

# Digger

OCTOBER 2024

## THRIVING FROM THE START

What new growers  
need to know



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## THRIVING FROM THE START

What new growers need to know

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On the cover: There's no template for starting a retail or wholesale nursery, but five nursery owners share their success stories. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO  
On this page: Left: Nik (left) and Sergei Ovchinnikov started not one but two businesses at the same time, The Nursery Outlet and SNO Landscape. They both helped each other grow hand in hand. Photo by Vic Panichkul Right: Sebright Gardens co-owner Thomas Johnson had always been a fan of Olivia Newton-John and when she passed away from cancer, he felt the urge to do something positive to honor her memory and named an iris after her. PHOTO BY THOMAS JOHNSON



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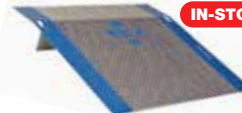
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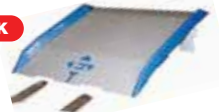
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# Thanks for the memories

**It is hard for me to believe  
that a year has already gone  
by since I wrote my first  
President's Message. What an  
incredible year it was!**

I knew that entering the president's role would be a huge responsibility and would require time away from my nursery and family, but I also knew it would be worth it. It has surpassed my expectations and has only increased my love for this industry.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people who helped me this year.

I couldn't even begin to start this without thanking the best advocate we have for our industry ... Jeff Stone. There is a reason he is thanked time and time again (but still, never enough). He works more hours than I believe is humanly possible and is everywhere all at once.

I will never forget how he missed whitewater rafting for the opportunity for just a few moments to talk to our governor on our behalf. He meets with other agricultural executives as well as other nursery executive directors to make sure we are leading this state and nation as an association. He is constantly bettering our association and therefore our industry.

But perhaps the thing he does best is bring us all together and show us how each and every one of us makes a difference within our association. Big and small, grower or supplier, owner or employee ... we all have a voice that matters. He helps find that voice. Without his support, encouragement, and words of wisdom, this year would never have been as easy as it was.

I am confident that any other person that is involved in any capacity of leadership within the organization feels that support and we are all beyond appreciative of what he does for us.

I want to also thank my family. First, my husband for his dream and the life I get to live every day with him. His determination and love for plants spearheaded this life we have now, and I will never take that for granted. He knows the impor-



Amanda Staehely

tance of the OAN's role for our industry and picked up the extra workload I left while I was busy this year.

And second, my kids. There were so many times that family members or babysitters had to pick them up from school or be with them for a few days while I was out of state. They knew how important this year was for me, and not only understood my absence at times, but were proud of what I was doing.

And finally, I want to thank all of you that have reached out this year. Those of you who reached out and introduced yourselves, called with questions or concerns for the industry, or told me that you read my column every month, I am humbled by the support, trust, and kindness.

Everywhere I turned I was met with the best of people and new friends for life. You all are what made this year so memorable for me and why I love this industry. I look forward to continuing to aid the association as past president next year and am excited to see Ben Verhoeven enter his role as president in November at our annual OAN Convention. He will be a great leader for our association and is truly one of the nicest people I have had the pleasure of knowing.

Our association is set up for the brightest future ahead and I am grateful for the opportunity I had and the beautiful memories I made this past year. Thank you all. ☺



# Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to [Calendar@OAN.org](mailto:Calendar@OAN.org) by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

## OCTOBER 4

### AMERICANHORT SALARY & BENEFITS SURVEY DEADLINE

AmericanHort and Ball Publishing have launched their second annual Salary and Benefits Survey designed for greenhouse and nursery growers and garden retail operations. Companies who take the survey can better understand salary and benefits trends and see how their businesses compare to other survey participants. Essential data will be captured by greenhouse and nursery growers, and garden retail centers in three distinct areas: company demographics, staffing and benefits, and salary. The deadline to complete the survey is October 4. Go to [TinyURL.com/AmericanHortSurvey](https://TinyURL.com/AmericanHortSurvey) to complete the survey.

## OCTOBER 9

### ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO WOODY RESIDUE MANAGEMENT

Join the Oregon State University Extension Service for a field tour of a suburban forestland parcel undergoing fire risk reduction and habitat restoration to explore alternative approaches for managing woody debris. There will be demonstrations of mastication and an air curtain incinerator as well as presentations and discussion. Topics include fire risk reduction, invasive insect sanitation, cost-share options, biochar production, smoke management, and protecting public health. The event is 9:30 a.m.–2 p.m. on October 9. For more information and to register, go to [TinyURL.com/ExtensionWood](https://TinyURL.com/ExtensionWood).

## OCTOBER 15-17

### SOUTHERN OREGON WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH CONFERENCE

Oregon OSHA is hosting a three-day event in Ashland, Oregon that will feature a variety of workshops and presentations designed to help employers and workers improve on-the-job safety and health. Topics include fall protection, hazard recognition, safety committees, excavation safety, and injury prevention. For more information, conference options, programs, and registration, go to [TinyURL.com/OSHAConferences](https://TinyURL.com/OSHAConferences).

## OCTOBER 16-17

### FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES AT OAN

Need a first aid/CPR certification renewal for yourself or one of your employees? The Oregon Association of Nurseries is holding its last session this year in English on October 16, and in Spanish on October 17. Class times are 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m. The cost is \$60 per person. It's the same for first-time certifications as well as renewals. 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 [OAN.org/Page/CPRclass](https://OAN.org/Page/CPRclass).



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALISHAN COASTAL LODGE

## NOVEMBER 15-16

### OAN CONVENTION

Join us at the picturesque Oregon Coast as we celebrate a great year at License to Grow: the 2024 OAN Convention at Salishan Coastal Lodge in Gleneden Beach, Oregon (near Lincoln City), Friday evening and all day Saturday, November 15–16. Enjoy social time with old and new friends, talk about the issues that are vital to Oregon nurseries, enjoy the sandy beaches, and honor the industry's achievers at the annual President's Awards Banquet. Complimentary childcare provided. To register, go to [OAN.org/Convention](https://OAN.org/Convention). For convention sponsorship information, go to [OAN.org/ConventionSponsor](https://OAN.org/ConventionSponsor)

## OCTOBER 23-26

### FFA NATIONAL CONVENTION & EXPO

The 97<sup>th</sup> annual Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention & Expo will take place in Indianapolis, Indiana. FFA members and guests from across the country will participate in general sessions, competitive events, educational tours, leadership workshops, an expo and shopping mall, volunteer activities and more. Early bird registration opens September 11 and ends on October 2. For more details, go to [Convention.FFA.org](https://Convention.FFA.org).

## NOVEMBER 4-7

### IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

The Irrigation Show brings the brightest minds and latest innovations in irrigation to one place. Make an investment in your business and your career while spending an exciting, jam-packed week with your peers. November 4–7 at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center in Long Beach, California. For more details, go to [Irrigation.org/2024Show](https://Irrigation.org/2024Show).

## NOVEMBER 9

### YOUNG FARMERS & RANCHERS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Come attend the 2024 Young Farmers & Ranchers Leadership Conference at the

Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center in Redmond, Oregon, to experience leadership, safety and training sessions within all sectors of the ag industry. Open to all, not just YF&R or Farm Bureau members. Network with peers in the ag industry, pick up new ideas at educational sessions, win door prizes and enjoy fun activities. For more information or to register go to [TinyURL.com/YFRConference](https://TinyURL.com/YFRConference).

## DECEMBER 4

### OAN OPEN HOUSE

Mark your calendars and save the date for the next OAN Open House on December 4. Learn more about OAN's new leadership and professional groups including NexGen, Human Resources Leadership Professionals and the coming Hispanic leadership group and how you can get involved. Learn about terrific member benefits and programs, including Legal Access, health coverage, Guest Worker Services, Trucks to Trade Shows, credit card processing, discounted Farwest Show booths, and OAN advertising. Beverages and light bites will be served. Non-members are also welcome, and members are encouraged to invite them to attend so they can meet OAN members and learn about membership benefits. The event is free. Time and location will be announced soon. ☺





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# 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](mailto:News@OAN.org).



Justin Read

## Justin Read is new owner of Garland Nursery

After 87 years, the family that has owned and operated Garland Nursery, a retail nursery in Corvallis, Oregon, has sold the nursery to Justin Read, a former employee of the nursery. Garland Nursery was started by Corlie and William Schmidt in 1937 and has been in the family for four generations, the most recent being Brenda, Lee and Erica Powell.

"We are so overjoyed to have found the perfect person to continue on this legacy," the Powells stated in an email this spring to garden club members and friends. "We are honored that he will be taking the reins and continuing to build upon what we have accomplished over the past 87 years. Justin has a tremendous horticultural background that will serve him well..."

Read is an Oregon native and an OSU graduate in horticulture and has worked at garden centers in California and Oregon, including Garland Nursery during his college years.



An emerald ash borer is seen next to an EAB larvae. The larvae burrow into the bark of ash trees, causing canopy dieback and ultimately killing the tree. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

## EMERALD ASH BORER FOUND IN THREE MORE OREGON COUNTIES

The invasive emerald ash borer (EAB) has been discovered in three new Oregon counties this summer, according to the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture (ODA) and Oregon Dept. of Forestry (ODF). The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) laboratory in Maryland has officially confirmed EAB in Marion and Yamhill counties. A third site on the border of Clackamas and Marion is believed to harbor EAB. Still, state officials first need to confirm with the federal lab the identity of the insects found there.

**Yamhill County:** One adult beetle was found in a trap in the Gaston area — one of 197 traps distributed by ODF and USDA

APHIS in the Willamette Valley. The trap was located just inside Yamhill County about seven miles from Forest Grove, where EAB was first detected in Oregon in late June 2022.

