personal belongings brought onto Plant Partners, Inc.'s property or job sites. Failure to cooperate with such inspections is a violation of this policy.

Violation of the drug and alcohol policy, includes: (1) a test indicating being under the influence of alcohol or the presence of unlawfully used drugs in an employee's system; (2) refusal to cooperate with Plant Partners, Inc. in any test, search or investigation, or failure to execute any paperwork or consent forms necessary for examinations or tests; (3) possession of, distribution of, or consumption of unlawful or abused drugs, unauthorized alcohol, or drug paraphernalia; (4) tampering with or adulterating a test sample; or (5) unlawful conduct related to illegal drug use either on or off duty will result in discipline, including immediate discharge of current employees or disqualification of an applicant.

**8:1 Drug and Alcohol Policy, continued**

If you are terminated due to a violation of this policy, you may reapply for employment after 30 days. If the company chooses to re-hire you, you will be subjected to monthly drug tests at your cost for the first twelve months of employment. If there is a drug test violation during this time period, immediate dismissal will follow without an opportunity for rehire.

## **9:1 Involuntary Separation**

Plant Partners, Inc. reserves the right under employment-at-will to terminate any employee at any time when it considers the termination to be in the best interests of the company. When feasible, employees will be given warning that they are in jeopardy of losing their position. Involuntary terminations could occur as a result of lack of work or performance, corporate restructuring or for unacceptable personal conduct. Employees may appeal an involuntary termination using the Company's normal grievance policy and procedure.

Reasons for an involuntary termination may include, but are not restricted to:

- Misrepresentation on employment application
- Chronic absenteeism
- Insubordination
- Intentional, wrongful, or unlawful misconduct
- Time Fraud
- Theft

## **9:2 Voluntary Separation**

Resignation is a voluntary act initiated by the employee to separate employment from the Company. The employee should provide a minimum of two (2) weeks notice prior to the last day of employment. If an employee does not provide advance notice or fails to actually work the remaining two weeks, the employee will not be eligible for rehire and will not receive any accrued benefits, if eligible. In the event the notice falls over a holiday, the company will reserve the right to end employment prior to the actual holiday.

## **9:3 Job Abandonment**

Employees who fail to report to work or contact their supervisor for three (3) consecutive scheduled workdays shall be considered to have abandoned the job without notice, to be effective at the end of their normal shift on the third day. The supervisor shall notify the Human Resource Department at the expiration of the third workday to initiate the required paperwork to terminate the employee. Employees who are separated involuntarily due to job abandonment are ineligible to receive accrued benefits and are ineligible for rehire.

## **9:4 Lay Off**

In the event that scheduled staff exceeds staffing needs, a supervisor may need to reduce hours temporarily or permanently, depending on the current and future needs. Because of the seasonality of our business these workforce reductions can be made at any time, based on the needs of the Company and our customers.

## **9:5 Final Paychecks**

Final paychecks will be issued on the next regularly scheduled payroll deposit day. The final paycheck will include all compensation earned by the employee and not paid through the date of termination. Final paychecks will also include any accrued time off if the criteria is met for payment of such.

Generally, Plant Partners does not pay any severance to terminated employees, whether they quit, are laid off or are fired for any reason, however, we reserve the right to pay severance to a terminated employee. Decisions about severance pay will be made on a case by case basis and are entirely within the discretion of Plant Partners. No employee has a right to severance pay and should not expect to receive it.

## **9:6 Return of Company Property**

All employees are expected to take proper care of Company property and to use appropriately. When employment with this Company ends, employees are expected to return all company property. This includes all manuals and guides, documents, tools, phones, computers and equipment. The Company reserves the right to take any lawful action to recover or protect our property.

## **10:1 Workers' Compensation Insurance**

Plant Partners is committed to providing a safe work environment and trains employees on all aspects of the job which can contribute to potential injuries. However, if an employee suffers from an illness or injury related to work, they may be eligible for workers' compensation benefits. Workers' compensation will potentially pay for medical care and lost wages resulting from job-related illnesses or injuries.

If an employee is injured or becomes ill through work, they are expected to inform their supervisor immediately (if able to do so) regardless of how minor the injury or illness might be. Failure to report any injury in a timely fashion may result in non-payment of claim and could result in termination from the company for not following procedure. Plant Partners provides a list of approved hospital and doctors to visit in case of injury.

## **10:2 Unemployment Insurance**

If employment with our Company ends for any reason, employees may be eligible for unemployment benefits to provide a percentage of past wages while unemployed and looking for work. To find out more, contact the local state employment agency.

## **10:3 Leave of Absence without Pay**

Should a situation arise that temporarily prevents an employee from working, he/she may be eligible for a personal Leave of Absence without pay.

An employee must have been employed for at least three months prior to the requested leave. Any request for leave of absence without pay must be submitted in writing to the immediate supervisor as far in advance as possible and it will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the supervisor and the Human Resources Department. In order to maintain any health insurance during unpaid leave, the employee is solely responsible for any premiums due at the first of the month after the first 30 days of the approved leave.

