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# Advocacy training matters more than ever

**I didn't grow up dreaming about being in politics. I'm guessing most of you didn't either.**

I dreamt of running my own business and working outdoors and with my hands.

As my dream became reality, I defined myself as a grower. Over the past several years, I have served in various leadership roles. This experience cemented something very important in my mind.

While I am a grower, being a part of the politics of our industry is also extremely important. The longer I run a wholesale nursery, the more I see that the decisions made in Salem and Washington D.C. directly impact my farm, whether or not I participate. If we don't speak up, someone else will do the talking for us.

That's why the Oregon Association of Nurseries advocacy training on January 13, 2026 is so important. Policy decisions are seen around our businesses every day. They touch everything we do.

Think of ag overtime, water availability, immigration reform, pesticide regulations, transportation, climate and energy policy and tariffs. The list goes on. These decisions impact our margins, our workforce, and our ability to stay competitive.

It took me a while before I decided to get involved in advocacy for our industry. It seemed too complicated and intimidating. What could I bring to the table? My business isn't big enough for my voice to have an impact. These are some of the things I would think.

I'm sure a lot of you have encountered these same thoughts and feelings when considering getting involved. Advocacy training helps break down these barriers and enables me to be much more comfortable participating in advocacy for our industry.

Advocacy training helps us learn how to explain what we do, understanding which issues matter most, and get the confidence to tell our story. It is not about being a polished politician — it is about being honest and direct.



Patrick Newton

The truth is that legislators want to hear from us. They need to hear from us. They don't know anything about our industry, and our needs, unless someone takes the time to show them. They have no idea how to staff our operation in peak season, or how water restrictions and new regulations hit our nursery's bottom line, unless we explain it to them.

I have learned that rather than just trying to explain something to the legislators, it is far more effective to show them. We need to invite state and federal representatives out to our farms. Walk them through the propagation house and our fields. Let them see the irrigation system. Show them the labor it takes to grow a plant over multiple years.

When they stand on the ground with us — when they see the scale and complexity of what we do — it sticks with them. They will remember that the next time they vote.

Advocacy isn't about giving speeches, it's about building relationships.

As a nursery community, we're stronger together. When growers, suppliers and retailers share our stories as one united industry, lawmakers pay attention. They start to understand it's not just about rows of plants.

So, as January 13 approaches, I would encourage every grower to take part in the advocacy training.

I hope to see you on the 13<sup>th</sup>!