**Clackamas County:** Ash trees in the Elliot Prairie area east of Woodburn show evidence of larvae feeding with several trees in marked decline. Several ash trees in a site along Butte Creek north of Mt. Angel and south of Hubbard also showed signs of EAB infestation. Samples have been sent to a federal lab for official confirmation.

**Marion County:** Five adult EABs have been found in traps set along the Pudding River south of Woodburn and west of Mt. Angel.

ODA will be conducting intensive searches in the areas surrounding the new sites in Marion and Clackamas counties to find out



whether EAB shows up further away, said Cody Holthouse, compliance and regulatory manager at ODA. The ODA is currently working out the details of a quarantine to limit the movement of ash, olive, and white fringe tree wood, and other materials in these new counties, similar to the one in Washington County. That quarantine restricts the movement of several tree materials, including but not limited to logs, green lumber, nursery stock, scion wood, bud wood, chips, mulch, stumps, roots, branches, and firewood of hardwood species.

The City of Salem, Oregon, located in Marion County, is taking a proactive approach to EAB, according to Salem Reporter, a news website in Salem.

For the last two years, the city has worked with state forestry and agriculture departments to remove ash trees in poor condition and protect healthy ones. About 100 ash trees in the area have been

removed and the city stopped planting ash trees three years ago. The city plans to inject about 1,000 ash trees starting next spring with insecticide. The trees will need new injections every two to three years.

For more information on EAB and an up-to-date list of resources, go to [ODA.direct/EAB](http://ODA.direct/EAB). Suspected EAB infestations can be reported over the phone at 1-866-INVADER or online at [OregonInvasivesHotline.org/Reports/Create](http://OregonInvasivesHotline.org/Reports/Create).

### RESEARCHERS, OAN COORDINATE RESPONSE TO NEW WATER MOLD THREAT

Dr. Nik Grunwald at the USDA Agricultural Research Service and Oregon State University, an expert in *Pytophthora* species, will be leading a multiagency group of researchers coordinating a response to the recent detection of *P. austrocedri* in Oregon. The soilborne water

mold has been detected at two Oregon nurseries, resulting in millions of dollars in plant inventory being quarantined at those two operations pending further testing.

OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone plans to explore federal funding for research as well as testing and grower education, while also working to prevent a quarantine of the state. AmericanHort, the national nursery trade group, is also on board with seeking federal aid.

*P. austrocedri* has been detected previously in Chile, the United Kingdom and Iran. It attacks conifers of the Cupressaceae family, including *Austrocedrus*, *Juniperus*, *Chamaecyparis* and *Cupressus* and potentially others. It also has the attention of Jared LeBoldus, forest pathologist at OSU, because it has serious implications for forest Cupressaceae including cypress, juniper, and cedar. Thus, there's an incentive to keep it from spreading in nature as >>

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well as nurseries.

The OAN plans to develop and deploy educational materials for growers, including regular updates and webinars. The OAN's Safe Procurement and Production Manual contains best management practices that can be followed to prevent the spread of various nursery pathogens. These will be reviewed and possibly updated in light of the emergence of this new pathogen.

Stories on plant pests and diseases can be found at [DiggerMagazine.com/Category/PPD](https://DiggerMagazine.com/Category/PPD).

For OAN members, the most up-to-date information on plant pests and diseases can be found at [OAN.org/PPD](https://OAN.org/PPD).

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### BACK-TO-NATURE TREND HIGHLIGHTS 2025 GARDEN TRENDS REPORT

A "Nature's Renaissance" — that is, a desire to reintegrate natural elements into our landscapes, cities and lives — is the predominant consumer gardening theme identified in the new 2025 Garden Trends Report.

"This renaissance isn't merely an aesthetic appeal — though more plants are certainly better — it's about a growing recognition of the vital need for green spaces everywhere," says Katie Dubow, president of Garden Media. "Cities are increasingly adopting strategies that weave nature holistically into our daily existence."

The report identifies several trends related to this overall theme, including spaces to share and connect, adding music to the garden experience, gardens that stretch the boundaries of reality, gardens that are meticulously designed, living fences, foraged flowers, houseplants/tropicals with hole-y leaves, and the color teal.

The report is issued annually by the Garden Media Group research and marketing firm headed by trend-watcher Katie Dubow and formerly by her mother, Suzi McCoy. Their office is based in West Chester Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia. The report is often watched for identifying the directions where consumer interest is headed.



The color teal is one of the new trends for 2025 identified in Garden Media's 2025 Garden Trends Report. PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN MEDIA

The full report can be downloaded at [TinyURL.com/2025GardenTrends](https://TinyURL.com/2025GardenTrends). Registration is required.

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### OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT REQUESTS FEE HIKES

The state Water Resources Department has asked Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek to include several fee hikes — ranging from 10% to 135% — in her proposed state budget for 2025–27. Officials say these increases are necessary to maintain current service levels at the agency.

Constructor licensing and landowner permit fees would go up 10%, start card fees would go up 40%, dam safety fees would go up 56%, and water rights transaction fees would go up a whopping 135%.

Gov. Kotek has until December to release her recommended budget, which may or may not include these hikes. The Oregon Legislature will make final decisions during its 2025 session.

State officials are fully aware that historically, they have awarded water rights that exceed what certain basins can bear. The result is competing user groups fighting for a resource that is already oversubscribed, while the agency struggles with slow response and processing times.

The OAN particularly objects to the severe increase in water rights transfer fees and has communicated this to all those

involved in a possible decision, including legislators, WRD officials and the governor's office, OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said.

"To pay increased fees for the same poor service, and mind you a likely denial with new groundwater rules and other policies being put in place, the ag community is likely to be unified in fighting this new fee increase," he told OAN leaders in an emailed update.

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### EPA ANNOUNCES VOLUNTARY CANCELLATION FOR THE PESTICIDE DACTHAL

Following the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's emergency suspension of the pesticide dimethyl tetrachloro-terephthalate (DCPA or Dacthal) in August, the agency is initiating a process to cancel all products containing DCPA.

The EPA said in a statement that it received a letter from AMVAC Chemical Corporation (AMVAC) stating its intent to voluntarily cancel the remaining pesticide products containing DCPA in the United States, and subsequently announced it intended to cancel all international registrations as well.

"AMVAC's decision to voluntarily and quickly cancel their DCPA registrations is a huge win for public health and will ensure pregnant women are no longer exposed to a chemical that could cause their babies to experience irreversible lifelong health problems," said Assistant Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Michal Freedhoff.

The emergency suspension in August was the first time in almost 40 years EPA has taken this type of emergency action, following several years of efforts by the agency to require the submission of data that was due in January 2016 and then assess and address the risk this pesticide poses.

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### IMMIGRATION REMADE U.S. WORK FORCE

The U.S. is experiencing its largest immigration wave in generations, driven



by millions of people from around the world seeking personal safety and economic opportunity and they're changing the makeup of the U.S. labor force in ways that are likely to reverberate through the economy for decades, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Since the end of 2020, more than nine million people have migrated to the U.S., after subtracting those who have left, coming both legally and illegally, according to estimates and projections from the Congressional Budget Office.

That's nearly as many as the number that came in the previous decade. Immigration has lifted U.S. population growth to almost 1.2% a year, the highest since the early 1990s.

## USDA REVISES FARM EARNINGS FORECAST UPWARDS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has sharply raised its forecast for farm earnings this year, projecting that net farm income will fall by close to 7% from 2023, a far smaller decline than USDA economists had estimated in February, according to Agri-Pulse, an agricultural news website.

The new forecast reflects wide variations in earnings by sector. Stronger than previously estimated profits in the cattle, dairy and egg sectors are expected to partially offset price declines that are hammering many row crop producers this year, according to the latest farm income outlook from USDA's Economic Research Service, released last week.

Net farm income for 2024 is now estimated at \$140 billion, a decrease of \$10.2 billion, or 6.8%, from 2023 when adjusted for inflation. Despite the drop, net farm income would still be 15.2% above the 20-year average, ERS says.

USDA's February forecast had projected net farm income at \$116.1 billion this year, or 1.7% below the 20-year average when adjusted for inflation. Net cash farm income was projected to decline 25.8%, or \$42.2 billion, in 2024.



Representatives from Means Nursery (left), Loma Vista Nursery and Overdevest Nursery were on hand to receive awards from Bailey Nurseries. PHOTO COURTESY BAILEY NURSERIES

## Announcements

### BAILEY HONORS FOUR BRAND LICENCEES

**Bailey Nurseries, Inc.**, a wholesale grower based in St. Paul, Minnesota, honored four brand licensee partners for their outstanding contributions to Bailey Consumer Brands Endless Summer® Hydrangeas, First Editions® Shrubs & Trees, and Easy Elegance® Roses, the company announced in a statement.

The awards recognized excellence across various categories such as sales performance, plant quality, social media engagement, trade show participation, effective communication, and overall partnership.

The awardees:

**Trial Grower of the Year:** Loma Vista Nursery, Ottawa, Kansas.

**Endless Summer® Grower of the Year:** Baucom's Nursery, Charlotte, North Carolina.

**First Editions® Grower of the Year:** Means Nursery, Scappoose, Oregon.

**Easy Elegance® Grower of the Year:** Overdevest Nurseries, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

### PROVEN WINNERS® COLORCHOICE® VARIETIES TAKE MULTIPLE AWARDS AT 2024 PLANTARIUM

**Spring Meadow Nursery**, a wholesale nursery in Grand Haven, Michigan took home a Gold Medal Award and a Bronze Medal for two of its Proven Winners® ColorChoice® varieties at this year's Plantarium 2024 held in Boskoop, Netherlands. Plantarium is a trade show-style event tailored for growers, wholesalers, and garden centers, designed to connect buyers and suppliers of garden plants and is recognized as the leading wholesale market for nursery products in Europe.

