

Digger

NOVEMBER 2023

TRANSPORTATION OUTLOOK 2024 Pricing, availability, rail options and more

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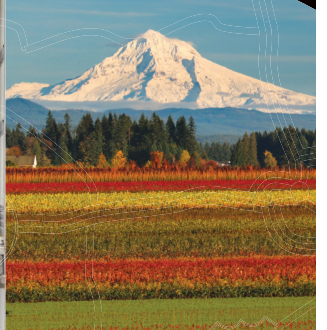
Junell – jhill@northlandexp.com

Joel – jmandel@northlandexp.com

Carol – chill@northlandexp.com

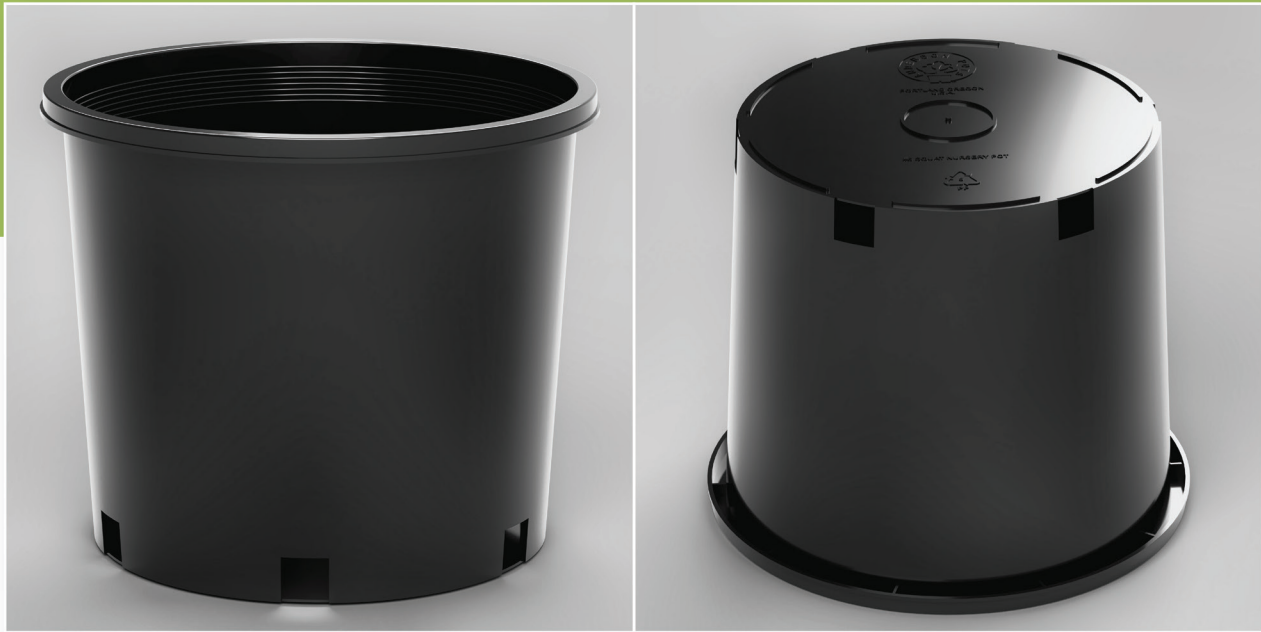
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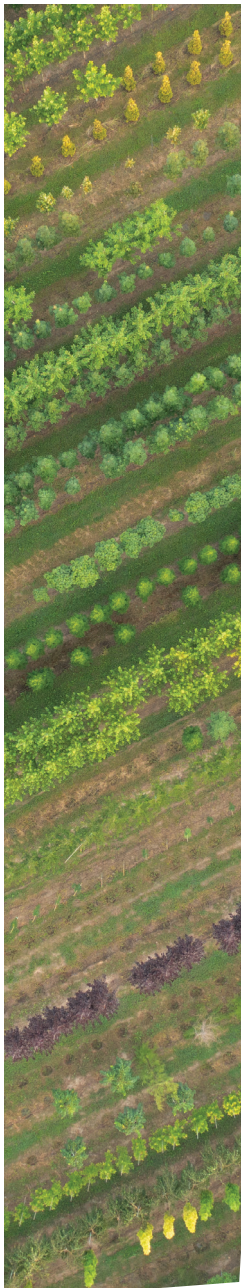
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On the cover: Growers and retailers are benefitting from an improved shipping landscape coming out of logistical nightmares that happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. PHOTO BY MILOS MULLER

On this page: Left: Gary Furr knows roots are the key to plant health, and a healthy workplace culture provides the roots of success in any business. At Rio Verde Plantas, in Cornelius, Oregon, he helped turn around a dismal workplace culture. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP Right: Adam Farley is leading Countryside Nursery into the future while also taking a role on the OAN Board of Directors. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL



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29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West
Wilsonville, OR 97070

PH 503-682-5089 PORTLAND
PH 888-283-7219 NATIONWIDE
FAX 503-682-5099 MAIN OFFICE
FAX 503-682-5727 PUBLICATIONS

info@oan.org EMAIL
www.oan.org WEB
www.diggermagazine.com NEWS BLOG

STAFF

Jeff Stone JStone@OAN.org
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 503-582-2003

Beth Farmer BFarmer@OAN.org
COMMUNICATIONS &
WEB DESIGN MANAGER 503-582-2013

Curt Kipp CKipp@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
& PUBLICATIONS 503-582-2008

Mary Claire Lamm MCLamm@OAN.org
EVENT & EDUCATION
MANAGER 503-582-2004

Tana Klum TKlum@OAN.org
OFFICE COORDINATOR 503-582-2012

Allan Niemi ANiemi@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF EVENTS 503-582-2005

Vic Panichkul VPanichkul@OAN.org
PUBLICATIONS MANAGER 503-582-2009

Stephanie Weihrauch SWeihrauch@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
& ADMINISTRATION 503-582-2001

DIGGER

Curt Kipp CKipp@OAN.org
EDITOR &
DISPLAY ADVERTISING 503-582-2008

Vic Panichkul VPanichkul@OAN.org
MANAGING EDITOR & ART DIRECTOR 503-582-2009

Beth Farmer BFarmer@OAN.org
E-DIGGER PRODUCER 503-582-2013

Dr. Lloyd Nackley Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu
GROWING KNOWLEDGE
SERIES COORDINATOR Oregon State University

**Jon Bell, Mike Darcy,
Erica Browne Grivas,
Tracy Ilene Miller, Mitch Lies,
Emily Lindblom, Kym Pokorny,
Debbie Teashon** CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

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Life's good little surprises

2023-2024 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Amanda Staehely**
PRESIDENT
Columbia Nursery
29490 S, Jackson Road
Canby, OR 97013
Wayne@columbia-nursery.com
503-263-2623
- Ben Verhoeven**
PRESIDENT-ELECT
Peoria Nursery
32355 Peoria Rd SW
Albany, OR 97321
BenV@PeoriaGardens.com
541-753-8519
- Darcy Ruef**
VICE PRESIDENT
Al's Garden & Home
1220 N. Pacific Hwy.
Woodburn, OR 97071
DRuef@Als-GardenCenter.com
503-981-1245
- Todd Nelson**
PAST-PRESIDENT
Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc.
17280 Boones Ferry Rd. N.E.
Woodburn, OR 97071
Info@BountifulFarms.com
503-981-7494
- Patrick Newton**
TREASURER
Powell's Nursery Inc.
5054 SW Boyd Rd.
Gaston, OR 97119
PowellNursery@gmail.com
503-357-0631
- Jesse Nelson**
SECRETARY
Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc.
30120 S.E. Waybill Road
Boring, OR 97009
JNelson@HansNelson.com
503-663-3348
- Chris Robinson**
MEMBER-AT-LARGE
Robinson Nursery Inc.
P.O. Box 100
Amity, OR 97101
Chris@RobinsonNursery.com
877-855-8733

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Patrick Peterson**
ASSOCIATE MEMBER
BASF Turf & Ornamentals
Patrick.Peterson@BASF.com
971-286-1457
- Adam Farley**
CONTAINER GROWER
Countryside Nursery
AFarley@CountrysideNursery.com
503-678-0511
- Dave Daniel**
CONTAINER GROWER
Fall Creek Farm & Nursery Inc
DaveD@FallCreekNursery.com
541-937-2973
- Blake Nelson**
CONTAINER GROWER
Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc.
Blake@BountifulFarms.com
503-981-7494
- Joe Dula**
FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER
Moana Nursery
JoeD@MoanaNursery.com
503-266-8170
- Sam Barkley**
FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER
J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.
SamB@JFSchmidt.com
503-663-4128
- Jay Sanders**
FIELD / BARE ROOT
KG Farms Inc.
JSanders@KGFarmsInc.com
503-678-3245
- Andrea Avila Aragon**
GREENHOUSE
Smith Gardens
Andrea.Avila-Aragon@
SmithGardens.com
503-678-5373
- Tyler Meskers**
GREENHOUSE
Oregon Flowers Inc.
Tyler@OregonFlowers.com
503-678-2580
- Gary S. English**
RETAIL
Landsystems Nursery
Gary@LandsystemsNursery.com
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Life is funny. Do you ever think about where your life path has brought you?

I can't help but sit back and laugh sometimes about where I am right now. The irony of it all is nothing short of amusing.

I grew up in the nursery industry. My parents (and, at the time, my grandparents) owned **Simnitt Nursery** in Canby, Oregon. I grew up going to the Clackamas Chapter Christmas Party, meeting all my parents' friends at other Oregon Association of Nurseries get togethers, and loving the Farwest Show because I would get to go out to "fancy" dinners.

But my work at the nursery itself was sparse. I occasionally had time to help transplant and run deliveries, but most of my extra time was spent in a ballet studio. I grew up having complete admiration and appreciation for our nursery and the industry itself, but never saw myself being a part of it in the future.

I then met my now-husband, Wayne. His passion for plants started at a very young age and had nothing to do with me or my family. Of course, it helped that my dad and he had similar interests, but his shared passion for plants was just one of his many great qualities.

He started his nursery before we were married, and I had my own career at that point. I was dancing professionally and had started a Pilates studio, so plants were far from my mind. While discussing our future together, we knew that we would both be supportive of one another's businesses, but we each had our own focus.

As his nursery grew, I saw myself helping a little more each year. Moving pipe, running errands for supplies, cleaning scion wood, planting ... each time the nursery grew, so did my involvement. Within the first 10 years of **Columbia Nursery**, we moved the nursery from a 2-acre rented parcel to our first property, and then to our larger location where we are now, just south of Canby.

My professional ballet career had ended, but my Pilates studio was still my main focus. The Clackamas Chapter needed some help planning their annual Christmas party, so I volunteered to assist them. That became the beginning of my



Amanda Staehely

OAN involvement. Oh, little did I know.

I was soon a permanent member of the chapter board, and then made my way through the OAN Board of Directors before I was asked to be on the Executive Committee. During that time, I also served on the chapter revitalization and revenue task forces. Wayne's nursery also began to grow more quickly. It needed a full-time office presence. I split my time between teaching Pilates and ballet, and the nursery as best as I could while also raising our three kids. Covid actually made planning my life a little easier, as it forced me to focus 100% on our nursery and the kids.