## **10:4 Family and Medical Leave**

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide eligible employees with unpaid leave. There are two types of unpaid leave available, including the basic 12-week leave entitlement, as well as military leave entitlements. Employees who have worked for our Company for at least a full year, and have worked at least 1250 hours during that time, are eligible to take unpaid family and medical leave for acceptable reasons.

Please contact the Human Resources Department for information concerning the requirements for leave eligibility under the FMLA, the manner in which FMLA leave is calculated and employee rights and obligations with regard to FMLA leave.

## **10:5 Extended Leave**

Eligible employees who have exhausted their family/medical leave and all other employees may be allowed to take an extended medical leave of absence, not to exceed 180 days following the last day worked. Employees must provide verification of medical need upon request. Employees who take such extended medical leave are not guaranteed to be returned to work or reinstatement to a particular job or rate of pay at the end of their leave. However, Plant Partners will attempt to return employees to their regular position or in a similar job for which they are qualified, if such job is available.

Employees on extended medical leave may maintain their insurance benefits, subject to policy terms and conditions by paying the applicable COBRA premiums in a timely manner. Employees on extended medical leave do not accrue any additional employee benefits such as vacation pay while on extended medical leave.

**10:6 Military Leave**

Employees who require time off from work to fulfill military duties will be treated in accordance with applicable requirements of state and federal laws. Employees are expected to notify their supervisor of upcoming military duty by providing a copy of orders as soon as possible. This leave is not paid.

**10:7 Conditions of Wage Benefits**

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) does not require payment for time not worked, such as vacations, sick leave, holidays or other benefits offered by the employer. These benefits are a matter of agreement between an employer and an employee (or their representative).

## **11:1 Safety Policy**

Our Company takes employee safety very seriously. In order to provide a safe workplace for everyone, every employee must follow our safety rules which include:

- Employees must follow their supervisors' safety instructions and follow any client-mandated safety procedures.
- Employees must wear only appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Employees are prohibited from wearing dangling jewelry or apparel, and may be required to pull back or cover their hair for safety purposes.
- All safety equipment must be used properly. Do not use equipment for other than its intended purpose.
- All employees must immediately report to their supervisor any workplace condition that they believe to be unsafe.
- All employees must immediately report any workplace accident or injury to their area supervisor or the Human Resources Department.

Plant Partners has a nationwide database of doctors and hospitals who work with Workers Compensation claims. Unless the need is of an emergency nature, for example, broken bones, profuse bleeding or unconsciousness, it is expected that any employee whom is hurt will call their immediate supervisor or a member of the Human Resources Department to obtain the address and phone number of the nearest clinic in our database.

## **11:2 Emergency Procedure**

In case of emergency or accident, your first priority should be your own safety. In the event of any emergency causing serious injuries, immediately dial 911 to alert the necessary authorities.

## **11:3 Workplace Security**

It is every employee's responsibility to help keep themselves and their fellow employees safe from unnecessary harm. Plant Partners has initiated normal hours of operation to try to keep our employees free from harm by not putting them in an area of work too early or too late in the day. Although there are many precautions that can be taken, the most important one is for each employee to always be aware of their surroundings, to keep an eye out for any peculiar behavior by others and to help minimize any situation that may lead to getting out of control.

## **11:4 Inclement Weather**

During inclement weather conditions, Plant Partners does not want employees to take unnecessary risks in travelling to work or in transit from work to home. The following policy has been adopted concerning working during, and taking time off for, inclement weather:

### Hourly Employees:

Hourly employees who do not feel comfortable in driving to/from work during inclement weather have the following options:

- If they choose not to work, they will not be paid in accordance of FLSA guidelines for hours not worked.
- If they choose not to work or leave work early, they have the option to re-schedule at a later time with their managers approval.
- The employee must notify their supervisor if they are unable to work their assigned schedule.
- If they choose to work, they will be paid for all hours worked.

## **12:1 Employee Benefit Plans**

As part of our commitment to our employees and their well-being, Plant Partners provides certain classifications of employees with a variety of benefit plans. Due to space constraints, we cannot provide the details of each plan in this document, and because these benefits are subject to change from time to time, it is not practical to keep this handbook updated. Employees receive official plan documents for each of the benefit plans that the Company offers at the time of eligibility. Those documents (along with any updates provided by the Company) should be your primary resource for information about benefit plans.

## **12:2 Health Care Benefits**

The Company provides the following health care benefits to qualified classifications: medical, dental, vision and short term disability. Employees who are eligible and have not already received detailed plan documents about each of these benefits should contact the Human Resources Department. As with all of the policies in this Handbook, health care coverage may change at any time. For the most up-to-date information about health care benefits, refer to the plan documents or call the Human Resources Department.

Salaried exempt supervisors are eligible for insurance immediately upon employment. If an eligible employee chooses not to accept insurance coverage, the use of cash benefits or payroll increases are not permitted to replace the Company contribution towards insurance benefits.

