



For OAN member and Canadian nursery Van Belle Nursery, other than a good scare in February and March, business hasn't been affected by the Trump tariffs. PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN BELLE NURSERY

# Tariffs and the tea leaves

**The administration's trade wars have created uncertainty for everyone, including Oregon's nurseries**

BY JON BELL

If there's anything that's certain in this day and age — and under the administration of President Donald Trump — it's uncertainty.

As this story was being written in early June, the president and his once-close confidant Elon Musk were mucking through a messy online fallout just a few months after the tech and space mogul had joined the administration to head up the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

By the time members of the Oregon Association of Nurseries have this issue of *Digger* in their hands in early August, a veritable lifetime will have transpired — and who knows what else will have gone down in the meantime.

“Certainly a framing element of this

story is that by the time you write it, it could be completely, 180 degrees different,” said Jeff Stone, OAN's executive director. “The consistency of inconsistency is quite alarming and unsettling.”

By “this story,” Stone is specifically referencing one of the most significant and disruptive issues yet under the relatively new administration: tariffs.

As promised during the campaign, Trump rocked the world financial system with a series of tariff announcements throughout the early spring, including a 10% universal tariff on all imports and specific reciprocal tariffs on certain countries. At one point, China was facing 145%.

But almost as quickly as the tariffs were announced, many were either postponed, reduced or whittled down to allow



**“I think the uncertainty that this has created has been the biggest thing.”**

— **Todd Nelson**  
CO-OWNER  
Bountiful Farms

some goods to skirt the system.

The result has created a business environment that's at the very least stamped with uncertainty, including for Oregon's nurseries.

Though largely a domestically focused industry — just 10 percent of what's grown in Oregon gets shipped outside the U.S. — nurseries in Oregon are riding a sea of uncertain waves capped with questions: Will the tariffs raise costs on fertilizer for plants, aluminum for greenhouses, plastic pots and peat moss? Will Canadian customers turn their backs on longtime Oregon relationships? Will it still be financially feasible to

invest in equipment manufactured in Europe that makes growing plants in Oregon more efficient?

“It's hard to predict,” Stone said. “By the time we get to this article, our whole >>

## Tariffs and the tea leaves

conversation could be spot on — or wide right. You're trying to write this for August. That's like 10 years from now."

### Direct hit

The most direct potential impacts that the tariffs could have on Oregon's nursery industry are on its inputs. Lots of the NPK — nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium — fertilizers that nurseries use come from overseas. Most of the plastic pots used here are imported from China. And aluminum for greenhouses, as well as 90% of the peat moss used in the U.S., comes from Canada.

"It's too early to determine for sure the impacts," said Charlie Hall, professor and Ellison Chair in International Floriculture at Texas A&M University. "Undoubtedly, some inputs have been impacted, but I am waiting on data that can tell me how much."

As of early June, those input costs had yet

to show up for nurseries, at least anecdotally.

"I think the uncertainty that this has created has been the biggest thing," said Todd Nelson, co-owner of **Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc.** in Woodburn. "The actual tariffs themselves may not have impacted us yet, but we still don't know."

Part of the reason Oregon nurseries and other agriculture sectors have been spared has been because of the delayed tariffs. But there have also been other forces working hard to except certain goods — forces like OAN, AmericanHort and other agricultural associations that have been lobbying away.

"We are trying to keep tariffs away from green goods," Stone said. "There are always lists (of products excluded from tariffs). Live plants are not listed, and that's a bigger victory that we should acknowledge. Peat moss was not listed. We had to work very, very hard to make

sure that was not listed."

That's not to say there hasn't been some tariff trauma. Nelson purchased a robot from The Netherlands to help with pruning and other tasks at Bountiful. When the container arrived from overseas, it incurred a new tariff. Nelson said the tariff was impactful in a way that will make Bountiful have to size up future purchases in a different way.

"It's a whole new budgeting process now," he said.

### Canadian clubbing

Perhaps some of the more painful pokes for Oregon nurseries from the new trade wars have been the cold shoulders from customers up north in Canada. When Stone visited the country earlier this spring, he sensed a palpable Canadian pride. He saw firsthand how some Canadian businesses were excising

OVER 350 VARIETIES OF SPECIMEN JAPANESE MAPLES  
SPECIALTY GRAFTED CHERRY AND DOGWOOD

**DON SCHMIDT NURSERY, INC.**

ERIC SCHMIDT  
Mobile 503-781-3411

503-668-4659  
32010 S.E. Kelso Rd.  
Boring, OR 97009

[www.donschmidtnursery.com](http://www.donschmidtnursery.com)

American goods from their shelves.

“There were liquidation sales for American-made furniture, they’ve taken American alcohol off their shelves,” he said. “How do you make the Canadians that mad? You talk about them as the 51<sup>st</sup> state.”