The shift into working at the nursery full time was so gradual that I almost didn't see it happening. It wasn't until my youngest got mad at his dad while he was pruning some maples and said, "Stop, Dad! You're hurting Mom's trees!" that we both realized the kids saw the nursery not only as Dad's anymore. It had turned into my passion and focus as well, and was now our one mutual dream.

So, when asked if I would have seen myself following my father's footsteps, I would have absolutely said no. But now, I look and think to myself, why not? It all makes sense now. The two most important men in my life have inspired me to be a part of this organization, and I feel incredibly lucky to not only be a part of it, but to raise our children with this extraordinary community.

Who would have thought I would be here now? Life truly does have a way of making you look back and laugh. ☺

Amanda Staehely



Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to calendar@oan.org by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

NOVEMBER 13

USDA-ARS RESEARCH UNITS OPEN HOUSE

The USDA-ARS Horticultural Crops Research Units will open their research facilities for a Golden Jubilee open house event from 1-4 p.m. Monday, November 13, at 3420 N.W. Orchard Ave., Corvallis, Oregon. The event will celebrate 50 years of horticultural research excellence. There will be facility tours, posters, pictures, and demonstrations highlighting research accomplishments.

NOVEMBER 15, 16

FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES PLANNED

Need a first aid/CPR certification renewal for yourself or one of your employees? The Oregon Association of Nurseries is holding a session in English on November 15 and a session in Spanish on November 16. Class times are 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The cost is \$60 per person whether you are renewing certification or taking the class for the first time. Certification is good for two years and includes instruction and a certification card. Classes are held at the OAN office, 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West, Wilsonville, Oregon. Register at www.OAN.org/Page/CPRclass.

NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 1 2023 IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

The Irrigation Association will present its 2023 Irrigation Show and Education Week from at the Henry B. González Convention Center, 3150 S. Paradise Road, San Antonio, Texas. The trade show portion of the event will be Wednesday and Thursday, November 29-30, with other events happening all week. The gathering will offer unique educational opportunities, access to the latest in irrigation technology and networking. Registration is now open, exhibitors are being accepted and lodging is available. For details, go to www.Irrigation.org/2023Show.

DECEMBER 5

IN-PERSON PESTICIDE TRAINING

The Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) Health and Safety Committee and Oregon OSHA are providing an in-person training workshop for four core credits that are required by the Oregon Department of Agriculture as part of the pesticide licensing process. The workshop is intended to help employers achieve compliance with certain requirements. It will be 1-5 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 5, at the 2023 OFB annual meeting at the Embassy Suites at Washington Square, 9000 S.W. Washington Square Road, Tigard, Oregon. The workshop provides four core credit hours, which are recertification credits that pesticide handlers and applicators are required to earn to maintain their licenses. For OFB members, the cost of the workshop is \$40. The cost for nonmembers is \$100. Only credit cards are accepted. Each participant must register



PHOTO COURTESY NORTHWEST AGRICULTURAL SHOW

JANUARY 17-19, 2024

NORTHWEST AG SHOW

The 54th Northwest Agricultural Show will take place at the Oregon State Fair and Expo Center, 2330 17th St. N.E., in Salem, Oregon. The annual event focuses on emerging trends in agriculture including small farming, technology, and education. For more information, go to www.NorthWestAgShow.com. A sister show, the Central Oregon Agricultural Show, will take place April 6-7 at the Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center, 3800 S.W. Airport Way, in Redmond, Oregon. For information, go to www.NorthWestAgShow.com/Central-Oregon-Ag-Show.

individually. Online registration closes at noon on Dec. 4. To register, go to <https://Bit.ly/45ziXPE>

JANUARY 10-12, 2024

MID-ATLANTIC NURSERY TRADE SHOW

The Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show will once again take place at the Baltimore Convention Center, 1 W. Pratt St. in Baltimore, Maryland. MANTS, produced by the state nursery and landscape associations of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, is one of the largest private trade shows serving the horticulture industry, with more than 11,000 attendees and 900 exhibitors in 2023. Registration and housing registration is now open. There is a waiting list for exhibitors. For information or to register, go to www.MANTS.com.

JANUARY 22-24, 2024

UTAH GREEN

Presented by the Utah Nursery & Landscape Association, the event will be held at Mountain America Expo Center, 9575 State St., Sandy, Utah. The show features green industry vendors from across the nation and offers seminars on topics such as business management, landscape design, plant material, irrigation, and many others. For information or to register, go to www.UtahGreen.org.

JANUARY 23-26, 2024

IPPS WESTERN REGION ANNUAL MEETING

The 62nd International Plant Propagator's Society (IPPS) Western Region Annual Meeting

will be at Pechanga Resort Casino, 45000 Pechanga Parkway, in Temecula, California. The Western Region will be hosting this meeting in conjunction with UC Nursery and Floriculture Alliance. Speakers will focus on a range of topics from water management to new plants. Early-bird rates are available until December 22. For information or to register, go to www.IPPS.org.

JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 1, 2024 PROGREEN EXPO

ProGreen EXPO is the only green industry conference in the Rocky Mountain Region of its kind. More than 5,000 green industry professionals gather every year at the Colorado Convention Center, 700 14th St., Denver, Colorado, to gain vital knowledge and skills to improve business, educate employees and discover the latest information for the upcoming season. For information or to register, go to www.ProGreenExpo.com.

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

NOR CAL LANDSCAPE & NURSERY SHOW

The 2024 Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show will take place at the San Mateo Event Center, 1346 Saratoga Drive, San Mateo, California. The show is a one-day collaboration between California's horticulture and landscape industries featuring more than 250 exhibitors and five educational seminars. To register, go to www.NorCalTradeShow.org. For more information, contact Margo Cheuvront, MargoC@FrontierNet.net or 530-458-3190. ©



Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email news@oan.org.

Worry over climate highlights 2024 Garden Trends Report

Younger consumers just entering adulthood are worried about the future of planet Earth, and that concern will dramatically shape future markets, according to the newly-released 2024 Garden Trends Report.

The report – issued by the Garden Media Group research and marketing firm based in West Chester, Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia – identifies several mounting climate-related issues. These include climate warming, an increase in climate-related disasters, the danger of displacement for 200 million people and extinction for 25,000 species, and the psychological effect all of this has. It proposes that the garden industry and horticulture can provide answers for people in search of hope and willing to invest in solutions.

“Eco-anxiety is real – people feel stress, worry and bleakness over climate change,” the report states. “We are scientists, horticulturists, gardeners, communicators, and more. Our job is to understand environmental issues and translate these concepts into solutions our customers can understand. One of our responsibilities, more with each new report, heatwave, hurricane, and fire, is to communicate solutions that don’t create hopelessness. Stubborn optimism needs to motivate us daily. The future is worth fighting for.”

Garden Media Group was founded in 1990 by Suzi McCoy and was purchased in 2020 by her daughter, Katie Dubow.

The report is downloadable for free, but registration is required. To get it, log on to www.GardenMediaGroup.com/Trends.



The nursery and greenhouse industry can expect to see continued profits over the next year, according to an analysis by Ag West. OAN FILE PHOTO

AGWEST ANALYSTS FORECAST CONTINUED PROFITS FOR NURSERIES

The nursery and greenhouse industry can expect to see continued profits over the next year, according to a 12-month outlook by **AgWest Farm Credit Services**.

“Nursery-greenhouse producers are benefiting from strong sales volumes and prices and lower fertilizer and transportation costs,” the company stated in its report, released on September 30. “All product categories are profitable. Product movement is going well for this time of year.”

Although the overall outlook remains strong, there are concerns. Chief among them is a weakening economy and a decline in the housing market.

“Rising delinquency rates on consumer

loans and a falling savings rate suggest many consumers are financially stressed,” the report stated. “Housing data is mixed, and while single-family home starts remain relatively strong, it is unclear how long this can last given persistently high interest rates. Furthermore, existing home sales, an important source of nursery-greenhouse product demand, are falling.”

The report noted that sales of existing homes have been more sensitive to rising interest rates than sales of new homes. The average 30-year fixed mortgage rate has risen from 3% in January 2021 to 7% in July 2023.

However, the report also stated that growers are generally well positioned for a possible downturn.

AgWest Farm Credit is an agricultural lending cooperative serving farmers, ranchers, timber harvesters and aquatic producers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska and Montana; ➤

Northwest News

most of Arizona; and parts of California and Nevada. The company was created through the January 2023 merger of the former Northwest Farm Credit Services with Farm Credit West. The report can be downloaded at <https://TinyUrl.com/NurseryProfit>.

OAN PAST PRESIDENT TESTIFIES ON FARM EQUIPMENT TAXATION

Farmers need clearer rules on how farm equipment is taxed and when the equipment can be tax exempt, Oregon Association of Nurseries past president Leigh Geschwill (**F&B Farms and Nursery**, Woodburn, Oregon) told the Oregon House Revenue Committee at an informational hearing in late September.

“Agricultural equipment has changed quite a bit since 1973, when the legislature first approved its property tax exemption for tangible personal property used for agricultural purposes,” she said.



Leigh Geschwill

The problem is, today’s equipment doesn’t neatly fit into the definitions and parameters created at that time.

In 2018, Geschwill received a statement from her assessor for personal tangible property. It listed their hop harvesting equipment, but the hop house had its own tax lot and hasn’t been moved. “I made inquiries with other growers in our area and found that some growers were paying taxes on their hop equipment and others were not — in the same county no less,” she said.

“The assessor’s office was at a loss to explain the differences in taxation from farm to farm,” she said. “When I brought this issue to the Oregon Association of Nurseries, we heard from other members, as well as members of the Oregon Farm Bureau, that there is actually relatively widespread confusion about what is taxable and what is exempt.”



The Mediterranean oak borer (MOB), *Xyleborus monographus*, transmits multiple fungal species to the trees it infests, some of which may cause oak wilt. COURTESY OF OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

There were two main areas of confusion: what is real vs. personal tangible property, and whether the property is used for agriculture, which would be exempt, or processing, which has a different tax implication.

The OAN is putting a focus on the issue in hopes of clearing up the confusion. “It’s our hope that the committee will take it up next session and put forth a bill,” Stone said. “This should be a non-controversial fix. We want it and so do the county assessors. This is the single bill that we will pursue in the month-long session.”

Go to <https://TinyUrl.com/GeschwillTestimony> to download a transcript of Geschwill’s testimony.

OREGON RECEIVES FUNDS FOR URBAN SHADE CANOPY

Oregon’s tree canopy is about to get a lot broader thanks to \$58 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reduce the impact of extreme heat by planting trees, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported on its website.

The USDA is handing out more than \$1 billion to 385 projects nationwide in an attempt to increase access to trees and nature, and provide shade to neighborhoods that need it to reduce the effects of climate change.

Oregon’s portion will be divided between eight entities including the cities of Salem, Hillsboro, Pendleton, and Hermiston; Northwest Youth Corps, Friends of Trees and the Oregon

Department of Forestry.