A Gold Medal Award was presented to Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Bubbly Wine® *Weigela* in the Novelty category of Plantarium 2024. *Weigela florida* 'Floraclar' BUBBLY WINE is distinguished by its brightly colored, stable variegation in hues of yellow, green, and burgundy. The plant blooms in late spring with dark pink.

A Bronze Medal was awarded to Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Invincibelle Sublime™ *Hydrangea arborescens*. The plant boasts large, fluffy blooms in a deeply saturated tourmaline-green and are complemented by very dark green foliage.



**CODY PLATH JOINS TARGET SPECIALTY PRODUCTS**

Target Specialty Products has hired Cody Plath as Northwest sales representative. Plath previously worked for Nutrien in the same capacity and is the president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries Willamette Chapter.

Targeted Specialty Products delivers value-added solutions to nursery and greenhouse growers and pest management through innovation, products, supplies, application, education and training opportunities. The local branch is in Portland and is one of 44



Cody Plath

branches in the United States and Canada.  
Contact: 503-252-2732, [Cody.Plath@Target-Specialty.com](mailto:Cody.Plath@Target-Specialty.com)

**NUTRIEN PROMOTES MARK THOMPSON TO EXECUTIVE VP AND CFO**

Nutrien promoted Mark Thompson to executive vice president and chief financial officer effective Aug. 26, the company said in a news release. Thompson has been with the company since 2011, most recently working as executive vice president and chief commercial officer. He will suc-



Mark Thompson

ceed Pedro Farah, who will remain with Nutrien in an advisory capacity until his departure at the end of the year.

**UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO AGRICULTURE DEAN TO RETIRE**

After nine years as the dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Science, Michael Parrella has announced plans to retire, according to Pacific Northwest Ag Network, an ag news website.

Parrella, who also holds the title of special assistant to the president for agricultural initiatives in recognition of his many contributions to the university, will retire on June 21, 2025. ©



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# Nursery owner creates special iris to celebrate Olivia Newton-John



Mike Darcy

Head “plant nerd,” longtime speaker, host of gardening shows on radio and TV, and author of the In the Garden email newsletter. You can reach Mike, or subscribe to his newsletter, at [ITGMikeDarcy@Comcast.net](mailto:ITGMikeDarcy@Comcast.net).



Thomas Johnson (left) cross-pollinated the seed for the new Iris in the garden of Barry and Lesley Blyth, who live only miles from where Olivia Newton-John grew up. PHOTO COURTESY OF THOMAS JOHNSON

*“Let me take you through that wonderland*

*That only two can share  
All I ask you is let me be there”*

**W**hen Thomas Johnson was 8, his mother gave him the record “Let Me Be There” by Olivia Newton-John. Even at that young age, the song, the music, and the lyrics all seemed to click for him, and he quickly became a fan of the singer, whom he had never heard of. It would probably be accurate to say that from that early age, Thomas became hooked on Olivia Newton-John.

Oregon is well known for being an ideal climate for growing bearded iris

and Thomas Johnson is the owner of the bearded iris company, Mid-America Garden in Salem, Oregon. However, he is probably better known to local gardeners as the co-owner of Sebright Gardens. He and Kirk Hansen own and operate the well-known hosta nursery in Salem, which has the superb display garden that is open to the public.

As Thomas grew up, he never lost his fondness for Olivia Newton-John. As he followed her through life, he was saddened when it was announced that she had breast cancer. The cancer was first diagnosed in 1992, and she battled with metastatic breast cancer for 30 years. In 2022 she finally succumbed to the dreaded



Thomas Johnson had always been a fan of Olivia Newton-John and when she passed away from cancer, he felt the urge to do something positive to honor her memory and named the above iris after her. PHOTO BY THOMAS JOHNSON

disease. Cancer was also no stranger to Thomas; he lost three of four grandparents to colon cancer.

Thomas felt the urge to do something positive in her memory to honor her. Being an iris breeder, Thomas decided the best thing that he could do would be to create an iris named after her. Little did he know the hoops that he would have to go through just to get the rights to use her name. But he persevered and was able to contact a maternal aunt of Olivia Newton-John, Tottie Goldsmith, who, after contacting others, was able to give Thomas the go-ahead to breed a namesake iris for the singer.

As a well-known iris breeder with many of his bearded irises on the retail market, he had only named two of them for people. The first, *Iris* ‘Barbara Rider’, was named for his grandmother, and the second, *Iris* ‘Paul Black’, was named



## What I'm Hearing

for his iris mentor. The process of naming an iris for a person, in this case a well-known deceased celebrity, was obviously quite a different challenge. Thomas wanted to create a new iris that would be unique, have a stunning flower and convey his admiration and respect for this special lady.

Growing a quality iris from seed is not a fast-moving process. There is always the chance that the resulting flower may not be worthy. In this instance, seed to flower was 10 years. The seed for this iris was hand pollinated in Australia. Thomas commented, "I made the cross in the garden of Barry and Lesley Blyth, who live only miles from where Olivia grew up, using two of Barry's seedlings."

Now, Thomas had the flower, it met his expectations and was an iris that he would be proud to introduce. The next hurdle was to select a name, and this was

a difficult challenge. Should the name be from a motion picture that Olivia starred in, should it be from one of her songs, or should it just be called Olivia Newton-John?

After much discussion, the name Lovely Livvy was chosen. That was the pet name that the media often used throughout Olivia's life to describe her. Thomas wrote, "It is pink, the color of breast cancer awareness. It is an extraordinary and unique creation in a color combination that has not yet been seen in iris until now. The standards are white flushed with pink. The falls are a deeper rose pink with a gorgeous ruffled white band."

Later this year, Thomas will be flying to Australia along with a photograph of *Iris* 'Lovely Livvy'. There will be a ceremony and dedication of the photograph and the iris and the photograph will be hung in the Olivia Newton-John

Cancer Wellness and Research Center in the hospital in Heidelberg, a suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

One of Thomas' biggest regrets is that he never had the opportunity to see Olivia perform in concert. Today, Thomas would not call himself a "crazy fan" of Olivia Newton-John, but he liked her music. The more he learned about her as a person, cemented his thoughts that she was a very kind and decent human being.

'Lovely Livvy' has been a very popular iris for Mid-America Garden. Thomas writes, "Olivia, we tip our hats to you in gratitude for your kindness, compassion, humility, and all you did to help others. Thank you for setting the example." A portion of the sales from each rhizome sold will be donated to the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Research Center that she created in Melbourne, Australia. ©



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# Many roads, same destination

Nik (left) and Sergei Ovchinnikov jointly own The Nursery Outlet and SNO Landscape but Nik runs the landscaping side and Sergei runs the nursery side. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

## Five owners share their experiences on what it takes to start a nursery businesses

BY VIC PANICHKUL

**T**here's no one template for starting a retail or wholesale nursery. Each business is as unique the owners who start them, the locations they select, and their unique visions for their businesses.

*Digger* magazine visited with five nursery owners who started their own businesses. Although they took different roads to their dream of starting their nurseries, their journeys shared common threads of a strong passion for the business, resourcefulness and flexibility.

### **Nik and Sergei Ovchinnikov** The Nursery Outlet and SNO Landscape Woodburn, Monitor, Canby

Nick and Sergei Ovchinnikov started thinking seriously about starting a nursery back in 2006. They had grown up helping their dad on his Christmas tree farm, which also grew some nursery stock. In 2008, they started collecting Northwest native plants and grew them and sold

them to wholesale brokers in Washington.

"That was the base of the nursery," Sergei said.

"Then we got asked to start installing trees that we were selling so we started a landscaping business and when that business started growing, we began growing plants for the landscape business too," Nik said.

The landscape business took off so it gave them the money to grow the nursery, both based in Woodburn.

"The first few years were about making connections. Everyone was helpful with advice. When we came up with a problem and didn't know how to address it, we would just ask someone and get their advice, everything from front office issues to growing issues," Sergei said.

"It was a lot of trial and error too, a lot of learning," he said.

"We only had enough money to do things a little at a time in stages." The retail nursery didn't really start until 2020. "What we did before was more like a weekend hobby," Sergei said.

### **Finding ways to surmount challenges**

One of the biggest challenges facing the brothers was the cost of starting up.

"The expense was tough. We didn't take out loans," Nik said. "We really didn't know how to budget, and we didn't take into account the seasonality of the cash flow."

But having a landscaping business as well as the wholesale and retail nursery turned out to be a big plus. "During the summer months the landscaping business was busy so it helped finance the other side of the business," Nik said. "Now, we try to keep a cash reserve for the slow months."

"We also used labor from our landscaping business to help the nursery," Sergei said. "When the landscaping season slowed down the nursery work was getting busy and the crew would switch over to work on our farms."

Funding land purchase was also a challenge for the brothers. "Leasing land was the most important thing that we did," Sergei said. "We could not afford to buy property at first."

"The investment was a lot smaller so we could devote the resources to put plants in the ground," Nik said.

### **Generating sales**

"Selling our product was one of the biggest obstacles in the beginning," Sergei said.

"We had to be persistent and





## Many roads, same destination

focus on customer service so we could get repeat business and referrals,” Nik said.

“Don’t give up. Some sales will lead to another and another,” Sergei said.

“We were visiting clients in Washington and picked a list of other nurseries in the area to visit and take plants to show them,” Sergei said. One order from those other nurseries alone paid for their trip to Washington.

