

Vote

When thinking about elections, Kyle Fessler of Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas said it best: The mayor from Jaws is still the mayor in Jaws 2.

In other words, it is important to vote in your local elections. (I love movie references.)

The upcoming primary in Oregon isn't just another date on the political calendar — it's a defining moment for the nursery and greenhouse industry. For growers, propagators, and the thousands of workers who keep this sector thriving, participation in the primary is not optional. It is essential to protecting the future of an industry that anchors the state's agricultural economy.

If we as agriculture treat our voting privileges as optional, we will deserve what we get.

The civics of the Oregon primary

Oregon uses a closed primary system for its major parties. This means registered Democrats vote in Democratic primaries, registered Republicans vote in Republican primaries, minor party members vote within their party's process that is often separate, and nonaffiliated voters are sidelined from partisan primaries. They can still vote on nonpartisan races (such as judges and local offices), and for or against ballot measures.

In the Oregon primary, who gets to vote can be very different from what the electorate looks like. That distinction is especially important if you're thinking about influence and turnout. Several factors are in play.

1. Turnout. It's a much smaller universe. Even though millions are registered in Oregon, primary turnout is typically: 25–35% of registered voters. That means the real electorate is a fraction of the total population. In practical terms, a motivated bloc — like growers, suppliers, and ag workers — can carry real weight if they participate consistently.

2. Demographics. Older voters dominate. Primary voters skew significantly older: voters 50 or older make up the

largest share of ballots cast, and those 65+ make up the most consistent participants. Voters under 35 are dramatically under-represented and fall into the “my vote does not matter” camp.

Tale of the tape

Recent statewide voter registration data (2026) shows a striking split in our state. Nonaffiliated and independent voters make up 46% of voters. Democrats are next with 31%, and Republicans make up 23% of voters.

So why am I raising the alarm for this cycle? The reality is, a relatively small share of the electorate determines who appears on the November ballot. What that means in practice? This creates one of the most important political dynamics in Oregon.

The largest group can't fully participate. Nearly half of voters are nonaffiliated, yet they are largely shut out of partisan primaries, which is where most elections are effectively decided. That means a minority of total voters chooses the candidates.

To really understand the Oregon primary, you have to go beyond who can vote and look at who actually does vote. That's where influence is won or lost — and where industries like nurseries and agriculture can make a disproportionate impact.

Every election and every vote counts

The Oregon economy is at a crossroads. Big issues surround the industry. Water, labor and land use are in the crosshairs. Having a healthy business climate has turned into an afterthought. It has become increasingly clear we need balance in Oregon.

Schools impact us all. Oregon has never spent more money and had less to show for it. The money is simply not traversing to the classroom. This is so much so that 20+ communities are seeking school levies. Add to this — test scores are down. We simply are not preparing our kids. The system is broken.

I have visited well over 100 nursery operations over the last year and found a striking common denominator. This state makes it hard to do business. The overriding feeling is that it seems that elected offi-



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cials only care about agriculture when it suits them. Unless we set the terms of the engagement, the nursery, greenhouse and retail operations in our fertile state will be at risk of shortcut and poorly considered policies on tax, climate, and transportation. We will see a more regulation, along with labor policies that are decidedly anti-business.

Ballots are arriving now

These elections matter. Every vote matters. Your voice matters. Our member-led political action committee has made endorsements for the primary election cycle. Oregon will set the matchup for our next governor and the choice for Oregon is clear.

Meanwhile, it is almost a crime that the largest sector in agriculture does not have one of its members serving in the state Legislature. Fortunately, this year, we have one of our own (Amanda Staehely) running to represent our interests in a house district.

We need steadier, more-business-friendly hands to turn the tide. I highly encourage you to look at the half dozen or so endorsements by the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee, posted at [OAN.org/2026ONPAC](https://www.oan.org/2026ONPAC).

Use your voice on May 19

So let me draw the bottom line. Voter turnout is typically poor in primary elections. Rural and agricultural voices — when organized — can have outsized influence, pound for pound.

So when you receive your ballot, shape your future and vote. ☺