ODF’s Urban and Community Forestry program manager Scott Altenhoff said the agency received nearly \$23 million that will be spent on tree planting and maintenance.

NEW PEST RAISES CONCERN FOR OAK TREES IN OREGON

An invasive insect from Europe and the Middle East that attacks oak trees has been found several times in Oregon, including most recently in an Oregon white oak in Wilsonville, Oregon, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) reported.

The Mediterranean oak borer (MOB), *Xyleborus monographus*, transmits multiple fungal species to the trees it infests, some of which may cause oak wilt.

This insect was first found in North America when it turned up in 2017 in California.

Oregon Dept. of Forestry (ODF) Invasive Species Specialist Wyatt Williams said, “MOB was found in a single trap set by ODF in Multnomah County, Oregon in 2018. It was then found in traps in 2020 in Marion County, and in 2021-2022 in Clackamas and Washington counties. This spring it was found in a single Oregon white oak at Sandy River Delta.”

Cody Holthouse, integrated pest prevention and management program manager for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said his agency and ODF have been in touch with their California counterparts to

assess the impact of MOB on native and introduced oaks, while also exploring what control measures they recommend.

USDA LAUNCHES H-2A ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Grants are now available to help agricultural employers recruit H-2A workers and improve their working conditions as part of a new pilot program launched by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Agri-Pulse agricultural news website reported.

The Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program will provide \$65 million in grants to employers of all sizes in amounts ranging from \$25,000 to \$2 million to recruit and retain workers, improve working conditions and facilitate lawful migration paths. Funding comes from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Grant applicants could use the funds to pay for overtime pay, bonus pay and

sick leave, housing improvements, and measures to ensure the health and safety of workers.

The grant window is 24 months, allowing employers to use the grant over two growing seasons. Applications must be received by November 28. More information about the application process can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/flsp.

FORECAST CALLS FOR HIGHER DIESEL PRICES THIS FALL

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicts that U.S. diesel prices will be higher than previously forecast, the *Capital Press* of Salem, Oregon, reported on its website.

Diesel will average \$4.31 a gallon nationwide for the final quarter of the year, pushed up by increasing oil prices and decreasing inventories, according to the EIA's short-term energy outlook.

Although the EIA does not forecast prices by region, diesel prices in the West are above the national average.

Diesel prices have fallen from a year ago in every state except Washington and Utah. Diesel averaged \$5.67 a gallon in Washington on Sept. 12, up 13 cents from a year ago, the most in the nation, according to AAA.

Announcements

EGAN GARDENS SOLD, TO CLOSE END OF YEAR

Ellen Egan has sold her retail and wholesale nursery, **Egan Gardens**, in Salem, Oregon, and will be closing at the end of the year.

"After 41 years I am ready to retire and get some much-needed rest," she said. "I'm looking forward to doing all the things that I can't do now. Of



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course, make the house and the yard I'm moving into mine, go back into drawing and painting and learn some new things. I want to be able to enjoy doing things at a slower pace."

"I'm not going to miss having to get up in the middle of the night to start up a power generator in an emergency power outage."

The nursery is being purchased by John and Kylee Pedersen, who will carry the business on as Pedersens Nursery. "They're going to do a good job," Egan said. "I'm very happy to be selling to them — local nursery people."

"The Pedersens are already accomplished growers of hanging baskets, and they've been working out of the greenhouses at Willow Lake, where Kylee is part of the family. So those of you who have been missing Willow Lake Nursery since they changed to being a wedding venue can in a way have a bit of that nice



"After 41 years I am ready to retire and get some much-needed rest," Ellen Egan said. PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLEN EGAN

place come back again," she said.

Egan Gardens is designated as a Century Farm, dating back to when Egan's great-great grandfather and his family settled on the property in 1875. The sale will end five generations of family ownership of the property.

VALENT BIOSCIENCES BUILDING MYCORRHIZAE FACILITY IN SOUTHERN OREGON

Valent BioSciences LLC has broken ground on a new manufacturing facility in White City, Oregon, to meet the increasing demand for its MycoApply® arbuscu-

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lar mycorrhizal fungi (AMF) products, the company announced in a statement.

As a leading supplier of mycorrhizal soil inoculants, **Mycorrhizal Applications LLC**, owned by Valent BioSciences, researches and markets mycorrhizal fungi. These specialized fungi colonize plant roots to create a symbiotic root-and-mycelial network within the surrounding soils, helping plants absorb water and nutrients more efficiently. This optimizes plant hardiness and vigor. The White City facility will produce AMF for use in agriculture, horticulture, and turf and ornamental production.

“We are excited to begin construction in White City and expand our operations in southern Oregon, where Mycorrhizal Applications was founded more than 25 years ago,” Valent BioSciences President and CEO Salman Mir said. “We have enjoyed a strong partnership with the



Officials break ground for Valent BioSciences' new manufacturing facility in White City, Oregon.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VALENT BIOSCIENCES

community and look forward to expanding our business and fostering new relationships in White City and southern Oregon in the years ahead.”

WALLA WALLA NURSERY CO. SOLD TO MANAGEMENT TEAM





Lorne and Aurelea Blackman have sold a 90 percent stake in **Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc.** to a team of managers

and a customer, the company announced.

The wholesale nursery is situated on the Oregon-Washington border near Walla Walla, Washington, with about 50 acres total on both sides. Founded in 1992 by Lorne Blackman, it grows perennials, shrubs, annuals and tropicals, and sells them to retailers and re-wholesalers.

According to Lorne, the new owners are buying the company via a hybrid employee stock ownership plan. They >>

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include Operations Manager Alex Ramos, Customer Service Manager Jo Anne Simons, Logistics Manager Dale Lauby, Production Manager Jeremy Maddess, Manager of Growing Operations Noel Ortiz, Potting Foreman Ernesto Salamanca, IS Manager Bradley Wright, and retail partner Cody Connor.

“They came up with a down payment and it will be a 10-year transition,” he said.

The price was not disclosed, but Blackman said the initial deal is for the business alone, not the property. The second step will happen in 10 years, when the ownership group will purchase the property. Terms for the purchase of the property have already been agreed to as part of the initial sale, Blackman said.

The agreement was finalized in early October after three years of serious discussions and planning. “We first started talking about this probably six years ago and



Walla Walla Nursery's new owners, from left: Bradley Wright, Dale Lauby, Ernesto Salamanca, Jeremy Maddess, Lorne and Auralea Blackman, Noel Ortiz, Alex Ramos, Cody Connor, and Jo Anne Simons. PHOTO COURTESY OF WALLA WALLA NURSERY CO

it didn't go anywhere,” Blackman said. “Then three years ago, we received an offer from a competitor.” That re-started the conversation.

“My first choice was employee ownership,” Blackman said. “I feel much better about that. Our neighbors and our customers appreciate that too.”

For Blackman, the nursery has, from its beginning in 1992, been an all-consum-

ing project. It was time to begin turning the reins over to more energetic hands, Blackman said. “After 31 years, I'm not a good multitasker,” he said. “The business was always occupying my thoughts. I want to learn how to have fun.”

Blackman said he's looking forward to spending more time at his recently completed cabin on the 140-acre family property in the Blue Mountains east of Walla

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From left: Haruko Buchholz, Talon Buchholz, Tim Nichols, Matt Nichols, and Aimee Nichols stand for a photo after completing the sale of Buchholz & Buchholz Nursery to MrMaple.com.

COURTESY OF MRMAPLE.COM

Walla, which is now equipped for remote work. The property has been in the family 120 years, he said.

BUCHHOLZ & BUCHHOLZ NURSERY SOLD TO NORTH CAROLINA NURSERY

Buchholz & Buchholz Nursery, a grower of Japanese maples, dwarf and unusual conifers based in Gaston, Oregon, has been sold to a North Carolina nursery specializing in Japanese maples.

Matthew and Timothy Nichols, owners of Nichols Nursery and MrMaple.Com, completed the purchase from former owner Talon Buchholz on September 29. Terms were not disclosed.

“We intend to continue the quality wholesale plants that Buchholz is known for and continue the legacy,” Matthew Nichols stated in a press release. “We hope to bring together the best of both worlds where each business benefits from the other’s amazing product lines.”

Buchholz Nursery has built its reputation on Japanese maples and has named more than 100 Japanese maple cultivars. The new owners said they would continue to operate it under the same name. “You wouldn’t buy Mercedes and change the name,” Nichols said. “Same with Buchholz Nursery. It’s famous for what it does best.”

The new owners declined comment on any changes in management at the nursery. MrMaple.com, based in East Flat

Rock, North Carolina, sells more than 1,000 cultivars of Japanese maples along with other rare and unusual plants grown by Nichols Nursery.

NORTHWEST NURSERY BUYERS NAMES NEW CEO-DESIGNATE

Crystal Cady has been named as the CEO-designate of **Northwest Nursery Buyers Association** (NBBA), a cooperative of independent retail nurseries in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Northern California based in Welches, Oregon.

Cady will succeed John A. Trax Jr., who has been the CEO and GM for the past 18 years and will retire at the end of the year.



Crystal Cady

Cady has more than 25 years of experience in the industry, including serving as event and education manager for the Oregon Association of Nurseries, account manager for **Skagit Gardens**, and manager and buyer for **Garland Nursery**. She was named OAN Young Nursery Person of the Year in 2009.

“Through an extensive search process to identify an individual to take over the reins of NNBA, I am very pleased that we have found the perfect fit in terms



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of background, education, and temperament to fill this crucial position,” said Bill Reynolds, NNBA Board Chairman.

“I look forward to continuing the organic growth of the association, leveraging new opportunities and enriching the group’s collaboration for long term mutual success,” Cady said.

In Memorium

KATHIE FEMRITE

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is saddened to report the passing of Kathie Femrite, a former OAN president. She passed away peacefully at her home in Woodburn on September 24 at age 74.

Femrite was born in Lincoln, Nebraska but grew up in Portland, Oregon. She spent three years at St. Mary’s Academy in Portland, and graduated from Madison High School, also in Portland.

She is survived by her husband Douglas, son Robert and his wife Rachel, and their daughters Brianna, Bailey, Olivia and Ava; and son Thomas and his wife Maria, and daughter Kayla.



Kathie Femrite

Femrite and her husband owned Femrite Nursery in Aurora, Oregon, where they grew bareroot shade and flowering trees and select grafted conifers and sold them wholesale.

She was selected as Young Nursery Person of the year in 1982 and she served as president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries in 1992. Femrite was instrumental in the development of The Oregon Garden in Silverton. Femrite and her husband are also OAN Honorary Life members.

She enjoyed spending time with her granddaughters as well as cooking and baking. ©



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The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?

University of Oregon, IBM, graduate school in fine arts, lots and lots of nursery work.

YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

My parents spent their whole life savings to buy the first 20 acres in Troutdale. They didn't have equipment, so the first crop was planted by hand. There weren't any other nurseries on that street back then, and the local farmers thought Dad was a little crazy. But he saw something there with real potential, and no one but him to do it, so he found a way. If you put your whole heart and mind into something and are willing to do the work, you can accomplish anything.

BEST BUSINESS DECISION?