But the location of the retail nursery next to Interstate 5 turned out to be a business generator. “Our location is our biggest asset,” Sergei said. “Purchasing this particular piece of property was the best investment and business decision that we made.”

The brothers have five farms now, including the retail nursery in Woodburn. One farm is in Woodburn, one is in Monitor and two are in Canby. Nik runs the landscaping side and Sergei runs the nursery side, but they co-own the businesses.

With the benefit of hindsight, the brothers said doing some things differently in the beginning would have helped them.

“I wish we organized our inventory properly from the start before we had more plants than we could keep up with,” Nik said. “Where were they? What stage they were they in?”

“Setting up the retail store earlier and planning it earlier so it would operate more efficiently, would have helped,” Sergei said.

Starting two businesses might seem crazy, but it worked out for the brothers. “Our business grew twice as fast because we grew together. Both our businesses grew hand in hand,” Sergei said.

“Have faith in yourself. Don’t be afraid to take risks,” Sergei said.

“We spent a lot of money on mistakes but sometimes we took the risks and it paid off. We’re not afraid to fail. Don’t be afraid to fail,” Nik said.

### Alfredo and Maria Fernandez

#### AF Nursery

Woodburn, Salem

Alfredo and Maria Fernandez started thinking of opening their own nursery in 2008. He had been working at **J&S Farms and Nursery** in St. Paul, Oregon



Alfredo (left) and Maria Fernandez worked their fulltime jobs at J&S Farms and Nursery for 8 years while they were also working their own nursery to get it going. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

since 1998, moving up through the ranks and becoming a manager. His wife also worked at the nursery.

The couple had decided to postpone having kids so they could save some money and start a business of their own, Maria said. After years of saving up, they bought the Woodburn farm in 2010, but they continued to both work at J&S.

“We did everything ourselves in the evenings and on our days off from our jobs,” Alfredo said. They worked their full-time jobs for eight years while they were starting their nursery. “We had to do it to be efficient on labor. Labor is a big expense,” Alfredo said. They didn’t hire their first employee until 2012.

AF Nursery began by growing hedges, particularly emerald green arborvitae and laurels. They expanded over the years to include Japanese maples and boxwoods. Now, the Woodburn nursery has 12 greenhouses and another location in Salem has 12 more. The nursery has grown in a short time to 150 acres of fields between four farms.

### Lessons learned

To make it financially feasible, the couple grew the business in stages. “We started small and learned over the years and grew in small steps,” Alfredo said. “We learned to put money aside to cover slow season.”

The couple tried to be as efficient as possible. “We use automation as much as possible,” Maria said. “We started potting

by hand. Now we use machines.” Maria said they also installed automated sprinklers on timers to save labor and water.

The first few years, they grew their customer base by word of mouth. “Most customers early on were re-wholesalers,” Alfredo said. He and his wife already knew a log of people from their jobs at J&S so having those connections helped them when they were starting up. “I had been in the industry since 1998. When we started, it made it easier because I knew a lot of people,” Alfredo said.

“It’s better to get your experience working at another nursery before you start your own nursery. I think that is what really helped me,” he said. “It would make it really hard to learn while you’re getting the nursery started.”

“Being an exhibitor at Farwest helps,” Alfredo said. “Last year was our first year and we did really well so we’ll keep doing it.”

Alfredo and Maria say they use the opportunity to connect with new customers and potential customers and to strengthen connections with existing customers face-to-face.

### Steven Ekstrom and Brandon Schmidt

#### Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery

Troutdale

The seed for Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery started with a 5-acre plot that Brandon Schmidt bought in 2010. Steve Ekstrom was still in college at the time





Brandon Schmidt (left) and Steven Ekstrom both worked evenings and weekends to get their nursery started, while still working their fulltime jobs. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

but they were both working at **Ekstrom Nursery**, where Steve's dad was part owner.

"We worked evenings and weekends to start our own nursery," Schmidt said.

They slowly bought plants and started planting. They had access to crews from Ekstrom's dad's nursery, who could help plant on their off time.

"It was fun to do our own side farm," Ekstrom said. Originally, his father and uncle, who co-owned Ekstrom Nursery, were going to part ways and split the business, but when it didn't look like his uncle and dad were going to split, they worked to start their own nursery.

"We were always going to have a nursery on the side ... to learn," Ekstrom said, "but when my dad and uncle weren't going to split, we started our own. It took a while to get it going."

"We could grow and borrow equipment from Ekstrom Nursery and sell through them initially. They got the plants they needed and we got the sales we needed at the beginning," Schmidt said.

"It allowed us to get started a lot easier and faster. All we had to do was keep track of the equipment and supplies we used and then paid them at the end of the year. It worked out really well," Schmidt said.

In 2014, they purchased their current property in Troutdale, which was an existing nursery. When Ekstrom's father finally split from his brother, he brought over 140 acres from his share of Ekstrom Nursery, along with a portion of the client list, which was a mixed blessing. The new

nursery could supply some of the clients, but they ended up with some customers with needs they couldn't supply, and there was a non-compete clause, Schmidt said.

#### Lessons learned

Borrowing crews from Ekstrom Nursery benefitted the pair in more ways than one.

"We relied on our crew's experience with things we didn't know," Ekstrom said. "We had the benefit of their experience."

"We also relied on a lot on our community," Schmidt said. "When we were short on plants we relied on them, and in return when they were short of something that we had, they turned to us."

In hindsight, "we jumped in too fast on some things," Ekstrom said. The nursery switched to fabric bags but discovered later that some things didn't do so well in them. "We could have been more deliberate on what we decided to grow," Schmidt said.

"We learned to focus on what we know and were good at," Schmidt said.

"We needed to find our place in the market," Ekstrom said. "It takes a while to see where you and your plants fit in with your customers."

The pair also realized that it was a capital-intensive business to start and it would take a while to recoup that investment. "Grandpa's [Carl Ekstrom, who started Ekstrom Nursery] saying was overnight success takes about 15 years," Ekstrom said.

At one point, the pair decided they would make the switch to containers. "Once we had a vision, we sat



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down and figured out what equipment we needed to handle the volume we wanted to produce and found most of it on Craigslist,” Ekstrom said. “We found potting machines, tractors, excavators and trailers,” Schmidt said.

### Advice for others

The pair underscored the need to work efficiently in their advice to others.

“Figure out how to get plants out the door the fastest,” Ekstrom said. “For example, buy a bigger liner so you can grow it faster. You can buy a one-gallon liner and cut two years out of the growing time.”

The pair also recommended starting smaller and working your way up. “We started propagating our own plants, propagating what we could not buy,” Schmidt said.

They did a lot of footwork to get their name out. “We went to trade shows to get our names out there, Farwest and MANTS,” Ekstrom said. “We picked up new customers at trade shows.”

They also relied on relationships and word of mouth. A supplier they worked with in the Midwest came out and shadowed them and saw what they did and thought it could work well with one of their customers, so they introduced Schmidt and Ekstrom to them.

### Wayne and Amanda Staehely Columbia Nursery Canby

Wayne Staehely’s fascination for plants dates back to elementary school, where he was friends with a few kids whose families owned nurseries. In high school he took a lot of plant classes and worked at a retail nursery on weekends.

By the time he got to college, he was already dreaming of starting a nursery. “In college I worked at a garden center and one of the owners offered me an opportunity to lease some land — 5 acres — in Wilsonville with one greenhouse and I jumped at the offer,” he said. “It was a lot of work.”

In 2007 he bought 50 acres in Canby and started Columbia Nursery and in 2013 he bought another 80 acres in Canby. Since then, the nursery has grown



Wayne Staehely says cash flow is a big struggle when starting a nursery and it's still something he struggles with. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKHUL

to three different farms.

“Sometimes you just have to go for it and make the leap, but you also have to be patient because you’re growing something that takes time.” Staehely had developed a passion for specimen trees, so he carved out a niche for Columbia Nursery and made that its hallmark.

### No stranger to struggles

Cash flow was a big obstacle. “It’s something we’re still struggling with. Things break down and we grow in the elements and sometimes that gets you,” Wayne said.

“Growing specimen plants also means that the investment (the plants) are in the ground 10 years before they’re salable,” Wayne said.

“We’ve had to sell some things off early before we really intended to in order to have the cash flow,” Amanda said.

“Dad was an accountant, and I went to school for business, so we plan weekly and monthly. The plan was to work our fulltime jobs and make it manageable to get the nursery going,” Wayne said. “When you’re running the nursery, one person has to make the day-to-day decisions.”

In order for them to keep expanding and to make their nursery what they want it to be, Wayne has had to keep working his fulltime job in the tech industry. Amanda eventually sold her Pilates studio to run the nursery.

To save on labor, they plan around it. “When you can do it yourself, you do it. Nobody is going to love or care for your nursery as much as you do,” Wayne said.

“We’ve also relied on friends and family,” Amanda said. “We hold a barbecue when we’re going to plant and invite our friends and family to help us. They pull plants out of the containers and prepare them for planting and then we feed them. The next day the planting crew comes in and plants them.”

### The challenge of marketing

In the early years, the couple took a multi-pronged strategy.

“In mornings I made cold calls,” Wayne said. “I tried to meet people face to face. We joined plant societies. When I first started, I would do weekend garden fairs and I called on other nurseries and tried to sell through them. If they ran out of something, I’d try to provide them with it. When they got a customer that was looking for something they didn’t have and I had it, they’d refer them to me.”

They also attended the Farwest Show. “We met other growers through Farwest and met potential customers, which is the No. 1 thing,” Amanda said. “You have to be there consistently for a few years. Sometimes potential customers want to see you for a few years before they order from you. We build on relationships over the years.”