In order to maintain continuous health insurance benefits all eligible employees must work to maintain an average minimum of 30 hours per week of paid time during any rotating 12 week cycle of continuous work eligibility. If an employee does not maintain this average there is a possibility that benefits will be withdrawn and the position forfeited.

## **12:3 Holidays**

Our Company observes the following 6 (six) holidays during each calendar year: New Years Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. If a holiday falls on a weekend, the Company will inform you when the holiday will be observed.

All eligible employees are entitled to receive 8 hours of pay for each observed holiday. Paid Holiday benefits begin immediately in the eligible position. For these employees, certain conditions must be met to be eligible for Holiday pay to be paid. They include: working for a minimum of 6 hours of in store time on the last scheduled business day prior to the observed holiday day and the first scheduled business day after the observed holiday. All holiday schedules must be in writing and must be approved by the immediate supervisor. Vacation and time off requests must be approved at least two (2) weeks prior to the observed holiday. A Company calendar is issued at the beginning of each year.

## **12:4 Bereavement Leave**

Plant Partners offers eligible employee classifications to take up to 2 days of paid leave during the immediate week after the death of an immediate family member to attend funeral services or to make arrangements. This leave will not count against any vacation or personal time off accrued for use in the current year. Immediate family members include mother, father, step-parents, siblings, step-siblings, children and step-children. To meet eligibility requirements for payment of bereavement leave, the employee must attend the funeral of the deceased relative..

The Company will consider, on a case-by-case basis, requests for bereavement leave for the death of someone who does not qualify as an immediate family member under this policy. Employees have the option of using PTO time or unpaid leave in the event paid leave is not approved. The bereavement pay benefit begins immediately upon the first day of employment.

## 12:5 Jury Duty

If you are called for jury duty, you are entitled to take time off as necessary to fulfill your jury obligations. This leave will be paid up to the period of 7 days. If your service extends beyond this period, the remainder of your leave will be unpaid. No employee will face discipline or retaliation for jury service. Jury Duty benefits begin immediately upon the start of employment.

You must immediately inform your supervisor when you receive your jury duty summons. If you are chosen to sit on a jury, you must inform your supervisor how long the trial is expected to last. You must also check in with your supervisor periodically during your jury service, so the Company knows when to expect you back at work.

Employees who take time off for jury duty must supply their supervisor with proof that they actually served. Please call the Human Resources Department to discuss what types of proof of service are acceptable.

## 12:6 Voting

Our Company encourages employees to exercise their right to vote. If your work schedule and the location of your polling place make it difficult for you to get to the polls before they close, you are entitled to take up to 2 hours off work at the beginning or end of your shift, to cast your ballot. This time will be paid if it is determined that you are unable to vote due to your posted work schedule.

Employees who will need to take time off work to vote must inform their supervisors at least 5 days in advance. Employees are expected to work with their supervisors to ensure that their absence doesn't negatively impact Company operations.

## 12:7 Vacation/PTO

Plant Partners offers a paid time off program (PTO) for all salaried employees. Employees must manage their PTO responsibly to ensure they have time available for emergencies, such as personal or family illness, or outside activities. All days off except for 6 paid holidays and jury duty are considered PTO days.

- If you work less than 4 hours, a full day of vacation will be assessed.
- If you work between 4 and 6 hours, a half day of vacation will be assessed.
- If you work a minimum of 6 hours, no vacation will be assessed.

Starting in 2014, PTO is based on length of service according to the following table:

<b>Length of Service as of January 1</b>	<b>Vacation Available</b>
<b>Less than 1 year</b>	<b>1 day (8 hours) per month of service</b>
<b>1 to 3 years</b>	<b>15 Days (120 hours)</b>
<b>4 to 10 years</b>	<b>18 Days (144 hours)</b>
<b>11 + years</b>	<b>21 Days (168 hours)</b>

Salaried employees will be allowed to cash out OR carryover up to 5 days of unused vacation at the end of the year. The employee must elect to either carry over or cash out these days and cannot do a combination of both. If the employee has more than 5 days of unused vacation at the end of the year, all days in excess of 5 will be lost. Carry over days can be used at any time in the following year.

The Company is closed for business each year during the week of Christmas. Salaried employees may save PTO for the Christmas week, otherwise it will go as unpaid time off.

## **12:8 College Tuition Benefit**

The Company will pay up to \$1,500.00 per semester/\$3,000.00 per year for a maximum of four years toward your child's education at an institute of higher learning. This benefit is provided only to children with which are your children by blood, children which you legally adopted or stepchildren, and the following requirements must be met:

- The employee must have full-time status.
- The employee must be a full-time employee for a minimum of four years counting from the beginning date of the first semester when the bill is submitted.
- Upon request the employee must furnish satisfactory parental status as defined above.
- A tuition bill or a copy of the tuition bill must be submitted to the office clearly showing the name of the school and the amount of the tuition. The amount awarded cannot exceed the amount of the tuition bill.
- The school must be an accredited school.

If the recipient fails to complete the semester, the student may be asked and is obliged to return the scholarship to Metrolina Greenhouses.