Having a cohesive team is critical to our success. I have spent years looking for the best people to fill key roles, and have elected many times to pull double duty and do the work myself rather than bring someone on board who isn't a good fit. I prefer to collaborate on our major initiatives, so talent is important. The team we have in place now is already taking Countryside to the next level. >>

Adam Farley

President

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HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION?

We acquired Countryside in 1993, and for the next 20 plus years Fairdale and Countryside operated more or less as separate entities with some overlap in the front office. As the Great Recession hit and the businesses became more integrated, it was clear that our survival depended on realigning our resources to match the climate we were in and the way we were doing business. We are a more streamlined operation now, but getting there was painful — and necessary.

MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

My dad, Jim Farley. I think about him every day and feel like I can hear him talking me through most of the situations we encounter. If I handle anything right,

it's because of the things he taught me growing up.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE?

When two people do business, both should be better off afterward.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

The people, no question. I left a lucrative career in high-tech because I wanted to reconnect with a community where the people are honest and direct, and the standards haven't changed.

YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Right now, it's not having enough plants to sell. But in general, I would say it's that we need to expand our operation. That is not something I have encountered

yet in my career so I will have lots of new things to learn in that process.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

It's easy to go to work and see all the progress my team is making on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. I am very excited about the future of Countryside and it's my good fortune to move forward with some of the best people in this industry.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

If I have managed to meet the expectations of the generation that came before us, life-long friends and mentors to our family and people whose example was a guiding light my whole life, well then I would feel like I have accomplished something. ☺

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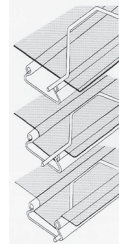
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Celso Barron Castillo loads arborvitae into an awaiting truck at Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. Nurseries are benefitting from lower shipping costs, better truck availability and more scheduling certainty. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Riding the highs and lows

Lower shipping costs and steady demand give nurseries a leg up – for now

BY JON BELL

TWO YEARS AGO, THE NURSERY INDUSTRY was riding a sort of post-pandemic wave of strong sales, fueled by a pandemic boom in home gardening and landscaping as people stuck around their homesteads waiting for the storm to pass.

While that was great for nurseries — and still is — it made for a tight freight situation. Trucks and drivers were few and far between, rates went through the roof and timelines became much less reliable. Natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes didn't help much either.

And not only was demand for plants and nursery materials up, but so was demand for just about every other kind of product and consumer good, which put huge pressures all across the supply chain, including shipping.

Now, the tides have turned.

“Now it's the complete opposite,” said Dale Parra, sales manager at **Truck Transportation Services**, a Wilsonville, Oregon, freight brokerage company specializing in nursery stock, produce, frozen commodities and dry freight in the lower 48. “Rates are so low right now I can't even believe



Juan Jesus at Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. in Woodburn, Oregon, ties together a load of trees to prepare for shipping. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Highs and lows

it. I never thought they'd get as high as they did (during COVID), and now I can't believe it's turned around like it has. It's a little crazy."

What the new, albeit temporary, shipping reality looks like for nurseries is lower shipping costs, better truck availability and more scheduling certainty. All of that is incredibly helpful since the demand for plants has held strong.

But as the economy continues to strengthen — interest rates may be stabilizing, fourth-quarter consumer goods sales are traditionally strong, and unemployment as of August 2023 was still under 4% nationwide — the tables could turn again.

"I think there's always an adjustment," Parra said. "The wheel goes down and then it comes back up again."

'Down to compete'

The pandemic and the associated demand for nursery goods — along with the overall jump in demand for consumer products — caused all kinds of ripples across the shipping industry in 2020 and 2021. The additional volume put incredible strain on every link of the supply chain and revealed some major weaknesses: There were not enough drivers or trucking capacity and not enough cargo containers in the right places. Rail lines, maritime shippers and ports were all stretched thin. And social distancing guidelines meant fewer nursery workers could help load or unload.

Compounding the issues brought on by the pandemic was the ongoing shortage of truck drivers. According to the American Trucking Association (ATA), the industry was short roughly 60,800 drivers even back in 2018 — an almost 20% jump over 2017. If those trends continued, the ATA predicted, those numbers were on track to hit a shortage of more than 160,000 drivers by 2028.

But something happened along the way. To help draw in new drivers and make deliveries happen, trucking companies raised pay rates and sweetened benefits. The ATA reported that 90% of truck fleets increased salaries an average



KG Farms worker Vincente Lopez adds bracing to secure a load of arborvitae in a truck. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

of almost 11% in 2021.

"I think a lot of big companies hired a lot of extra drivers during the pandemic," Parra said.

Similarly, with shipping rates hitting top dollar, more independent owner-operators got into the trucking game to try and make some of those bucks.

"So many people became drivers because rates shot up," Parra said.

Of course, for every economic up, there is an associated down. As the pandemic played out and consumer demand

evened, the tightness of the shipping scene loosened. As 2021 became 2022, it wasn't as tough to find shippers and, as a result, it wasn't as expensive either. Other economic factors — lower fuel prices, higher employment, an eventual stall in inflation — took hold as well. The result: freight costs have plunged almost as steeply as they rose two years ago.

"Rates have been down consistently all year," said Matt Frederick, owner of **K&M Distribution**, a transportation broker based in Rogue River, Oregon, that >>



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Highs and lows

specializes in nursery shipping. “It’s really competitive, but I’m down to compete.”

Shifting gears

As prices for shipping have fallen, Frederick said he’s seen more owner-operators call it quits and join larger trucking companies. The steady pay and consistent work make it a more appealing gig than going it alone.

In addition to the fluctuation in drivers and availability, there have been other challenges in nursery shipping in Oregon as well. For starters, Frederick said the Beaver State is typically a costlier and more regulated one for drivers to come into for freight.

“Coming into the state of Oregon is difficult,” he said. “The road taxes, trip permits — you pay more to come into Oregon to pick up freight than just about anywhere else. There are more CAT scales and DOT stops in Oregon than throughout the Plains states. It’s a lot of little things that eat into a truck driver’s and a company’s pockets.”

In September, Oregon’s fruit crops were hitting peak ripening, putting some of the squeeze back on freight availability for nurseries.

“The produce is running right now, and it’s taking a bite out of our trucks,” Frederick said.

Cracking the whip

That kind of swing is a seasonal one that nurseries and shippers have to take into account every year. Frederick said K&M keeps its connections with van drivers close in the fall to help move dry nursery goods when the refrigerated trucks are being used to move fruit and other produce.

“Sometimes the supply chain lends a hand and gives us more availability,” he said, “and there are times when it doesn’t, and it takes a little creativity to make it all work.”

As it stands now, nurseries should be in fairly good shape when it comes to moving their plants and materials. Per-mile freight rates remain low — at least as of early fall 2023 — and availability was not as pressing an issue as it was, say, two years ago. In fact, nurseries were in



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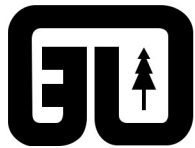
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Highs and lows

a good spot throughout the year to make up some of what they may have lost when shipping was more expensive because people still wanted plants.

“The nurseries should be killing it,” Parra said. “They’re able to charge more for their plants now, so there’s more dollars on each load, but the freight’s cheaper and that lowers their costs. They’re in a great position with the ball in their court.”

Whether it stays that way is anybody’s guess. Fuel prices crept up in mid-September, but were on their way back down by month’s end. The Federal Reserve was holding interest rates steady at the start of the fall, but signs suggested another bump might hit before the end of the year.

The trucking industry saw an influx of new drivers during the pandemic, but its aging, less-diverse workforce isn’t expected to meet the long-range needs for more drivers. And even though the shipping scene was solid for nurseries in 2023, there are still many unknowns that await the sector in 2024 as the spring shipping season comes into focus.

One thing that’s for sure? Things will always look up and, eventually, they’ll cycle around to look back down.

“It’s kind of like cracking a whip,” Frederick said. “When it cracks one way, then the hammer’s gotta come back the other way. But all in all, I’d say the ebb and flow are very consistent. There’s going to be peaks and valleys every season. That’s why relationships are so important. We’re just blessed to have the customers we do and that we’ve been able to stay pretty stable whether things are up or down.” ©

Jon Bell is an Oregon freelance journalist who writes about everything from Mt. Hood and craft beer to real estate and the great outdoors. His website is www.JBellink.com.

Shipping by rail an accessible option for growers, retailers



Trains line the rail yard along the Willamette River in Portland. Shipping by railroad using intermodal trailers used to be a more specialized delivery method for the nursery industry, but some are finding that it has become a more accessible option for growers and retailers. ADOBE STOCK

Some companies offer specialization to handle nursery businesses

BY EMILY LINDBLOM

SHIPPING BY RAILROAD USED TO BE a more specialized delivery method for the nursery industry, but now it has become more accessible for growers and retailers, according to Kyle Russell, shareholder and vice president at **Russell's Nursery** in Aurora, Oregon.

"Nowadays it is commoditized and if anyone wants to use it, they can," Russell said. "It's a great option to use for freight and it always will be."

Russell said rail is also a safer choice than it used to be, and plants are consistently delivered on time and in healthy condition.

Shipping by rail is usually more consistent on delivery time compared to over-the-road with trucks, he said.

"Especially on the delivery end, they call and request a timeframe and it seems to be more accurate than over-the-road, because you don't know when a driver is going to get there," Russell said. "That's what I love about rail. Plus, it's more environmentally friendly, keeping some long-haul trucks off the road and not putting the wear and tear on the free-ways. It's just a better system if you want to go more green."

"I do wish the railroads would expand for more capacity," Russell said. "I feel it's the future for the transportation industry."



Domingo Hernandez Nestor (left) and Julio Hernandez Nestor secure plants on a pallet in a truck at Palmer Creek Nursery in Dayton, Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY OF PALMER CREEK NURSERY

Shipping by rail

Intermodal coordination

Russell's Nursery partners with freight forwarding service **Independent Dispatch, Inc.** in Portland, Oregon, to coordinate shipping plants by rail to retailers.

Independent Dispatch has been handling dry intermodal containers during the nursery stock season every year for at least the past decade, according to Erica Hill, the company's director of intermodal shipping.

"Railroads are a very good option again for nursery stock," Hill said. "We've been handling it for many years now and we have a specific person assigned to it each year, and we're extra staffed for the season."

Independent Dispatch also works with other companies, including **Northland Express Transport** and **A&R Spada Farms**, Hill said. A couple of Independent Dispatch's long-term customers own trucks with salaried truck drivers to transport the product to the railroad.

Independent Dispatch is a family-owned company that handles nursery stock and works personally with each customer, Hill said. "We're very personalized and we have receptionists so customers can talk to a real person."



Domingo Hernandez Nestor (left) and Julio Hernandez Nestor load plants on a pallet in a truck at Palmer Creek Nursery. PHOTO COURTESY OF PALMER CREEK NURSERY

Pricing for the season

Nursery season — from February through April — is not the busy season for railroads. So pricing for shipping by rail is usually competitive at that time of year, compared with shipping over-the-road, Hill said.

So far this fall, rail prices have stayed competitive for shipping Christmas trees, wreaths and other seasonal products, Hill said.