### Advice for others

“I have no regrets,” Wayne said, “but I wish I could have streamlined the product line and not try to grow everything.”

His main advice? Don’t go too big right away.

“Plan your crops and try to be con-



sistent,” Wayne said. “Plan for the kind of nursery you’re aiming for. If you plant something that takes 10 years to grow, you have to plan for the future return on the investment,” Wayne said.

“If you’re a propagator or sell plugs and liners, you can flip them fast and have a steady cash flow,” Amanda said.

Keep things organized so it’s easier to reuse and recycle. “Plastic is a huge expense, so organize pots according to size,” Amanda said.

“When you have to buy, purchase things that are going to have longevity,” Wayne said. “Leasing land to start can be an option that gives you liquidity. You don’t have to tie up all of that capital and you can instead use it to buy plants.

“But consider what kind of improvements or infrastructure you’re putting in on a leased property. Is it movable? Hoop houses and irrigation pipes, equipment can

be moved but what are you buying that’s going to have to be left behind?”

**Melissa and Joe McLaughlin**  
**Country Garden Nursery**  
McMinville

The idea of owning a nursery started with a dream of having a country farming lifestyle. “My husband and I were living in California and wanted to move up here and buy property and have a country farming lifestyle,” said Melissa McLaughlin. Joe way back then had talked about wanting to start a nursery.”

“In 1989 when we saw this property (in McMinville) it had a small greenhouse and we thought, ‘Look we can start your idea,’” she said. It was 50 acres.

“We started [Country Garden Nursery] with some plugs of petunias and impatiens and potted them and grew them into 4-inch pots and we put an advertisement in the

local sales flyer and we put up signs on the road and started selling. That was the starting seed of the business,” she said.

“We filled up the greenhouse as much as we could and sold out in three weeks. That was our market research. Over the next few weeks, we ordered more plugs and ordered seeds of less commercially available bedding plants like Love Lies Bleeding and Nigella,” she said.

**A rocky start**

“In the beginning, it was hard to budget and we had to manage cash flow. It was volatile for a number of years. Joe had to work off the farm for a while. I didn’t have a lot of business background so I was slower than most in that regard. Joe’s off-farm job kept things going while we figured things out,” Melissa said.

“In the spring we made a lot of money but in the summer not so



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## Many roads, same destination

much, and it was a long time until next spring,” Melissa said. They planted baskets and tried to grow pansies and other things that would bring income in the fall.

“When we started, we thought ‘We can work on our farm where we live and have this laid back lifestyle.’ If we knew the reality of how hard it would be hiring people and paying payroll taxes, knowing the financial aspects of running a business, I don’t know that we would have started. Our plan was kind of vague. We had an idea and did what it took to bear fruit. The first greenhouse we bought we put on our credit card.”

### The importance of pivoting

Although the nursery had started out as a retail operation for bedding plants, their location meant that it was hard for customers to find them. They weren’t a destination nursery, so marketing was a challenge. But an opportunity provided a solution that would take the form of change to flower baskets.

“We started baskets in a small way,” Melissa said. “A guy was in the area selling baskets and he really wanted to focus on sales, so we inherited the start of the basket business from him. They were pre-ordered, and we were only planting what people asked for. We knew we could sell it and make a profit and there was very little waste.”

It took them 4–5 years, but they made the shift over and closed the retail nursery operation. They did it in stages.

Now the custom-designed plant-to-order baskets are what the nursery is



Melissa McLaughlin says it's important to be open to change. She pivoted Country Garden from a retail nursery to custom-designed plant-to-order hanging baskets nursery. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

known for and their clients include municipalities, retail and business developments and shopping centers.

### Advice to others

Finding labor is hard so it’s important to keep good staff. “We put a lot into training our people from processes and procedures to company culture,” she said. “Over time their value grows. We want them to stay. When it comes to labor, it’s not always saving labor that’s the challenge. It’s finding good people and keeping them.

“It saves money to hire someone at a little more pay but they’re going to make every effort to do the job right. We have a lot of repeat customers and good employees help us keep them. I have lost customers because of bad delivery experiences from employees.”

When it comes to expenses, saving a

little bit here and there adds up. “It’s easy to get overwhelmed when you’re looking at all of the ways you’re spending money,” she said.

She also took the figures personally. “It took me a while to separate the numbers and the bookkeeping realm from my personal value. The bad numbers don’t reflect on you personally. When I could separate that the numbers didn’t say anything about me as a person, it’s easier to look at the numbers and the business critically.”

### The rewards

Owning a nursery is a commitment. “It’s most important to love what you’re doing because it will be a lot of hard work,” Melissa said.

“For me having a business continually presents challenges that called on me to dig deep and figure it out. It toughed me that I had latent abilities that I never used. That was rewarding. I think that kind of stuff sticks with you and you go on to tackle the next thing and build muscle to tackle the next thing. We didn’t know it at the time, but it was one of the bravest things we ever did. We’re now well into our 2nd generation of family owners and seeing the hard work pay off.” ☺

*Vic Panichkul is publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and managing editor and art director for Digger. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or [VPanichkul@OAN.org](mailto:VPanichkul@OAN.org)*

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Crystal Cady (right), CEO designate of the Northwest Nursery Buyers Association, visits with John Christianson of Christianson's Nursery in Mount Vernon, Washington, at the 2024 Farwest Show. Cady says going to trade shows, meetings at industry organizations and even online webinars are all great ways to meet the people in the industry. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

# Making connections

Building trust is key to establishing clientele base for new nurseries

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

**F**or new retail and wholesale nurseries, one of the biggest challenges is building your network of suppliers, sales leads and vendors from scratch. From defining your goals and brands and refining your processes, the bottom line, seasoned professionals agree, is earning the trust of your new clients and partners.

“Trust is the most important factor in this business, because we grow a variable product,” said Lance Schamberger.

Schamberger, an independent sales representative in the Northwest for over 20 years, supports businesses like **J Frank Schmidt & Son Co.**, **Northwest Shade Trees** and **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.**. Being subject to so many more variables than towels or microwaves, plants are far less predictable, so sellers need to double down on consistency.

“The first step is getting customer to try you out,” he said. “The second step — and this is way harder — is making sure you deliver on your promises while mak-

ing the whole process easy.”

“It’s a business of relationships, plain and simple,” said Vinny Grasso, West Coast nursery manager for **Eason Horticultural Resources**, a Kentucky based plant brokerage. “It comes down to trust.”

And that’s built by forging strong relationships between the end user, the customer, supplier and vendor.

## Know your strengths and the market

Setting your goals and vision will help you chart your path.

“The most successful nurseries are the ones that narrow things down a little,” Schamberger said. “They figure out what their strengths are — it may not be the product, but the way they run the nursery.”

“If you don’t have a vision of what you are doing and where you are going, you will waste time and money,” said Crystal Cady, CEO-designate of the Northwest Nursery Buyers



Vinny Grasso, West Coast nursery manager for Eason Horticultural Resources, says recommends growers diversify clients geographically to allow for variable markets due to weather. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL



## Making connections

Association, a member-owned cooperative of independent garden centers that coordinates group purchases of plant material. “Once you do, you’ll find mentors and wholesalers who are aligned with your vision and specialties.”

Cady has worked in both the retail and wholesale side of nurseries. She ran her nursery, Sunflower Acres Farm and Garden, and later worked as a sales representative for Skagit Gardens.

Cady took the time to study the market to determine how she could position her business.

“When I started my business one of the first things I looked at was a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis of my competitors,” Cady said, leading her to sell the newly introduced Hort Couture line of coleus and high-end hanging baskets.

In defining your product and market, Cady recommends starting small. “For example, Groovy Plants in Ohio started very niche, focusing on what they knew they were good at, which allowed them to build a fan base. Now, they’ve got their core values and niche down and can do that in their sleep and can expand.”

“Each nurse has its own talent,” Grasso said. “I encourage growers to find their niche and try to expand on it without going too far outside their comfort zone.”

### Finding new partners and clients

“Every young industry professional looking to learn more should build a great network,” Cady said. “I started small locally with Oregon Association of Nurseries chapter meetings, learned of other opportunities, and went to Cultivate in Ohio and attended a management clinic to bring me a bigger network across the country. Now I’ve built such a big spider web that people will come to me, and I can connect them to others, which builds rapport.”

Schamberger concurs that volunteering help goes a long way toward boosting long-lasting goodwill. “It’s kind of paying it forward,” he said. “If someone calls me looking for a plant, I don’t have I’ll try to help them find it. You’ve now helped them solve a problem and maybe they’ll come back to you next time.”



Lance Schamberger said regular communication — down to small details like sending an availability list out the same day each week — helps keep everyone connected.

Going to trade shows, meetings at industry organizations and even online webinars are all great ways to meet the people in the industry. Cady also recommends industry social media groups, like IGC Talk! and on Facebook, Emergent: A Group for Growing Professionals.

Steps like this help you get to know people before doing business with them, she said.

When it comes to finding your new clients and vendors, Cady recommends the OAN’s *Nursery Guide* and member directory as a resource.

While introducing yourself to potential customers or vendors that suit your market, she said, persistence pays off. If you’re a grower, “You’ve got to get your product in your car or van and drive to every target market,” Cady said.

“Nothing beats a physical introduction,” said Schamberger. “A phone call is the next best thing — cold calling basically. It’s not easy and doesn’t always work,” he said, but it is far better than an e-mail blast which is likely to vanish to a spam folder.

Understand your customers’ needs. Cady recommends wholesalers “walk the benches at local nurseries, asking about their best sellers, what customers are asking for, what are they having a hard time finding?”

