

A year to take stock and be grateful



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is an understatement that 2024 has been a year full of anxiety.

There's been a contentious election season, uncertain economic conditions, and the emergence of challenges for nurseries specifically. These range from pest and diseases brought about by climate conditions, to the ever-rising cost of doing business.

We should also not lose sight of the positives that our great industry is experiencing. High-value, quality green goods continue to dominate the national plant landscape, and there's been exciting innovation in production. Our industry, despite all challenges, remains strong.

The annual christmas photo

Christmas in the Stone house is a joyous occasion. Having a full house — with my grown daughters around the table slinging comments — makes my heart full. The year-to-year growth and progress of the family is measured in our family photos.

The same can be said of our industry. Every holiday season is a time to take the family photo. We can celebrate being part of something special, mourn those who we have lost over the past year, and look forward to the year ahead with optimism and the promise of a better future.

A year like no other

You all know that I am a political nerd. I cannot help it, but what happens in the political ecosystem impacts the industry more than one might think. Both at the state and federal level, elected officials will be buoyed by victory and the agendas of the majority.

But I have to caution you that very few elected officials understand what agriculture does or how they do it — never mind the economics of production agriculture. This is why we and AmericanHort work to educate urban legislators, bring them to see rural farming operations, and

build relationships.

This year, OAN has been hyper-focused on narrowing the knowledge gaps that exist at the state and federal levels. We have trained our members to wield influence in any setting they may find themselves in. Some particular members deserve praise for opening up their operations for legislator tours. This is not a closed loop. I welcome any member who wishes to show off their operation, to raise your hand. It's your chance to directly tell elected officials what keeps you up at night. You are our best spokesperson.

When a problem emerges that impacts the industry, such as we have seen on pests and diseases this year, nobody attacks the issue harder than the OAN and its leadership. Oregon's growers have a well-deserved reputation for clean plants, and state/federal regulators need to know it, so the trust is there when a new issue arises.

Just know that the OAN is the first in and the last out when advocating on your behalf — no matter where that discussion needs to happen in the country.

A razor focus on you — the member

I often hear from our board members that until they became more involved, they had no idea about the sheer number of programs and services the association provides to members. It is true we provide enormous benefits that are tailored to small, medium and large operations. It is intentional.

We look at what will make your business life easier. We ask what we can provide at a lower cost than you can get on your own, thanks to economies of scale. I will admit — sometimes we do not tell the association's story well enough. My personality is not one to jump up and down and shout out the commitment to service your OAN staff provides day in and day out. Our world is where YOU are, not in the office in Wilsonville.

This year was a big year of planning and implementation for the OAN. We launched the HR Professional Leadership

Group on the heels of the self-generated NexGen leadership group being launched at the end of 2023.

We are taking our marketing approach down to the proverbial studs. We elevated Beth Farmer, our longest serving staff member, as director of marketing. We have given her the resources to be responsive to your marketing needs and our core mission of making Oregon the preferred option for horticultural products in the country.

Most exciting is our upcoming innovation with **NurseryGuide.com**. The site will be getting a total makeover to help turbocharge growers' and buyers' ability to find each other.

One industry, a big family, and the promise ahead in 2025

This industry is incredible, innovative and makes our planet better. I am so excited to see the next generation of leaders taking the reigns and making the industry better. We have great promise and opportunity in the new year, and I am fully committed to do everything in my ability to push for your success.

As we gather for the holiday season, take a good look around at your family, the people you work with, and the community you are a part of. It is special. I have been at OAN for 19 years and I do not hide my adoration and love for the industry and the members. You are the ones who make this industry special and be all that it is. It is the family picture that is in my mind that I treasure. Have a wonderful holiday season. ☺