Some trucking companies like **Integrity Logistics Inc.** in Wilsonville, Oregon, offer more flexibility for nurseries. While other companies work with truck drivers to transport containers to a railroad on a case-



"We've been handling [rail] for many years now and we have a specific person assigned to it each year ..."

— Erica Hill, director of intermodal shipping at Independent Dispatch

by-case basis, Integrity has its own storage yard and carriers and can work more closely with nurseries, said Steve Solomon, nursery buyer at the company.

Solomon has 18 years of experience coordinating shipping by rail at different companies. "One of the primary things of great value for us is that I believe we are the only logistics company that maintains a storage yard with empty containers and our own staff to do the pick-ups," he said.

The company's yard in Aurora has an empty trailer pool, so the dray carriers can pick up an empty trailer to fill at a nursery, according to the nursery's

own timeline. Solomon said his company's flexibility is very advantageous for the nurseries.

"We'll do whatever the nurseries want. Because we have our own employees and empties, we can react quickly," Solomon said. "They can call us at 6 a.m. and say they forgot to schedule a pickup, so can they come get it in two hours? And 99 times out of 100 we can do that."

Pros and cons

Some, however, are not convinced that rail is more cost effective than trucking. John Ollis worked with shipping by rail through a previous employer in the mid-2000s. He said in the immediate years following the financial crisis in 2008, the cost of shipping by rail was less than transporting plants by truck.

"In 2010 it seemed rail was a better price option than over-the-road, but I don't know that to still be true," Ollis said.

Now, Ollis is a logistics specialist at **Eason Horticultural Resources** in Fort Wright, Kentucky, where the company has chosen not to ship by rail.

When Ollis worked at **Monrovia Nursery Company** in Dayton, Oregon, years ago, they did shipments by rail to the East Coast, he said. But it had its pros and cons.

“There were some good and bad shipments,” Ollis said. “Everything going that direction was getting held up a bit in Chicago, so it could be a problem. The weather was nice in Oregon, but by the time the plants got to Chicago it was cold, and if we weren’t using temperature-controlled containers, which we weren’t early [on], the plants froze.”

Temperature-controlled containers are much more common now than they were then, he said.

Solomon at Integrity Logistics said



“In 2010 it seemed rail was a better price option than over-the-road, but I don’t know that to still be true.”

— **John Ollis, logistics specialist at Eason Horticultural Resources**



“The only con of rail is that rail can tend to be one day longer than over-the-road.”

— **Steve Solomon, buyer at Integrity Logistics**

his customers have the choice between dry, refrigerated or lined dry containers, which offer a level of protection between dry and refrigerated.

“We have liners that we sell at a small cost to our customers if they want to line dry rail loads for some protection for their load,” he said. “It’s not as

protected as refrigerated, but we line the trailer with foil and cardboard.” That prevents wild fluctuations in temperature.

Solomon said there are many pros to choosing rail. The fuel rates are stable for the entire year, so customers aren’t caught in a swing of rates like they may be for the trucking industry. >>

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Shipping by rail

Because of the fluctuation in over-the-road fuel prices, a nursery might choose rail 60% of the time when those prices are high, but only 40% of the time when those over-the-road prices are low.

“The only con of rail is that rail can tend to be one day longer than over-the-road,” Solomon said. “That’s not always the case, but it’s something you have to factor in because it comes off the rail and gets delivered the next day.”

He added delays happen with over-the-road too, especially during severe weather when roads close but railroads stay open.

But cost savings is the biggest pro, said Hill at Independent Dispatch.

“The cons are that it has a slightly longer transit time, and multi-stops are limited to two or three maximum,” Hill said.

“It’s on the railroad tracks, so unlike over-the-road, it can’t stop in transit for multiple stops. It really depends on the nursery.”

She said intermodal — meaning using multiple forms of transportation — is certainly faster than a boxcar, but it’s still a slower transportation time than only using a truck.

“But sometimes that’s good to give more lead time on intermodal shipments,” Hill said.

Nurseries have to consider the weight capacity when making their choice, Hill said.

“The maximum weight in a 53-foot container is between 42.5 and 43 thousand pounds, and some of the bigger, heavier trees sometimes hit that maximum.”

For Russell’s Nursery, rail was much cheaper than trucks when the grower first

shifted to shipping by rail in 2012. But Russell said that’s not necessarily the case today.

“Rail has become more expensive so it’s much closer in margin,” Russell said. “It was roughly 40% cheaper in 2012 and now it’s about 10% or not even that.”

Russell said his nursery chooses whichever mode of transportation makes sense at the time because the market changes.

“Last spring we only used rail 10% of the time. It changes because my customers and who handles the freight sometimes changes too,” Russell said. He added he anticipates using a mix of rail and over-the-road in the coming year.

He said his customers that choose rail have to order a larger number of plants in one container than they would have to if they chose over-the-road.

“There has to be more volume to make it work because there can’t be too many stops for one container,” Russell said.

Ready for the season

Hill said in the past year, some of Independent Dispatch’s customers have been reluctant to return to shipping by rail due to some bad experiences during the coronavirus pandemic.

“During COVID there was a big supply crunch, but now we’re back to normal, thank goodness,” Hill said.

“I want to assure customers that railroad service is back to pre-pandemic levels,” Hill said. “Equipment and driver availability will be surplus for the 2024 season. We’re ready to handle the new season of nursery stock.”

Emily Lindblom is an Oregon-based freelance journalist covering business, environmental and agricultural news. She has a background in community reporting and a master’s degree in multimedia journalism. Visit her website at EmilyLindblom.com or reach her at Emily@EmilyLindblom.com.

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Layers of deception



More nurseries and carriers have encountered double brokering, where unbeknownst to them, the broker or carrier they contracted with isn't the one that ends up carrying the load. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BILL GOLOSKI FROM ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY ANDREW BURGESS

Shippers, brokers and carriers increasingly must be watchful for a fraudulent practice called 'double brokering'

BY MITCH LIES

FOR HIS FIRST 25 YEARS in business, freight broker Cory Kinnaman of **Truck Transportation Services** in Wilsonville, Oregon never ran into fraudulent carriers.

This past year, he has encountered them multiple times.

Last January, a customer hired him to broker a shipment and he secured a carrier. The shipment was delivered, the customer paid him, and he paid the carrier he assigned to the load. All seemingly routine.

The problem? Unbeknownst to him, a different company actually carried the

load, but they never got paid. Welcome to double brokering.

"So, several months later, I've been paid by the customers," Kinnaman said. "I've paid the truck that was hired to do the job. I get a phone call from a lawyer or a collection agency stating that we have not paid freight to the carrier that delivered the shipment."

Transportation executives say that fraud has been an issue in transportation services for years, but today, they are seeing more of it. Double brokering is an increasingly common scheme.

"We've been seeing it over the years," said Debbie Frederick of **K & M Distribution Inc.** in Rogue River, Oregon. "It's just that it's more prevalent right now. There's more of it going on. There are a lot more stolen identities and that sort of thing. Technology has kind of added to the issue."

As the term suggests, double brokering involves multiple layers of brokering, kind of like Russian nesting dolls. Carriers that exist only on paper are accepting loads, then passing them off to other carriers to actually do the work. It's illegal to do this without disclosing it.

Sometimes there are multiple middlemen each taking their cut. Sometimes they take it all, never paying the actual carrier.

"The scary part of this whole thing is that people are opening up companies, filing their company with FMCSA (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration), and using that to broker freight," Kinnaman said. "And they'll do that as long as they can, until they get caught and go out of business."

After going through paperwork, Kinnaman discovered that the trucking company he hired then went through another brokerage, who then gave the load to a second trucking company. >>

Layers of deception



Transportation executives say that fraud has been an issue in transportation services for years, but today, they are seeing more of it. Double brokering is an increasingly common scheme. ADOBE STOCK

The second trucking company, the one that delivered the nursery load, never received payment from the fraudulent company.

Kinnaman said the fraudulent company looked legitimate. It had its FMCSA paperwork. It had its certificate of cargo insurance. And it had its completed W9 forms.

“They looked like a legitimate company,” Kinnaman said. “They’ve got all the paperwork, but they do not have any trucks or trailers. So, they’re just acting as a broker posing as a truck-driving operation, when in fact they don’t really have anything besides the piece of paper.”

Trying to recoup payment from a company no longer in business is virtually impossible, Kinnaman said. So, in order to maintain good customer relations, Kinnaman paid when he was contacted by the collection agency. So he ended up paying twice for the load: once to the company that actually delivered the goods, and once to the fraudulent company.

“We didn’t have to pay, but I’ve got a

good relationship with that customer, and so most of the time, you’ve got to bite the bullet,” Kinnaman said.

Forearmed against fraud

Double brokering is illegal, but enforcement is often left to the industry itself. A proactive approach, vetting who you do business with, is the best protection.

Kinnaman today has added steps to his carrier-vetting process, including checking a carrier’s number of inspections and checking a “fraud tab” on a subscription program called Safer Watch. This service rates carriers based in part on their National Safety score, their insurance limits, the quality of their insurance company and other factors.

He also checks for duplicate phone numbers. “Sometimes what we’ll see is the contact number that we’ve got for the trucking company is also a phone number for a towing company, also the phone number for a construction company,” he said. “So, they’ve got all these different businesses listed on the same phone num-

ber. That’s a red flag.

“We’ve seen it where there’s been multiple MC (motor carrier) numbers for a carrier,” he said. “That’s a red flag, because that means they’re closing them down and starting up new ones for some reason. If I’m a fraudulent company or I’m not even a real company but I’m acting as a broker and I get caught, all I’m going to do is refile my paperwork and open up another business under another name with a new MC [number], even though my name is still associated with it.”

In some cases, everything will look good. A company will pass all the fraud-watch hurdles, but then at the bottom of the report he will notice that the company has zero inspections. “If you’ve got a carrier with 50 carriers and they’ve had zero inspections in five years, that’s not a real company,” Kinnaman said.

“It’s little things like that you have to watch out for. You’ve got to really be diligent about checking carriers,” he said. “From this point forward, I’m pretty

confident that we have worked through that and we're not going to have this issue moving forward."

But, he said, the opportunity for fraud is still ever present in the industry.

"The hard part is there's not a clear-cut way (to ensure legitimate business dealings) besides having a relationship with a truck company and knowing who it is you are hiring," Kinnaman said. "And for a brokerage, that's a tough sell, because we're onboarding new carriers all the time. I mean, we're trying to be as busy as possible."

Frederick at K & M said she too has added vetting protocols to protect against fraud in recent years, and, in fact, does so all the time. Also, she said, K & M keeps comprehensive records of every contact the company has with a carrier, including all emails and phone numbers ever used by a company.

Due diligence

"It's real hard to sort through it," Frederick said. "But within house, you have to do your due diligence. And I don't see it changing."

K & M Distribution also subscribes to programs that rate trucking companies based on their safety scores, maintenance scores, tickets and other classifications, programs that help ferret out fraudulent companies.

"And they give you the owners' names, contact names, all of that kind of stuff," Frederick said. "And we'll connect that information together with what numbers they called in on. And we'll look at what the Internet might show if you randomly go out and search for that carrier. You will want to look for telephone numbers, emails, names and that type of thing.