Grasso recommends growers diversify clients geographically to allow for variable markets due to weather. “As a nursery you want to get your product in as many places as possible, but most smaller nurseries don’t have the internal staff to do that,” so that’s where brokerage firms like Eason and independent sales representatives like Schamberger come in. They may also act as liaison or even handle payments.

### Consistency is king

Delivering on your promises is paramount — delivering the expected quality and quantity on time. Consistently. While focusing on growing quality plants is expected, logistics can’t be overlooked. “It’s the easiest way to lose a customer,” said Schamberger, and he notes, “The easiest way to make a new customer is to step in when someone else has made a mistake.”

“The product has to be consistent. Not necessarily the best of the best,” Schamberger said. He’d rather see average-quality plants sent reliably than a mixed order of mature and young plants.

Schamberger said regular communication — down to small details like sending an availability list out the same day each week — helps keep everyone connected.

Ultimately, “price becomes maybe a third consideration, because service and quality are more important,” said Grasso.

If an issue comes up, offering credits, replacements, or refunds promptly will show you are ready to take responsibility and remedy it.

### Do what you enjoy

There are a lot of vectors and details to juggle in running a retail or wholesale nursery, but ultimately, Schamberger said, “if you hone what you like doing, you’ll naturally find an existing niche. You’ll be happier, and happier people sell more plants,” said. ☺

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*Erica Browne Grivas is an award-winning journalist and gardener pushing zone boundaries in Seattle, Washington. She can be reached at [EBGrivas@gmail.com](mailto:EBGrivas@gmail.com).*





The ODA hosted a field day for nursery inspectors from the western U.S. to practice stripping bark from ash trees to identify emerald ash borer infestations. PHOTO BY KARA MILLS, OREGON DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# For the common good

## Oregon's nursery licensing program aims to keep the entire industry healthy

BY JON BELL

It happened on June 30, 2022. Dominic Maze, an invasive species biologist for the city of Portland, had been sitting in a middle school parking lot in Forest Grove waiting to pick his kids up from a summer camp when he spotted a cluster of sickly ash trees.

Looking more closely, Maze noticed unique holes in the trees. Holes shaped like the letter D. Holes that were the tell-tale sign of a dreaded pest that had until then yet to show its face in Oregon or anywhere on the West Coast: the emerald ash borer.

An exotic beetle native to Asia, EAB has been known to devastate ash trees in no time. Between its discovery in Michigan in 2002 and the end of 2022, it was estimated to have killed more than 100 million trees in the eastern U.S.

So when it showed up in Oregon two years ago, the alarm bells went off. The Oregon Department of Agriculture adopted an EAB permanent quarantine limiting the movement of ash, white fringe and olive tree materials in all of Washington County. ODA, Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Forestry have also been working to control the spread of EAB, removing and destroying infested trees to reduce the number of adult ash borers.

Another arrow in the quiver came in June in the form of \$125,000 that the ODA will use to pay for EAB trapping in Washington County. And that money came from nurseries in Oregon and the fees they contribute as part of the ODA's nursery licensing program and an associated emergency fund set up for just this

kind of threat.

"The emergency fund is paid for by nurseries, and we just triggered that for emerald ash borers so we can get more assets on the ground to help ODA and ODF control this," said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, whose board votes to approve any use of the emergency fund. "It's not a complete solution, but it will help slow it down."

The emergency fund is just one component of the ODA's nursery licensing program. Other pieces aim to keep nursery plants healthy, whether they're being grown here and shipped out of state or brought in from elsewhere.

The program also has a research component that funds projects aimed at helping Oregon's nursery industry long-term — a key goal considering that, >>

## For the common good

with more than \$1.2 billion in sales in 2022, the nursery and greenhouse industry is the leading agricultural commodity in the state.

“We are not the plant police,” said Kara Mills, program lead for the ODA’s Nursery and Christmas Tree Program. “We are plant and nursery advocates first and foremost. We are here to help keep Oregon’s plants healthy and support a robust industry.”

### From the ground up

Not everyone who sells plants in Oregon needs a license through the nursery licensing program — but most do. According to Mills, licenses are required for anyone selling \$250 worth of nursery stock per year. Retailers who buy \$250 or more in nursery stock also need a license.

Nursery stock only includes living plants that are intended to continue living

after a customer buys them. For example, a tomato and tomato seeds are not considered nursery stock, but a tomato starter plant is; similarly, cut flowers, like tulips, are not nursery stock, but tulip bulbs are. Tree cuttings for propagation are nursery stock, while tree cuttings for decoration are not.

“I think that’s one of the biggest points of confusion,” Mills said, “is what qualifies as nursery stock and how that determines what a nursery is.”

Based on the licensing requirements, quite a few entities need to have nursery licenses, including stores like Grocery Outlet, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe’s and Fred Meyer. Individuals who sell at farmers’ markets, farm stands, online sites like Etsy and elsewhere are also required to have a license once they hit the \$250 annual sales threshold.

Fees for licenses vary based on a nurs-



Cara Still (right), Mia Johnson (center), and Keen Maher make interspecific crosses on western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) trees that were mutated and selected for single trunk, upright form rather than the shrubby habit typical of the species. The licensing program also includes the research assessment, which helps fund research projects in agriculture aimed at benefiting the entire nursery industry. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

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Claire Kepner prepares root tips for cytological observation to confirm chromosome numbers.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

ery's gross annual sales. The ODA has a fee calculator on its website that makes it fairly straightforward to calculate how much a nursery's license will cost. A nursery that has up to \$20,000 in gross sales would pay \$148 for its license plus a small assessment for every amount sold above that \$20,000 mark. It would also pay a \$10 research assessment fee, which goes to fund nursery- and plant-related research projects.

A larger nursery with \$5 million in sales would pay \$7,035 for a license, along with an assessment for amounts above that, and a research fee of \$1,000; a license for a nursery with \$11 million in sales would cost \$10,695, plus an assessment above that, and a research fee of \$2,200.

According to data from ODA, as of June 2024, there were 2,881 nursery license holders in Oregon — retailers, greenhouse growers and stock growers — with a sum value (sales or purchases of nursery stock) of \$1.4 billion. Just over 1,500 of those nurseries pay the minimum licensing fee, illustrating that the majority of nurseries in Oregon are on the smaller side.

### Money for something

Funds raised through the nursery licensing program help fund a range of different services designed to support — and protect — Oregon's nursery industry. For starters, ODA has 10 nursery inspec-

tors who cover various territories across the state, mostly concentrated in the Willamette Valley.

The inspectors help track which plants are coming into or going out of Oregon to make sure nurseries are following proper state and federal quarantine requirements and filing the correct paperwork.

"They're really tasked with helping to keep nursery plants healthy and keeping an eye out for diseases and insects that can potentially come in," Mills said.

The inspectors also frequently take samples of plants coming into Oregon to make sure they're not bringing anything harmful with them. While other states have their own quarantine requirements, and while plants may appear healthy when they set out on their voyage to Oregon, shipping conditions can sometimes be fertile ground for stowaway pests or diseases, such as *phytophthora ramorum*, the pathogen that causes sudden oak death.

If plants arrive in Oregon and fail to pass muster, they will be rejected and returned to their state of origin to be destroyed.

In addition to monitoring plants coming and going from Oregon, the ODA's inspectors also work closely with Oregon nurseries who may be experiencing an outbreak of a disease or pest. In that case, inspectors will help nurseries confirm the outbreak, including identifying insects >>

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in an ODA lab, as well as collaborate on a plan to eradicate or control it so that it doesn't spread to other nurseries or areas of the state.

"If a nursery has an outbreak, we are here with resources to help," Mills said. "If there's an outbreak at one nursery, we want to help out so that we're not only protecting that one nursery, but the entire industry in Oregon."

She added that it's important for nurseries in Oregon to sign up for alerts and notifications from the nursery licensing program to stay informed about any outbreaks that may rear their heads.

"They might not think that a certain disease or pest would affect them," Mills said, "but it's important for them to know and to be certain about it. We can always help with that."

### Above and beyond

On top of supporting nurseries when

it comes to outbreaks, inspections, quarantines and other matters, the nursery licensing program serves a few additional purposes for Oregon nurseries. First is the emergency fund, which comes from a portion of the license fees. The fund usually stands at \$250,000. If it's tapped into, as it was in June to help tackle EAB, it gets replenished through a one-year recovery surcharge on license holders.

The licensing program also includes the research assessment, which helps fund research projects in agriculture aimed at benefiting the entire nursery industry.

"The overall goal with that research funding is to try to plan ahead and keep Oregon safe from new pests, to develop plants that are resistant to pests and just to protect the industry," Mills said.

Current projects funded in part through the nursery license program in 2023 include research at Oregon State University on everything from boxwood

blight and thrips control to new disease-resistant nursery plants and using pulse electricity as a fumigant alternative in nursery seedling beds.

"We are grateful for every single dollar we have received as a result of the license assessment," said Ryan Contreras, professor and associate head of Oregon State University's Department of Horticulture, some of whose research is being funded by the licensing program. "It's cliché, but it's the whole rising tides floats all boats idea. This funding helps us with our research, but it also encourages collaboration between us and our nursery partners. That's a really important part of it."

Stone, with OAN, said such collaboration is also evident between the association, its members and the ODA, in part through the nursery licensing program. While some states might find nurseries butting heads with their regulatory counterparts or government being heavy-handed in its approach, he said the ODA and the OAN have developed a relationship of support and assistance that's envied across the country.

"The relationship between the association and ODA is as important as any relationship between two entities can be," Stone said. "ODA is both a regulator and a huge advocate. Our relationship with them has always been one of how do we make the best system possible."

