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Making progress towards sustainability

When I first saw that this month's issue of *Digger* was focused on sustainability, I was apprehensive.

I reactively thought about how my small nursery hasn't reached a scale that would let us focus on sustainability.

I thought about what larger nurseries are doing, such as Robinson Nursery. They have stopped shipping 600,000+ pounds of plastic because of their new root bag systems. They have also run studies showing how much carbon sequestration their nursery has managed to achieve. The results are beyond incredible!

Meanwhile, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas has set up a "bug lab," where they have reduced their spray use by breeding and introducing beneficial bugs into their nursery. As grossed out as I was walking through the breeding lab, you can't help but be impressed.

I see the monumental changes some nurseries are making, and feel overwhelmed. How can I make a difference like that?

But then I read a recent article from *Nursery Management* where they quoted Anna Ball at the Global Garden Retail Conference. She said, "Plants are probably the only product sold that are completely sustainable."

That one quote quickly changed my way of thinking. I realized that my small operation was already working on sustainability. We're doing small things, but they add up. For example, we're reclaiming water from our can yard through drain lines and using it for field irrigation, and we're switching from overhead water to drip, lowering the amount of water used.

Frankly, our entire industry is mindful of good practices such as this. Nursery owners are some of the best stewards of land that I have ever seen. Our products don't just sequester carbon, they continue to do so for the entirety of their lives!

We also are masters of reusing by-products of other agricultural commodities. Think of the timber industry. They used to burn their timber by-products, but now we utilize those for soil and bark needs.

But it doesn't end here. Honestly,



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we should be leading the entire sustainability narrative, but other industries have jumped in and taken that marketing opportunity before we even ever saw the real value in marketing it ourselves. We now need to do some catch up in that regard. What could that look like? It will be an interesting adventure for sure.

Aside from the obvious connection between sustainability and our environmental concerns, there's also the idea of keeping the nursery industry and (even more so) Oregon nurseries vital to the end consumer.

Every nursery, big or small, must deal with changing growing practices, product diversity, and marketing strategies to remain relevant.

I should close by mentioning that keeping our own personal businesses sustainable also matters. Being able to keep a business not only profitable, but making the "juice worth the squeeze" in the words of the great Jeff Stone, is a huge conversation for many.

My kids are young enough that we have not had to seriously look at this issue yet, but I have already had it in the back of my mind. We now make business decisions based on how it would potentially affect the future of our nursery and if it is sustainable for future generations.

I guess we do more than I thought in this arena. I can proudly hold my head up with those other great leaders ... maybe not quite as high yet, but we all are true leaders in conservation and sustainability and should all be proud with the work we are doing together. ☺

Amanda Staehely