"We also verify directly with insurance companies. We don't take a certificate from somebody and use it. >>



"The scary part of this whole thing is that people are opening up companies, filing their company with FMCSA (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration), and using that to broker freight."

— Cory Kinnaman, owner, Truck Transportation Services



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We talk to the insurance company. We also try to get tractor-trailer VIN (vehicle identification number) numbers to match them up with the insurance company's information."

Frederick has encountered situations where a fraudulent operator will represent themselves as part of a known company. "Then they'll try to book a load with you, and they'll have the correct information about that company," she said. "But our first move is to call the owner of the company immediately and say, 'Can you verify this person is actually representing you?' And you'd be surprised how many times they say no."

New companies also draw particular scrutiny, she said, to the point where K & M has a policy that it won't work with trucking companies that haven't been in business for at least six months to a year.

"We've been in business for 32 years," Frederick said. "So, it's been years and years

"They'll see a load posted out there and all of a sudden, you'll get scammer after scammer after scammer."

— **Debbie Frederick,**
K&M Distribution

of seeing this kind of thing. And we are always trying to tighten it up, tighten it up, tighten up every way we can."

Frederick said that about 10 percent of the time she vets a company, a red flag will come up and she won't take the order. Also, she said, fraudulent operators seem to work more on a Thursday or a Friday afternoon when distributors are trying to cover orders.

"They'll see a load posted out there and all of a sudden, you'll get scammer after scammer after scammer," she said.

"Sometimes I think they have an internal email that says, 'Everybody blast and see if you can get in the door.' We might get 10 or 15 within an hour. So, you're always on your toes."

Frederick said there are times when her dispatchers get impatient as they wait for her to clear a carrier. "My dispatchers look at me and go, 'Are you going to clear?' And I'm saying 'No, I'm still in the middle, but I can't connect this dot and that dot. I'm finding a telephone number that goes back to someone else that I'm tracking. I've got a name that I see coming up somewhere else that had a bad business. And until I can say it's okay, we're not clear to load this company.'" ☺

Mitch Lies is a freelance writer covering agricultural issues based in Salem Oregon. He can be reached at MitchLies@Comcast.net.

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Industry veteran leading turnaround

Gary Furr was brought in to examine the nursery operations, interview staff and make recommendations on how to correct the problems. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

Gary Furr addresses toxic company culture to fix crippling problems at Rio Verde Plantas

BY VIC PANICKUL

WHEN TORY SCHWOPE, founder of DCA Outdoor based in Kansas City, Missouri, purchased a 300-acre nursery in Cornelius, Oregon, and 500-acre nursery in Banks, Oregon, he had no idea the magnitude of the problems that he'd face.

About two months into his efforts to transform the two businesses into **Rio Verde Plantas** and the Oregon branch of Schwope Brothers Tree Farm, he uncovered a toxic culture and managers who would deliberately sabotage his efforts.

"I have never had people be intentional about sabotaging my efforts, working against what I was trying to accomplish. It was extraordinarily frustrating and deflating for me," said Schwope. "It was heart-breaking for me."

"I was out of options and I needed help," he said. Something needed to be done to turn around the culture.

Help from an old friend

Gary Furr had come to know Schwope as a business colleague first, and then a friend while he was at J. Frank Schmidt & Son nursery (Boring, Oregon), where he rose through the ranks and became chief operating officer. Schwope was a client at the time and Furr stopped by whenever he was calling on customers in the Midwest.

"Tory called me in May of 2020 and he had just bought the nursery and wanted to show me around," Furr said. "By that fall, he called me to ask for help."

Furr was asked to evaluate the company and make a



PHOTO BY JOSH LAPOINT

"I have never had people be intentional about sabotaging my efforts, working against what I was trying to accomplish. It was extraordinarily frustrating and deflating for me."

— Tory Schwope, DCA Outdoor founder



Turnaround



Furr checks in on Patricia Damian, section grower in charge of planting, in the potting shed at Rio Verde. He makes it a point to walk around the nursery regularly to greet the staff and see how they're doing. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

recommendation.

There were a host of problems, said Josh LaPoint, sales manager at DCA. "Inventory was inaccurate. Plants would be ready, but they would show in the system as not ready. Outside sales reps didn't want to sell because the inventory was off — they didn't know what could be sold."

"Shipping was abysmal," LaPoint said. They took seven hours to load a truck and the plants were not being loaded correctly. "The plants were arriving damaged," he said. Plus, they were loading the wrong orders in the truck or orders would contain plants that the customer didn't order. "When the material was being pulled from the field, plants for different clients were placed on the same pallet instead of separate ones."

"There were a lot of safety issues," LaPoint said. "Nobody paid attention or cared."

There was also a lack of organization in the field, which led to poor plant quality.

"Plants weren't grouped together by plant type or water requirement, so they were

receiving the incorrect quality of irrigation," production manager Jess Cesar said. "A lot of plants were overgrown for their container size and rootbound in their containers."

The problems themselves could have been tackled individually, but closer examination by Furr found that the problems ultimately had the same root cause.

"The culture here was toxic," Furr said. "People did not do their jobs. They had no accountability. They had an organizational structure, but nobody was following it. We had to change the people in order to change the culture here."

Schwoppe asked Furr if he thought the company could be turned around. "I said maybe, but not without a whole lot of work," Furr said.

Then Schwoppe asked Furr if he would lead the turnaround.

Furr thought about it. "When Tory explained the vision and mission, I told him I'd help him do it," he said.

Schwoppe was building DCA into a vertically integrated company where different businesses under the umbrella com-

pany would work together to supply the distribution market. It was an innovative idea. The portfolio of companies included growers, distributors, a transportation company, a marketing company, and a retail and agritourism operation. And Rio Verde and Schwoppe Brothers Tree Farm would have an important role.

"There's a lot of moving pieces here because we're a vertically integrated company. This operation is the foundation for the rest of the company," Furr said.

Both Oregon companies had their own brands and niche but there would be shared functions like finance, HR, and administration. The Oregon operation of Schwoppe Brothers Tree Farms would focus on bareroot and packaged shade, ornamental and fruit trees. Rio Verde would focus on container-grown plants.

Change the people, change the culture

Furr met with staff at both nurseries and told them the company was changing directions.

“The train is leaving the station, and I will help you get on board,” he told employees. “But if you come kicking and screaming, I’m going to kick you off the train.”

Tory gave Gary full autonomy. The first thing he did was get rid of the director of operations, who wasn’t up to the task. “I served as interim director of operations and it was going to be a 6-month job, then it turned into 12 months, then 18 months.”

“Culture changes aren’t easy. It’s like turning an ocean liner,” Furr said. “To fix it, you have to put the right people in the right spot. They’re the ones who make it happen. I’m just here to facilitate.”

Furr initially tapped the talent that stood out when he did the evaluation of the company.

Cesar, the current production manager, was a production coordinator when Furr started the process. “When I inter-

viewed her, I knew we had a star,” Furr said. “She’s amazing, capable and competent, and smart.” When the production manager left, he promoted her to that position.

Gabby Romero started out in the nursery pruning plants. One day the dock manager needed help and asked her if she knew how to drive a forklift and she said yes. “I’ve been in shipping ever since,” she said.

When the shipping foreman left, Romero was promoted to the position.

Amidst all of the changes, Furr tries to keep things focused so he tries to keep it simple. “We focus on three priorities each week and keep things neat, clean and organized so we can be efficient and effective and safe.”

While it’s important to focus on the business, it’s also important to focus on people, Furr said. It’s something that he instills in his managers.

“It’s not like we have two separate lives,” he said. “We have a business life and a personal life and they go hand in hand. If our business life is not going well, then it’s likely that our personal life will not be going well and vice versa.”

Romero appreciates the concern that Furr demonstrates for the well being of the workers.

“When it’s hot, he gets Gatorade for the workers,” she said. “That didn’t happen before. The workers know that the company cares for them.”

“He doesn’t just want you to succeed in the business, he wants you to succeed in life,” said Elizabeth Martinez, who oversees HR and finance. “When he walks around, he asks people how they’re doing. He cares about people genuinely. He finds out what moves each of us and tries to support and help us. He does that with everybody, not just managers.”



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“I love my job. I was looking for a company that reflected my personal values and I found it here. I’m valued and can make an impact,” said Martinez, who was interviewed for the job by Furr. “What I do matters. It feels good.”

“I learned a lot of patience from him just by watching him,” LaPoint said. “You wouldn’t run out of second chances with him, as long as you were trying. He’s in it with you. I learned to get out there and try things even if it didn’t stick. He’d say ‘well, lesson learned.’”

“Each week on Monday in our huddle we get together, he gives a mini talk about business and about life,” LaPoint said. “We get these life lessons every week.”

“He’s strict, strong and direct in his communications, but at the same time he’s very caring,” Martinez said. “He’s very direct about what needs to be done and goals. He makes sure teams follow goals and core values and he keeps them on track, but he’s emotionally supportive too.” Turning around the operation has required a constant push from everyone in the same direction. Furr calls this “keeping the pressure on the yoke.”

“I was a pilot for 22 years,” Furr said. “When you’re flying a plane, you turn the yoke to turn the plane. If you let go of the yoke, the plane will return to its original direction of flight because of momentum. You have to keep pressure on the yoke to maintain desired trajectory. In business, it’s the same. If you want to make changes or change direction, you have to keep applying pressure to move the business in that direction, or entropy makes people go back to their old habits.”

“He keeps reminding everyone that we have to put our best effort forward every day,” Martinez said. “That’s the key to how he has changed the culture here.”

Time’s ticking

While working to turn Rio Verde and Schwope Brothers Tree Farm around, Furr has lived with the knowledge that his time is limited, and not just to complete this job. In December of 2020 he was diagnosed with heart failure and cardiac amyloidosis. Abnormal



Furr and Schwope got to know each other when Furr was COO at J. Frank Schmidt & Son and Schwope was a client. PHOTO BY JOSH LAPOINT

proteins in his bone marrow are attacking his heart, he said. He had the disease since the early 2000s but did not know it. His doctors told him the average lifespan with his condition is 5-10 years if they caught it at that time — a prognosis he has already outlived. Furr said it’s been a liberating experience for him.

“It freed me to put all of my affairs in order,” he said. “It allowed me to tell my life story to my sons and my grandchildren. It’s really a feeling of peace.”

In June, he had a big party, a celebration, with family and friends. “It was basically a celebration of life,” Furr said. “Why have it after you’re dead? I wanted to be there.”

It has given him a sense of urgency to get what he wanted to accomplish at Rio Verde done.

The company recently hired a new West Coast director of operations. “We finally hired Scott (Boatman) so that I can step back and be an adviser,” Furr said. His goal now is to focus on getting Boatman up to speed and supporting him to make sure he’s successful. Boatman has a business background, but no nursery experience.

Furr has made a big difference at the company, but there’s still lots of work ahead.

“Gary is so far the best business

partner that I’ve had in my career from an operator’s standpoint,” Schwope said. “It was amazing to go from the most frustrating experience to the most rewarding experience.”