Nelson, too, has felt the Canadian chill. He said when all of the trade turmoil began, several long-time customers emailed to cancel orders with Bountiful in favor of supporting Canadian options instead.

“I don’t know if those customers will stay strong with that,” Nelson said, “but this has all definitely ruffled some feathers.”

Other Oregon agriculture-related companies, among them Bob’s Red Mill and Columbia Distributing, mentioned similar instances of being iced by longtime Canadian customers during a roundtable Nelson attended that Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek convened in April.

On the other side of the border, at least one Canadian Nursery, **Van Belle**, a wholesale grower in British Columbia, said the dust kicked up earlier in the year had settled by mid-spring.

“Other than a good scare in February and March, our business hasn’t been affected by the Trump tariffs,” said Scott Erickson, sales manager for Van Belle. “Things between our two countries have reverted back to the pre-existing trade agreement where plants travelled without tariffs. Thankfully, it hasn’t been much of a story for us.”

### Weathering the storm

Katie Briggs, a relationship manager at **AgWest Farm Credit**, noted that despite shifts in trade policy under the new administration, nursery growers have yet to experience any significant changes. While there is concern that costs for imported supplies, such as containers, greenhouse materials and specialized equipment, will rise, the full impact remained uncertain as of June.

“People are anticipating cost increases across the board, but it’s hard to prepare for events that haven’t happened yet,” Briggs said. “That said, the nursery industry is well-positioned to weather economic shifts better than some other sectors.” >>

**VISIT US AT BOOTH #20045**



**MAINLAND FLORAL**



**25355 - 56th Ave., Aldergrove, BC V4W 1G5**

**P. (604) 856-1264 F. (604) 856-1273**  
**E. sales@mainlandfloral.ca W. mainlandfloral.com**



**BOUNTIFUL FARMS** Woodburn, Oregon

Specializing in BB, Container, and Specialty Items  
info@bountifulfarms.com || 503.981.7494 || www.bountifulfarms.com

## Tarrifs and the tea leaves

Aside from the usual spring renewal period — when AgWest’s nursery customers review and renew their lines of credit — Briggs reported no significant uptick in loan activity. This suggests that nursery growers are not aggressively expanding or seeking additional financing to offset potential rising input costs.

“I think nursery growers are holding steady right now,” she said. “Many are waiting for more economic data, watching how inflation trends, what the Federal Reserve does with rates and whether tariffs will affect their costs. With economic uncertainty, nursery growers are proceeding with caution as they assess the best path forward.”

It’s that uncertainty that is likely to continue coloring the trade landscape for the foreseeable future. There’s nothing partisan in acknowledging that the certainty that business and industry covet isn’t always the main focus of the powers

that be.

For nurseries, not knowing what lies ahead or what could sneak up from behind has been something they’ve always had to contend with. Nelson said whether it’s meteorology, politics or economics, nurseries have to plan, react and redirect the best they can no matter what.

“My line is that we are farmers — we deal with Mother Nature,” he said. “You have to be ready and able at all times to roll with the punches. There has never been a time when we could predict everything, from forest fires to ice storms to the heat dome



**“People are anticipating cost increases across the board, but it’s hard to prepare for events that haven’t happened yet.”**

— Katie Briggs  
RELATIONSHIP MANAGER  
AgWest Farm Credit

we experienced. We are very resilient and figure out ways to make it work.

“The problem is, we don’t need uncertain weather on top of uncertain tariffs on top of the uncertainty that comes with doing business in a state like ours. But like I said, we’ll figure it out. We wake up with a smile every morning and the goal is to go home and go to sleep every night with a smile too.” ☺

*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).*



### B2401DTN

- 21.9 Gross HP,† 3-Cylinder Kubota Diesel Engine
- Overall Width of Less than 36 Inches
- Perfect for Vineyards, Greenhouses, Nurseries

**RENTAL RETURN UNITS AVAILABLE!**

### RTV-X Crew

- 23.3 Gross HP,† 3-Cylinder Kubota Diesel Engine
- Variable Hydro Transmission (VHT-X)
- Extra Duty IRS (Independent Rear Suspension)

**STOP IN TODAY FOR GREAT FINANCING OFFERS!**



**MCMINNVILLE**  
2700 ST. JOSEPH RD.  
MCMINNVILLE, OR  
(503) 435-2700

**HUBBARD**  
19658 HWY. 99 E.  
HUBBARD, OR  
(971) 216-0111

**LINN BENTON**  
33599 HWY 99 E.  
TANGENT, OR  
(541) 926-1811



**1-866-385-9073 • [orequimentsales.com](http://orequimentsales.com)**



† For complete warranty, safety and product information, consult your local Kubota dealer and the product operator’s manual. Power (HP/KW) and other specifications are based on various standards or recommended practices. K1042-24-152614-3