

Little doubt about it

Recently the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistical Service (USDA NASS) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) released the Top 20 Commodity List for the State of Oregon.

Our industry remains the shining example of resilience and once again is the “King of the Crops.” Despite punishing weather events, increased production costs levied by state and federal elected officials, uncertain labor markets, an unsettled, inflation-riddled economy, and a recession-hampered housing industry nationwide, the nursery and greenhouse industry left little doubt who would maintain the top spot in Oregon agriculture, with wholesale sales over \$1.2 billion.

In August, Oregon will show off the most productive nursery lands (and nursery growers) in the entire country. Those who travel to Oregon will find what they are looking for. The 2024 Farwest Show has been the preeminent confluence of grower operations, education, and networking for the last 51 years.

Texas travels to the Pacific Northwest

In June, the OAN was pleased to host our friends from the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association.

The full board and staff traveled to the green and fertile Willamette Valley to meet with the OAN Board of Directors, as well as spend a day with diverse industry production types. Texas toured **Smith Gardens** and **Oregon Flowers** in Aurora, Oregon, and **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas** and **Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm** in Woodburn, Oregon. During the joint board meeting, the two association leaders discussed common issues and pledged to work together on critical issues facing the industry.

The TNLA Board travels each June and visited Michigan in 2023. The relationship between the Oregon and Texas associations grew during the last several years while leaders and executive directors met for the Western Region Nursery & Landscape Association Executives meeting. Topics for the joint board meeting

included education and creation of worker pipelines into the industry, employee retention practices, political issues in Washington, DC through the local level, and Oregon’s well respected advocacy training.

Tour shows off the breadth of ag

The Ag-Pac Educational Services Association conducted their 2024 Legislature Tour with two buses toting around 90 participants — including sitting legislators, legislative candidates for the 2024 general election, state agency directors and staff along with members of Ag-Pac.

During the day-long tour, Ag-Pac hit several issues head on with a clear focus on labor and its impact on production in the agricultural sector. The stops included Lewis Brown Farm, Oregon State University AA Red Emmerson Advanced Wood Products Laboratory, Cheshire Yard Stroda Brothers:

This tour broke down the urban/rural divide to show firsthand the depth and breadth of natural resources in the state.

Generational debate on land use

There are a growing number of interest groups and legislators who believe they know better what the highest priority for ag lands may be. Generally, I regret to say, their idea of the best is not best for agriculture.

Prior to becoming your executive director, I worked as a chief of staff at the Metro regional government when Rod Park (**Park’s Nursery**) was an elected councilor.

Years later, Rod and I were called upon by the Oregon Legislature to draw up a 50-year peace accord between agriculture and development through the creation of urban/rural reserves. Unfortunately, our brokered peace lasted only 10 years, and the push to develop farmland resumed.

As Park has said to me a number of times — it’s key to understand that one’s stance on land use is generational. Young, you want land to farm. Middle age, you want land to expand. Old age, you want land to retire and/or pass along to your kids. The key question remains though. Is having land to farm important to the



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

nursery community?

I believe ag land is precious because once it is gone — it is gone. We see in our industry all around the country, ag lands are disappearing. Food production and nursery operations all are on the chopping block.

Back in 1973, we passed farmland protections. Do we still have the same values now? Oregon is chasing semiconductor companies. Where to put them? Ag lands. The governor wants a quantum effort to provide affordable housing. What is flat, has infrastructure and is seen by developers as open land? Ag lands. But ag is not open land. It’s neither empty nor unproductive. Ag land is simply industry without walls.

Oregon will be ground zero for the next big discussion over land use and what the industry will look like in the future. We all have a stake in the outcome.

What the Farwest show means

In the end, the nursery industry is a handshake business. Nobody cares about inner workings of a trade show — what they care about are the people, and the industry connections the show fosters. You can’t replicate that with an iPhone.

Texas has traveled and saw Oregon firsthand. Elected officials left their concrete jungles of urban life and got their shoes dirty and saw with clarity who we are. The Farwest Show aligns with what is produced at such a high quality — year after year.

The Farwest Show, for Oregon growers and all those who exhibit and attend, is the persona of the industry. Come to Oregon in August and see it to believe it. ☺