“We still have a lot to do,” Schwope said. “We still have key members of our different teams to fill out. We have a lot of work establishing KPIs (key performance indicators), we have equipment systems to continue to invest in. We have a lot of infrastructure to rehabilitate.”

“We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us to become the operation we envision,” Schwope said.

“We always have room for improvement,” Furr said. “When you keep raising the bar, there is a gap between where you are and where you want to be, which creates tension. You can either move closer to the goal to relieve the tension or lower the goal, which is not a good option. Think of it as creative tension not negative, which keeps you on the path of continuous improvement. It’s a never-ending process.” ©

Vic Panichkul is publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and managing editor and art director for Digger magazine. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or VPanichkul@OAN.org

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EMPLOYMENT

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Lakeside Nursery is a container grown wholesale nursery located in Canby. We are looking for laborers interested in working in the Nursery industry to join our team. Desired Skills: • Planting • Pruning • Plant Knowledge • Sprinkler system/ Watering • Plant Shipping • Plant fertilizing and maintenance. Requirements: • Ability to lift 30 – 75 lbs. • Reliable transportation/ Driver's License • Ability to work in an outdoor environment. • Spanish and English required. Not Required but wanted: Farm equipment experience. Full time, in person. \$16–18 hourly Monday–Friday. We offer sick time and 401K with paid time off. Must be able to reliably commute to Canby, Oregon 97013 or relocate before starting work (required). One year plant nursery experience required.

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OUTSIDE AND INSIDE SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Blooming Nursery is looking to expand our sales force! We are looking for the right people to join our successful and professional sales team. Passion, organization and dedication as well as a solid background in the nursery industry are some of the qualities we value the most. We are a 41 year old wholesale nursery specializing in herbaceous perennials, herbs, grasses and specialty annuals but also producing a line of selected shrubs. We sell exclusively to Independent Retailers (mostly in the Pacific Northwest) as well as to the landscape trade. Currently we are seeking an additional Inside Sales Rep as well as an additional Outside Sales Rep. Salary and bonuses are competitive! Health insurance, Vacation, 401K 6% matching. We are environmentally careful. We believe in supporting our community of employees. Please send your resume and a letter of introduction to: gkdinsdale@bloomingnursery.com

EMPLOYMENT

INSIDE SALES REPRESENTATIVE

TSW Nursery Sales Inc. is seeking a plant-knowledgeable inside sales representative with 3–5 years of sales experience. The perfect candidate must be proficient in MS Office Suite and Quickbooks software, provide excellent customer service, have strong verbal and written communication skills, manage their time, and be organized. Salary commensurate with experience.

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Our partially employee-owned Nursery, north of Seattle, is looking for an experienced Nursery Manager who can guide a team of up to 12 members. 10 or more years of hands-on experience in growing and propagation of nursery stock is recommended. Compensation from \$85K per year plus bonus. Please send resume to diggerjobs@oan.org with the subject line Blind Box C.

EMPLOYMENT

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EMPLOYMENT**DISPATCHER****FOREST GROVE, OR**

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Reporting to the Distribution Manager, we are seeking a Dispatcher to join our team at our Forest Grove location at Forest Grove, Oregon. You will use your outstanding organizational and communication skills to assist with routing orders and getting them properly set up and ready to leave the loading dock.

Duties will include: • Routing loads and entering into Oracle • Working with carriers to book loads and monitoring deliveries • Assisting with budgeting, and staying on track • Assisting with ordering shipping supplies as needed • Overseeing paperwork flow, from making a load to running the PODs • Checking in drivers, going over load paperwork with them, checking them out with the load • Overseeing and managing DMV licenses, tags, registrations, etc. on vehicles as needed • Maintaining all DOT & DMV driver and equipment files, including driver logs, trip reports, pre- and post-trip inspections, rental equipment reports, and issue chain of custody forms to drivers for drug/alcohol testing • Assisting other departments as needed

Qualifications: • High school diploma or general education degree (GED) • Ability to read/write English; ability to communicate in English • Bilingual Spanish a strong plus • At least one year experience working in a team environment • Have a basic knowledge of geography of the lower 48 states a strong plus • Excellent phone skills • Availability to work extra hours and/or weekends Full-time, 8 hour shift Monday-Friday with weekend availability. From \$20/hour. Benefits: 401(k), dental insurance, health insurance, paid time off, vision insurance.

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EMPLOYMENT**ASSISTANT FARM MANAGER**

Moana Nursery in Canby, Oregon, is looking for a full-time Assistant Nursery Manager who will work directly with the General Manager. They will work in all areas of the 193-acre wholesale nursery, which has both container yard and field production. We have a parent company in Reno, Nevada, with three retail stores and a commercial/residential landscape division.

Duties: • Production planning, inventory • Herbicide applications in container yard and fields • Customer orders • Fleet maintenance decisions • Budgeting of annual expenses • Shipping • Supply purchasing.

Requirements: • A strong foundation in common sense • A strong knowledge of the ornamental nursery business • A strong knowledge of plant production, growing, propagation • Experience with irrigation systems, overhead impact sprinklers and drip irrigation • Experience with wide range of agriculture/farm equipment operation. • Computer experience • Bilingual is preferred.

Salary and benefits: • \$55,000-\$70,000/year (with bonuses) • Benefits: 401K, 401K matching • Health/Dental/Vision insurance, Paid time off, Professional development assistance, Relocation assistance.

To apply: Email resume and answers to these questions: Are you willing to work outside in all weather conditions throughout the year? What is your education? How long have you been in the nursery business? (5 years preferred) What language(s) do you speak? What licenses or certifications do you have? (driver's license required; chemical applicator's license preferred) Please visit our website at www.moananursery.com

PROPAGATION MANAGER, FOREST GROVE, OR

We are seeking a Propagation Manager to work out of our Forest Grove, OR location. Job requires Horticulture/Agriculture or related experience and well-developed leadership skills including the ability to listen without judgement, give and receive honest feedback, create a culture of open communication and place a high value on teamwork and accountability. You will get to work closely with the Production Manager for management and oversight of the Propagation department, including all aspects of propagation production from cutting, harvest and preparation, sticking and potting, lay down, growing, finishing, sorting, canning and delivery to internal and external customers.

You will get to: • Oversee the daily operations of the Propagation teams, executing propagation & production plans. • Ensure that quality standards and best management practices are met in production and within the propagation department. • Schedule and prioritize work lists, plan daily production & labor. • Maintain raw material inventory counts and insure needed supplies are on hand. • Coordinate daily operations and labor needs for the department. • Work with team leads to communicate cutting and potting needs from their areas. • Assist the General Manager in improving productivity and reducing shrink. • Embrace learning and training on all new mechanization equipment and tools. • Work with the management team to implement best management practices and efficiencies within propagation and canning, in part by learning and implementing lean projects and processes. • Work with the Availability team in preparation for and taking of physical inventories & cycle counts in the Propagation department. • Financial results & meeting monthly & yearly budget results. • Capital needs & projects. • Work with the Scheduling manager to reduce residency of crops. • Oversee the new products department. • Handle staffing, training and discipline of employees.

Job requirements: • Experience in nursery, landscape, horticulture or other agricultural-related endeavors • Bachelor's degree (B. A. or B.S.) from four-year college or university; or 1-2 years related experience and/or training; or equivalent combination of education and experience • Strong leadership, supervisory and communication skills • Must have a current driver's license • Ability to communicate in English and Spanish • Must be able to operate a computer using Windows based programs to include but not limited to Excel, Word and Office.

Full time, 8-10 hour shift, Monday-Friday.. Benefits to include medical, dental, vision, life, long term disability, vacation and sick time, and more. Compensation to start in the low \$50s, higher based on experience.

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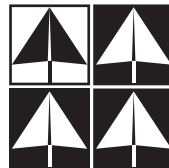
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

Series content is coordinated by Dr. Lloyd Nackley, associate professor of nursery production and greenhouse management at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.



Oregon State University



An ongoing series provided by Oregon State University in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture and in partnership with the Oregon Association of Nurseries



Phytophthora root rot caused by *P. cinnamomi* (wilting plant, left) and *Phytophthora* leaf spot caused by *P. syringae* (right), both occurring at the same nursery. These two diseases require different approaches for management. BY JERRY WEILAND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE

Research shows *Phytophthora* root rot, leaf spot require different approaches for management

BY JERRY E. WEILAND AND CAROLYN F. SCAGEL

IT'S BEEN 10 YEARS since our research team started receiving funds from the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) to study soilborne diseases for the nursery industry. Based on Oregon Association of Nursery's research priorities, we chose to study *Phytophthora* root rot because it is one of the most common diseases of nursery plants nationwide.

We also focused on the disease as it affects *Rhododendron* because the Pacific Northwest is the top producer of this valuable ornamental shrub (\$13 million/year). Since 2013, we have collaborated with other scientists to better understand this troublesome disease, including Johanna Del Castillo-Munera (University of California-Davis), Carla Garzon (Delaware Valley University), Nik Grunwald (United States Department of Agriculture-

Agricultural Research Service), Jay Pscheidt (Oregon State University), and Luisa Santamaria (OSU). Here are some of our most important findings.

Main causes of *Phytophthora* root rot of rhododendron

Our first task was to determine which *Phytophthora* species were causing root rot of rhododendron in the PNW.

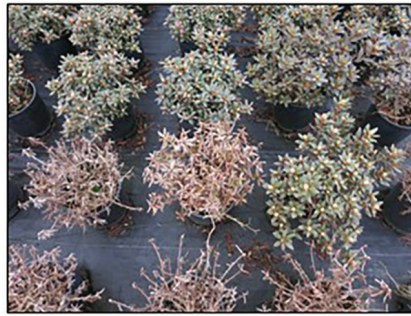
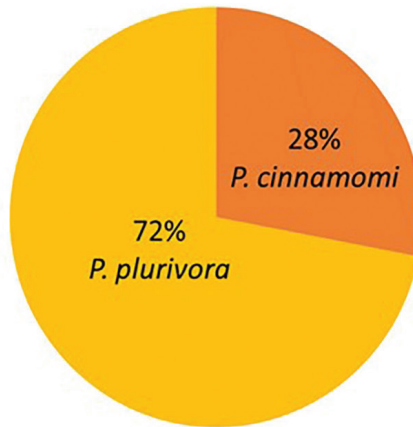
A 1974 survey indicated that *P. cinnamomi* was the main culprit in our region, with losses averaging 10–15%. However, a lot has changed since then, and nurseries may be dealing with new species that weren't around 50 years ago. Indeed, more recent surveys show that there are about 20 different *Phytophthora* species causing leaf spots, cankers, and root



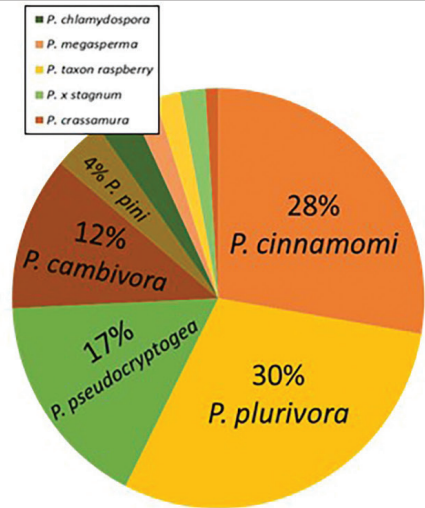
Phytophthora root rot



Propagation



Container



Field

Rhododendrons are exposed to an increasing number of *Phytophthora* species as they move from propagation into container and field systems. As a result, container and field systems generally suffer more losses from *Phytophthora* root rot. BY JERRY WEILAND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE

rot on many of Oregon's most important nursery crops.