Ultimately, the arrangement protects Oregon growers by addressing research and pest issues and ultimately protecting Oregon's access to marketplaces nationwide. "Ultimately we support the licensing program and fees because they are put to good use," Stone said. "We're committed to defending the proper use of the fees going forward." ☺

*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 [JBellInk.com](http://JBellInk.com).*

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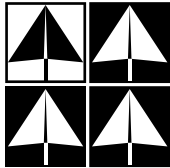
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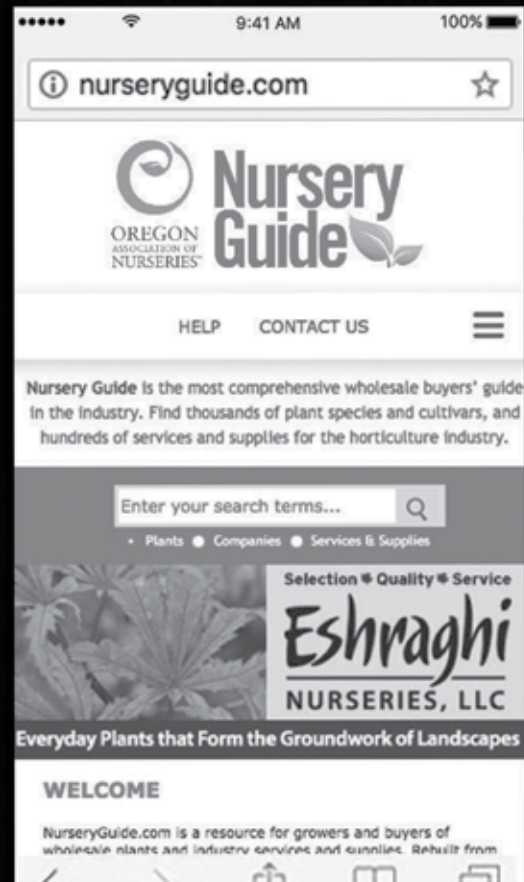
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# GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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



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



View from the tractor seat looking down a row of maple trees in a field-grown tree nursery. The rearview mirror reflects an orange air blast sprayer equipped with the Intelligent Spray System (ISS), which is being towed by the tractor. This setup highlights the integration of advanced spray technology in a practical field application. PHOTO BY LLOYD NACKLEY

## Precision in pest control

### Researchers evaluate trunk spray effectiveness of air-blast sprayers with sensors to target Pacific flatheaded borer

BY LLOYD NACKLEY, BRENT WARNEKE, AND JAY PSCHIEDT

In the evolving landscape of agricultural technology, sensor-controlled air-blast sprayers have emerged as a significant innovation. These advanced systems utilize sensors to enhance the

precision and efficiency of pesticide and fertilizer applications, offering a promising solution to many challenges faced by modern farmers.

#### Intelligent Sprayer project history

The Intelligent Sprayer project was initiated in 2009 by agricultural engineer Dr. Heping Zhu (USDA-ARS). Dr. Zhu's team designed and tested prototypes and concept models of the Intelligent Spray System, with the primary objective of developing two advanced and affordable spray systems.

These systems aim to continuously match operating parameters to crop characteristics, insect/disease pressures, and microclimatic conditions during pesticide applications. In collaboration with Robin Rosetta, former Oregon State University nursery IPM specialist, the USDA and Oregon State University have been collaborating with Oregon Association of Nurseries growers over these past 15 years to refine and improve the sprayer systems ([TinyURL.com/OSUSprayers](https://TinyURL.com/OSUSprayers)).

The project's advanced sprayers include several key modules: (a) a



## Growing Knowledge

data acquisition and control unit with laser scanning sensors to characterize crop shape, canopy density, and plant volume; (b) an expert subsystem that considers real-time microclimatic conditions and pest prediction models; (c) an off-target recovery unit to trap non-target sprays; (d) a direct in-line injection unit to eliminate leftover disposal problems; and (e) an air-assisted spraying system with multi-jet nozzles for tree crops and hydraulic boom spraying systems for other plants.

While the new spray systems may be more expensive than conventional ones, the increased efficiency and more than 50% reduction in pesticide use can offset the initial investment, providing significant cost savings and reducing environmental risks.

Following successful demonstrations, the focus shifted to developing Intelligent Spray System retrofit kits that can be added to any sprayer designed for specialty crops ([TinyURL.com/OSUSprayRetro](https://TinyURL.com/OSUSprayRetro)). These kits have been installed across the country, with researchers in various states using them to manage pests and diseases in region-specific crops. Cooperating universities — including Washington State University, the University of California, the University of Tennessee, Texas A&M, and Clemson University — have implemented these systems in crops such as wine grapes, pecans, apples, hazelnuts, berries, peaches, and nurseries. The recent commercialization of the Intelligent Spray System allows it to be purchased by the public, further expanding its accessibility and impact ([TinyURL.com/OSUComSpray](https://TinyURL.com/OSUComSpray)).

### Sensor technologies: the basics

Sensor-controlled sprayers integrate various sensor types to optimize spray applications. At the core of these systems are ultrasonic and LiDAR (light detection and ranging) sensors, which help detect the presence and density of plant canopies.

Ultrasonic sensors, known for their affordability and effectiveness, measure the distance to objects by emitting sound waves and timing their return. This data



Close-up view of the base of maple trees in a field-grown nursery, focusing on the stubbing and grafting wounds at the base of the trunks. These wounds are preferred locations for Pacific flatheaded borer (PFB) infestation, making them critical targets for trunk spray applications. PHOTO BY LLOYD NACKLEY

allows the sprayer to adjust its output based on the canopy's thickness, ensuring that plants receive the appropriate amount of spray.

LiDAR sensors, although more costly, offer superior accuracy by using laser beams to create detailed three-dimensional maps of the canopy. These maps provide precise information about the shape and size of each plant, enabling even more accurate spray targeting. The ability of these sensors to differentiate between plant material and gaps in the canopy helps reduce chemical use and prevents overspray, contributing to both cost savings and environmental protection.

### Recent research trunk sprays

In the Pacific Northwest, particularly Oregon's Willamette Valley, the Pacific flat-headed borer (PFB) (*Chrysobothris mali*) has become a growing concern for nursery and orchard growers. This pest is particularly problematic in hazelnut orchards, where young trees, which are most vulnerable to PFB damage, are increasingly planted. As hazelnut acreage expands, often in areas with challenging growing conditions, PFB infestations have become more common. Infected trees can suffer severe damage, including up to 35% tree loss in some cases.

The problem is exacerbated by the changing climate, with warmer summers

and excessive winter rainfall stressing young trees. This stress makes them more susceptible to PFB attacks. Traditionally, hazelnut orchards were not irrigated, but with increasing summer temperatures, irrigation has become more important. However, poorly drained soils during the winter can also stress trees.

To combat PFB, trunk sprays using air-blast sprayers have been proposed as a cost-effective solution. However, conventional sprayers can waste large amounts of pesticide, especially in young orchards where trees are widely spaced. Sensor-controlled sprayers, like the Intelligent Spray System (ISS), offer a solution by applying pesticide only when the tree is directly in line with the sprayer nozzles. This precision can significantly reduce pesticide use and waste.

Recent research has focused on enhancing trunk coverage with sensor-controlled air-blast sprayers, aiming to address the common challenge of uneven pesticide application in orchards.

### Trunk coverage trials

**Hazelnut Orchard Trial:** In this trial, conducted in Corvallis, Oregon, the effectiveness of the sensor-controlled sprayer was evaluated on four-year-old Jefferson hazelnut trees. Using water as the spray mixture, the trial featured individual plots of six trees each, arranged with three trees



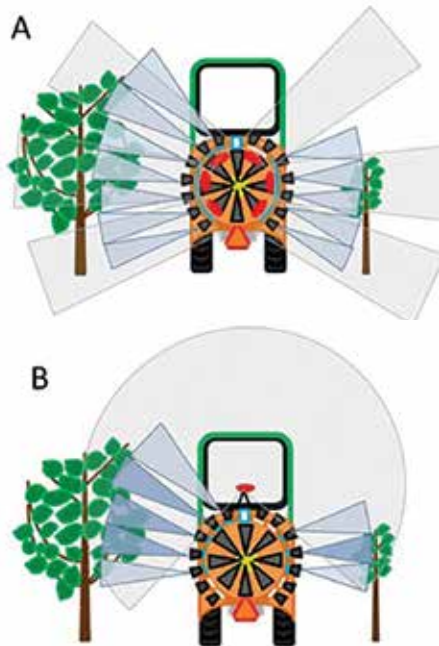


Illustration of on/off sensor sprayers (A) and canopy adapting sensor sprayers (B). Sensors are illustrated with red ovals and sensor field of view illustrated grey shaded washes. FIGURES COURTESY OF BRENT WARNEKE

in one row and three in an adjacent row. Water-sensitive cards were strategically placed to measure spray coverage:

**Trunk Cards:** Positioned 6 inches off the ground on the trunks.

**PVC Low Cards:** Placed 6 inches off the ground on PVC tubes.

**PVC High Cards:** Positioned 30 inches off the ground on PVC tubes.

**Ground Cards:** Staked into the ground.

The study tested speeds of 1.9 mph, 3.2 mph, and 6.7 in intelligent mode, and 3.2 mph (5.1 kph) in standard mode as a reference. The trial was randomized with four replications.

