



From left: Greg Addington (Oregon Farm Bureau), Ken Fisher (AmericanHort), Tyler Meskers (Oregon Flowers Inc.), Adam Farley (Fairdale Nursery and Countryside Nursery), Jonathan Sandau (Oregon Department of Agriculture) and OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone at the Climate Summit during the Farwest Show in Portland, Oregon in August. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

# Balancing the equation

## OAN's Climate Summit starts a research and policy discussion on measuring plant benefits and production impacts

BY CURT KIPP

Each professionally-grown plant has a life cycle. It starts with production, then transportation to market, purchase by the end consumer, and installation in the landscape.

At each step, there are environmental impacts, but there are also benefits. At the 2025 Farwest Show, held in August, the Oregon Association of Nurseries organized a Climate Summit aimed at examining both sides of the equation.

The effort brought together researchers from Oregon State University and Chemeketa Community College; advocacy groups like Farm Bureau and AmericanHort; government entities like the Northwest Power and Planning Council and the Oregon Department of Agriculture; staffers for members of Congress; and of course, nursery producers themselves.

Between the two days, more than 40 people participated, either as panelists or

audience members.

The hope is that if nurseries are going to be regulated and taxed based on environmental impacts, they can also be credited for environmental benefits, but research is needed to measure those with greatest accuracy and reliability.

“One thing we have to remember is, we produce sequestering plants,” said Tyler Mesker, an owner of **Oregon Flowers Inc.** in Aurora, Oregon and a member of the OAN Board of Directors. “That’s what we want to do, but it’s also what environmentalists want us to do. We shouldn’t let politics get in the way.”

Day one, on August 20, focused on research to measure the environmental benefits and carbon sequestration of nursery material. Day two, on August 21, focused on policy. Of course, the two are linked. Without policy in place that supports research, research is less likely to happen, and so in turn is improved policy.

“We have ideas,” said OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone, who conceived and organized the summit. “We want to inform congressional members we need research dollars to solve the math problems over time.”

## Motivation to help

The prevailing sense from the gathering was that growers want to help with societal climate challenges, but they also want to stay in business and pursue profitability. They want to find solutions that will let them do both.

“Farmers don’t wake up at night worrying about climate change,” said Greg Addington, executive director of the Oregon Farm Bureau. “They worry about passing the farm on to their kids, staying in business, keeping it profitable. If there’s no cost, no decrease in performance, people will do it. But the bottom line is, it’s got to pencil out. We can talk about the carrot and stick, but if our people sense the stick, it’s not going to be a good solution.”

Ken Fisher, CEO of the national green industry trade group AmericanHort, felt similarly. “We want the business mock case and the environmental case to work together,” he said.

Jonathan Sandau, deputy director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture said cooperation is the answer. “The most environmentally friendly gallon of fuel and the most business friendly gallon of fuel are the same one,” he said. “It has to make business sense. Both of those can be true. They are >>

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often true, if we approach it that way as a shared goal in a common manner.”

### Initial efforts

Of course, nursery awareness of environmental impacts and benefits is not new.

The Climate Friendly Nurseries Project, a collaboration between the OAN and the Oregon Environmental Council from 2008–2012, focused on improving the environmental efficiency of nursery production.

This effort yielded a guide, “Best Management Practices for Climate Friendly Nurseries” (2011). It covered lighting, variable frequency drive pumps, irrigation efficiency measures such as drip, greenhouse insulation, reuse/recycling of waste, efficient use of nutrients, and vehicle fuel efficiency.

It prescribed improvements nurseries could make to lessen their environmental impact while improving their bottom line.

Many did, particularly by seeking incentives to help them finance environmentally driven capital improvements.

This new initiative expands the scope of that effort by also looking at the positive impacts of plants, both during production and once installed.

A few years ago, Meskers sensed the industry’s need to measure impacts and benefits, and decided to get a head start. He developed a carbon footprint calculator for his business, Oregon Flowers Inc. This year, he had an intern from England work with the spreadsheet in greater depth to get better information.

The company has already acted on this knowledge and made improvements. For ideas on resource efficiency, the company has looked to European producers — primarily those in Holland, where the Meskers family is from.

In terms of plant benefits, Fisher of

AmericanHort said that part of the problem is not knowing where nursery material goes or how long it will be there. That makes calculating the sequestration benefits more complicated for nurseries than for, say, forestry. “The forest isn’t going to move, but the trees from our nurseries are going to move around, on purpose,” he said.

Adam Farley, second-generation nursery owner of **Countryside Nursery and Fairdale Nursery** (Aurora, Oregon), wants to make end consumers aware of plant benefits, and would like to have more data to back it up. “When people drive [by] and see our nursery, we want them to say, ‘There’s a place that’s part of the solution,’” he said. “We want to quantify it and we want to tell our customers the truth.”

### Looking to the future

Stone said it was the OAN’s first climate summit but won’t be the last. “My sincere hope would be in two years, to regather this group and see what our progress has been,” he said.

Those attending acknowledged there will be political challenges but expressed interest in working through them.

Margi Hoffman is a full-time member of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, which plans the power grid for the Pacific Northwest. “We have to find a way to rise above or below the politics,” she said. “We have to find a way to work together even when we disagree .... It’s easy to discount a legitimate concern from a producer as just, ‘Oh, they’re on the other side of the politics.’”

She said the Climate Summit was a great first step in overcoming that. “This is how we make a beginning and make a commitment to each other,” she said.

“I want to thank our finalists,” Stone said. “It took time and a little bit more of faith to come here. We have work — a lot of work to do.” ©

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