Nevertheless, it still wasn't clear which species were causing root rot on *Rhododendron*, and we also wanted to know if disease control had improved since the 1970s, when few *Phytophthora*-specific fungicides were available.

To answer these questions, we evaluated root rot at seven PNW rhododendron nurseries and collected samples to identify the *Phytophthora* species involved.

Our survey found that root rot is still a serious problem for the rhododendron industry, causing up to 41% in inventory losses per year (average 15%), with damage generally being least on cuttings in propagation facilities, intermediate in container-grown plants, and worst in the field. The increase in root rot corresponds to an increasing number of *Phytophthora* species as plants move through the production cycle (see chart above). This is because propagation facilities generally start with clean materials, while plants in container and field systems are increasingly exposed to *Phytophthora* from contaminated pots, gravel, irrigation water,

potting media, and field soil.

Our survey also found that *P. plurivora* and *P. cinnamomi* are now the top two species causing root rot in most rhododendron nurseries, with *P. plurivora* (44% of samples) replacing *P. cinnamomi* (29% of samples) as the #1 species in our region.

Phytophthora plurivora is a relatively newly-discovered species that may have been introduced into the U.S. as early as the 1960s. It is unique in that it produces inoculum that spreads both above and belowground. It causes leaf spots, cankers, and root rot.

On the other hand, *P. cinnamomi* is restricted almost completely belowground where it mainly causes root rot. This difference in biology allows *P. plurivora* to spread more easily than *P. cinnamomi*, and has led to it becoming one of the most important *Phytophthora* species in nurseries worldwide.

Fungicide resistance hampers control

While conducting the survey, growers mentioned that *Phytophthora* root rot was increasingly difficult to control, and that fungicides weren't always effective at pre-

venting the disease.

Based on this information, we tested *Phytophthora* isolates from the survey for resistance to two popular fungicides, mefenoxam (e.g., Subdue MAXX®) and phosphorous acid (e.g., Alude™).

While all *P. cinnamomi* isolates and many *P. plurivora* isolates were sensitive to both fungicides, isolates of *P. plurivora* at four nurseries had developed resistance to one or both products. In fact, 90% of the *P. plurivora* isolates at one nursery were resistant to phosphorous acid, which explained why that grower had difficulty controlling root rot.

So, although both fungicides are effective for *P. cinnamomi*, they may not work at nurseries where *P. plurivora* has developed resistance (see photo on Page 43). This situation illustrates why it is important to not rely on fungicides alone for disease control and why growers should alternate with more than one or two different fungicide chemistries over time.

Drenches vs. foliar sprays

We also tested whether disease control depends upon where the fungicides



A mefenoxam soil drench did not prevent root rot caused by a fungicide resistant isolate of *P. plurivora* (yellow plant, foreground), but was effective against root rot caused by *P. cinnamomi* (healthy plant, background right). BY JERRY WEIL AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE

are applied to the plant.

Both mefenoxam and phosphorus acid are systemic, and some growers apply these fungicides as a foliar spray to protect against leaf- and stem-infecting *Phytophthora* species such as *P. syringae* and *P. ramorum*, hoping that the systemic activity will also protect against root rot (see photo on Page 41). But does this actually work? Unfortunately, no.

Our research showed that soil drenches are much more effective at reducing root rot than foliar sprays. It is therefore better to put fungicides where the plant needs the most protection: on the leaves for *Phytophthora* leaf spots and on the roots for *Phytophthora* root rot.

The impact of nitrogen fertilization

Fertilization is often used to produce larger, quality plants more quickly. We therefore wanted to see how nitrogen (N) application influences root rot in a study evaluating three levels of ammonium sulfate (none, low, and high).

Generally, increasing the amount of N applications caused root rot to get

worse. Although lower levels of N reduced the number of visibly diseased plants, it also led to plants becoming stunted and chlorotic, and could increase the risk for selling apparently healthy plants with low levels of infection. Growers should therefore focus on a balanced approach, being cautious not to overfertilize, as this makes plants more susceptible to several diseases, not just *Phytophthora* root rot.

Climate change affects *Phytophthora* biology

Climate change is having an effect on nursery production in the Willamette Valley, with hotter and drier summers and more unpredictably cold or wet winters. We therefore conducted experiments to determine how temperature and soil moisture influence *Phytophthora* biology and control.

Our studies showed that *P. cinnamomi* and *P. plurivora* are adapted to a broad range of temperatures, growing best at temperatures near 80 F. *Phytophthora plurivora*, however, sporulates better at cooler temperatures (50-70 F) than *P. cinnamomi* (60-80 F), which may give it >>

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an advantage for causing disease in spring and fall. We also found that temperature influences how well fungicides inhibit the growth of *Phytophthora* isolates in the laboratory. But additional experiments are needed to determine how this relates to disease control.

Because *Phytophthora* root rot is frequently associated with overwatering and wet soil, we tested whether we could reduce disease by growing newly infected plants under drier conditions.

Unfortunately, plants grown with less water developed just as much disease as those grown in consistently moist soil. Counterintuitively, root rot actually became severe under dry conditions because the newly infected roots slowly lost their ability to take up water.

This, in turn, caused soil moisture to rise and resulted in a slightly wetter environment that was more conducive for root rot. So, once infection has occurred, there is little that can be done to manage

the disease by reducing irrigation. Instead, focus disease control efforts on preventing infection from occurring in the first place by avoiding situations where plants are overwatered or sit in puddles for any length of time.

Future directions

In summary, our research has shown that there are two main species of *Phytophthora* causing root rot of rhododendron, *P. plurivora* and *P. cinnamomi*. This is important, because these two species differ in their biology and adaptability to different environments (affecting their ability to cause disease) as well as their sensitivity to fungicides and other disease control measures (affecting disease control). Disease control strategies that were developed for *P. cinnamomi* back in the 1970s–1990s may not work as well for other *Phytophthora* species such as *P. plurivora*.

Our next step will be to evaluate new fungicide chemistries to see if they

are effective against mefenoxam- and phosphorous acid-resistant *Phytophthora* isolates. We will also be expanding our *Phytophthora* root rot survey to include other plants important to the nursery industry. This will allow us to identify other *Phytophthora* species constraining nursery production and will help us develop disease control methods that are effective for a broader range of nursery plant species. ☺

Dr. Jerry E. Weiland is a research plant pathologist with the Horticultural Crops Disease and Pest Management Research Unit, USDA Agricultural Research Service in Corvallis, Oregon. He can be reached at Jerry.Weiland@usda.gov. Dr. Carolyn F. Scagel is a research plant physiologist with the Horticultural Crops Production and Genetic Improvement Research Unit, USDA Agricultural Research Service in Corvallis, Oregon. She can be reached at Carolyn.Scagel@usda.gov.

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Ag can be the author of climate solutions

The debate over climate change is no longer in the hands of the scientific community or political talking heads on cable news.

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Agriculture has an opportunity. If we shore up our resources, we can make the case that we are a critical component of providing relief. We can help sequester the carbon that is changing our weather patterns and scorching parts of the planet that have not seen such heat in recorded history.

There is an increasing societal drumbeat to do what it takes to find solutions. We are among many who find ourselves in the crosshairs because, like others, we must transport our product to market. It's a huge policy issue affecting not just us.

But we can create an offramp for ourselves by earning greater recognition for the value that nursery stock brings to the table in fighting climate change.

Vast opportunities for our industry

Let's level set what is known. Nursery and greenhouse growers are some of the most productive growers in the world. Oregon sets the standard for what nurseries grow and ship all over the country and throughout the continent.

The environmental community, communities of color and justice advocates are all increasingly aware of the urban heat island effect. Metropolitan areas are reducing parking, promoting plugins for electric vehicles, and even disinvesting in core businesses in the city. The truth is, none of that will do as much as tree canopies. All cities need an integrated green infrastructure plan. Whether the OAN is in the halls of the state capitol or on the ornate granite corridors of Congress, we must step up and advocate for our role in resolving this major crisis in the minds of our children.

Beware of the tax man as an agent of change

The old adage remains as true today

as when I worked for the United States Senate. You tax things you want to go away. Nowhere is this more true than on the regulatory side of the climate debate.

Front and center are fossil fuels used to move product to market. A near second place is the demonization of natural gas. It is not worth debating whether these energy sources produce carbon. The more important question is, what are the suitable replacements? Is there a transitional period where industries and markets can adjust? They are not good at going cold turkey.

The move toward electric trucks and farm equipment is a slow road. Much of that is tied to performance issues. Never mind that the source material for e-batteries is China, which is the big polluter on the climate scene. The environmental community sweeps this under the carpet.

A transportation system is not built overnight. There needs to be a focus on infrastructure that allows for large-scale, multi-modal options. The same can be said for energy and the use of natural gas.

For three decades, natural gas was incentivized, mobilized and utilized across the business landscape. Efficiencies have been perfected. Any conversion to electric power will take time and more resources. What governments do is tax or significantly regulate to provide the hammer on use of fossil fuel and natural gas. If agriculture gets no help with a well-planned transition, the change is going to start feeling very punitive for our industry.

Morphing agency purposes

Another change is the expanding mission of state agencies as they morph to embrace environmental stewardship. Up to now we have had agencies devoted to energy, natural resources and taxation setting parameters and policy. Now, you can expect to see every agency getting in on the game.

The U.S. Labor Department was established in 1913, under President William Howard Taft, with a mandate to improve conditions for workers. Now, thanks to mission creep, it's a climate change agency. That is thanks to the Biden



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

administration, which is pushing to focus on climate across the federal government. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 includes massive climate provisions linking tax incentives for clean energy projects to workplace standards. While alignment of agency resources is preferred, competing voices make for muddled policy.

The Big Think in 2024

We expect to see the 2025 Oregon Legislature craft a transportation package. The OAN supported the large increase in transportation infrastructure dollars at the state level in 2017, but the promises made six years ago have yet to come to fruition.

The attempts to address freight-clogging critical pinch points have been put on the back burner. So far we have had price increases without the commensurate improvements.

We need to show that green goods are a benefit to the climate, and we need cost-effective ways to grow and ship products throughout the nation.

State and federal governments need to reward growers for the planet-saving products they grow. During 2024, I will be traveling throughout Oregon and talking directly with you about what our climate policy should look like. We want to know what the OAN can advocate for to remove barriers so you can do what you do best, which is grow plants.

We will draw upon science to quantify the carbon sequestration based on what you are growing and intend to grow. That's how our industry can take its place as the architect of climate solutions by, of and for agriculture. ☺

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