**Maple Tree Nursery Trial:** This trial, conducted at a commercial nursery in Clackamas County, Oregon, assessed spray coverage on *Acer x freemanii* 'Jeffersred' (Autumn Blaze) maples. A 120-gal tower air-blast sprayer, retrofitted with the Intelligent Spray System, was used. The application was conducted with water and the study was organized as a completely randomized design with four replicates. Treatments included:

Speeds: 2 mph, 3 mph, and 4 mph

Modes: Standard spray mode and intelligent spray mode.

Cards were placed on trunks 12 inches off the ground, with two cards per trunk oriented perpendicular to each other. ➡

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### Pros and cons of sensors used in sensor-based spraying systems

Sensor type	Measurement method	Pros	Cons
Infrared	Detection of infrared waves emitted or reflected from plants.	Little impact of temperature and humidity on sensing accuracy. Low cost.	Sensing ability impacted by red light intensity and driving speed. Narrow field of view and short sensing distance. Unable to determine plant structure characteristics.
Ultrasonic	Measurement of the distance to objects using sound waves. Uses time of flight concept.	Ability to determine plant structure characteristics. Relatively easy to implement.	Limited resolution of plant structure. Need multiple sensors to detect plant structure.
Plant fluorescence	Detection of near infrared fluorescence from green plant surfaces.	Ability to determine plant structure characteristics. Rapid data acquisition.	Need multiple sensors to detect plant structure. Sensors affected by background lighting, requiring frequent calibration.
LIDAR	Measurement of the distance to objects using laser beams. Uses time of flight concept.	Rich data acquisition capability. Fine resolution of plant structure. High speed of measurement.	Data acquisition affected by tractor bouncing which requires correction. Delicate moving parts inside sensor.

Additional cards were placed on the ground to detect off-target spray. After application, cards were analyzed for percent coverage and droplet density using DepositScan.

These trials aim to optimize the precision of pesticide application, focusing on improving coverage of tree trunks and minimizing off-target waste.

#### Trunk coverage results

##### Hazelnut Orchard Trial:

**Trunk Coverage:** In the hazelnut trial, the best trunk coverage was observed with the sprayer traveling at 3.2 mph in standard mode and 1.9 mph (3.1 kph) in intelligent mode. These settings provided significantly better coverage compared to other speeds tested. The 6.7 mph intelligent mode showed lower coverage compared to the 3.2 mph standard mode and the 1.9 mph intelligent mode.

**Ground Coverage:** At ground level, the 3.2 mph standard mode resulted in the highest coverage, significantly better than

all other settings. The 1.9 mph intelligent mode also provided better coverage than the 3.2 mph intelligent mode. The 6.7 mph intelligent mode showed similar coverage to the 1.9 mph intelligent and 3.2 mph intelligent settings.

**PVC Low Coverage:** Coverage on PVC tubes placed 6 inches off the ground improved as the speed decreased, with the highest coverage observed at 3.2 mph in standard mode. The 6.7 mph intelligent mode had significantly lower coverage than the 3.2 mph intelligent mode.

**PVC High Coverage:** At 30 inches off the ground, all settings resulted in low and similar coverage, less than 1%.

**Pesticide Volume:** The amount of pesticide applied in intelligent mode at 1.9 mph, 3.2 mph, and 6.7 mph was 75%, 84%, and 89% lower, respectively, compared to the standard mode at 3.2 mph.

##### Maple Tree Nursery Trial:

**Trunk Coverage:** Coverage was highest at 4 mph when the sprayer was facing the

first row of trees in both standard and intelligent modes. However, in the second and third rows, the best coverage was achieved at 2 mph in both modes. For the second row, standard mode at 3 mph outperformed intelligent mode at 4 mph. In the third row, there were no significant differences between 3 mph and 4 mph treatments.

**Deposit Density:** Deposit density inversely mirrored coverage patterns. The lowest deposit densities were found at 4 mph in the first row, and at 2 mph in the second and third rows. Significant differences were found primarily between 4 mph and other speeds, with varying results in each row.

**Side Coverage:** Coverage on the sides of tree trunks followed similar trends as trunk coverage, with the highest average coverage occurring at 2 mph. Significant differences were noted primarily between 2 mph and 4 mph settings.

**Soil Coverage:** At soil level, standard mode at 3 mph had higher coverage than



intelligent mode at 4 mph and standard mode at 2 mph. For deposit density, standard mode at 2 mph resulted in significantly higher deposits compared to most other settings.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of sensor-controlled sprayers in improving trunk coverage and reducing pesticide use, especially when tailored to specific application speeds and modes.

### Applications and industry impact

The results from our trunk coverage trials show that the Intelligent Spray System (ISS) can effectively target trunks and may offer a more cost-efficient alternative to traditional drench treatments for controlling Pacific flatheaded borer (PFB).

PFB is a pest that affects many woody ornamental trees and hazelnuts in the Pacific Northwest. While PFB can cause serious damage, especially in young orchards, infestations are usually sporadic. Because of this, growers often use systemic insecticides that can provide long-term protection but come with high costs.

The ISS, however, can help save money by using 40%-70% less pesticide compared to standard sprayers. In our 2018 hazelnut trunk coverage trial, we found that using the ISS at various speeds resulted in significant savings — up to 84% less pesticide used compared to traditional spraying. This means that for large orchards, switching to the ISS could reduce the cost of trunk sprays, making it a more affordable option than using drenches.

Lower pesticide use not only cuts costs but also makes periodic trunk sprays a viable choice for farms that need occasional pest control without breaking the bank. ©

*Dr. Lloyd Nackley is a plant physiological ecologist at the Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC) in Aurora, Oregon. He can be reached at [Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu](mailto:Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu). Jay Pscheidt is professor and statewide OSU Extension plant pathology specialist. He can be reached at [Jay.Pscheidt@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Jay.Pscheidt@oregonstate.edu). Brent Warneke is faculty research assistant at OSU Department of Horticulture.*



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# Government behind the scenes

**“Dang bureaucrats.” “Soulless agency drones.” “The swamp – drain it!” Comments like these express frustration over the slow gears of government.**

It is true — government is like a mighty river or an aircraft carrier. These things are not nimble and take time to turn, but in the end, policy decisions do matter and directives from elected officials are eventually implemented.

However, seldom acknowledged are the ordinary, committed public servants in our government, our legislative offices and our election certifiers. They all play a critical role so that our nation functions.

## **Civil service as a school play**

There are certain people nobody sees that make our system of government work. They are our unelected officials.

Our democratic system isn't really designed to highlight their individual achievements. Even the people who win an agency award will receive it and hustle back to their jobs before anyone has a chance to get to know them — and before elected officials ask for their spotlight back.

Even their nominations feel modest. It is never “I did this,” but “We did this.” Never “Look at me,” but “Look at this work!”

It's unfortunate, but when hearing the word “bureaucrat,” many people get a certain picture in their head that doesn't exactly make them curious. Bureaucrats are a dog that is OK to kick. Most people don't ask what bureaucrats do, or why.

What they do? The work. And the reason? Because it matters.

The bureaucratic workforce are the carrots in the third-grade play. You know the kids who preen to the teachers for attention and wind up cast in the lead roles? Those are our elected officials. They are quick to take credit for the good done by people in the smaller roles. They then blame them when things go wrong.

We never ask: Why am I spending

another minute of my life reading about and yapping about Donald Trump or Kamala Harris when I know nothing about the 2 million or so federal employees and their possibly lifesaving work? It will be the next president's job to support that work, or at least not screw it up. There is no constituency pushing to present civil servants as characters with voices needing to be heard.

## **Personal staff and committee professionals**

Who is really running this country? Mostly 25-year-olds. It is a fact.

When I go back to D.C., I see young, driven staff members pushing the agendas set by their elected officials. More so in Washington, D.C. than in the state, staffers hold enormous power to determine which interest groups get access and which are successful on their issues. The reason is simple: members of Congress simply do not have time to become subject-matter experts.

OAN leadership has seen this dynamic firsthand, and — as a former staff member to U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood back in the late 1980s to mid-1990s — I can attest that members of Congress rely greatly on staff recommendations.

Committee staffers are another breed. They have a steady hand on crafting policy. Several years ago, I brought our leadership back to D.C. and I asked for a gathering of the Senate Finance Committee staff members I grew close to over my years of service.

According to current staff members of the committee, this group was like the 1927 New York Yankees. I just knew them as Josh (Bolton, who became chief of staff for George W. Bush); Roy (Ramthun, who became the number two health care policy advisor for two administrations); Craig (Kennedy, who then was a junior staff like me but now runs a national trade association); and Brad (Figel, who was the head lawyer for Nike and now the top guy as the Mars Corporation).

They were focused on one part of the large bevy of tax issues. Sen. Packwood took the leash off and let them make gen-



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

erational policy changes.

## **The greatest defender of democracy**

Election officials are the everyday Americans who administer our elections, keeping our democracy safe and secure. They undergo extensive training to make sure the necessary rules and laws are followed as they impartially conduct elections.

In recent years, however, these individuals who have spent their careers safeguarding the electoral process are facing unprecedented levels of threats, harassment, and intimidation.

We have seen a spate of election officials hanging up their duties because of the hyper-aggression of those who disagree with the outcome of an election. They use their ignorance to assign blame on those who are, in essence, umpires of a free and fair election.

Our elections officials make sure that only those eligible to vote are allowed to do it. This is a sacred public service that is ignored. At the end of the day, election officials are vital to our democracy. They are people in our communities who put in long hours before, during and after Election Day.

## **Ballots are out this month**

We are a vote-by-mail state and your ballots will arrive soon. I will encourage this: vote, vote, vote! And while we are focused on the election cycle, it is important to remember the people most Americans never consider as a critical part of our functioning government. They are our civil servants, our hard-working legislative staff at the state and federal level, and those who safeguard our elections and democracy to support our great nation. ©



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