

2025-2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Learning your challenges face to face

One of the things I've enjoyed most during my time as OAN president has been getting out and visiting your farms.

Over the past nine months, Jeff Stone, Beth Farmer, Stephanie Collins, and I have been making our way around the state visiting OAN members.

We've been averaging four or five visits a month, and if all goes as planned, we'll hit our goal of visiting 50 nurseries before my term is over.

I'll admit, I wasn't sure how these visits would be received. A few people looked a little nervous when we pulled into the driveway. I think they thought we were there to conduct some kind of audit.

Once they realized we were just there to visit, ask questions, and listen, everybody relaxed. We even got a few laughs out of it.

Every nursery has been different. We've visited operations that cover hundreds of acres and others that fit on a single acre.

Some are expanding, some are just trying to keep up, and some are wondering what the next few years are going to look like. No matter the size of the operation, we always leave having learned something.

The biggest reason for these visits isn't to tell members everything OAN is doing. It's to hear what's going on in your world. What's keeping you up at night? What's going really well? What should we be paying more attention to? Those are the conversations that matter.

It also gives members a chance to ask us questions. Sometimes people aren't exactly sure what OAN is working on behind the scenes, and that's understandable.

Advocacy, regulatory issues, labor, water, transportation, the Japanese beetle — there's a lot happening that most people don't see every day. These visits give us a chance to explain what we're working on and why it matters.

One thing I've learned is that no two



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nurseries have the exact same concerns. That's why it's so important for us to get out and see people face to face.

Emails and surveys have their place, but they don't replace standing in someone's shop or walking their fields. You learn a lot more during a one-hour conversation than you do reading a dozen emails.

These visits have also reminded me how many good people make up this industry. Everywhere we've gone, we've been welcomed with a handshake, a tour, and honest conversation.

People have been willing to share both their successes and their challenges, and that's one of the things that makes this industry so special. There's a real willingness to help each other, and it's something I'm proud to be a part of.

We've still got a ways to go before we reach my goal of 50 visits while I'm president, and I'm looking forward to every one of them.

Thank you to everyone who has welcomed us onto your farms, taken time out of your busy day, and shared your thoughts with us. Those conversations help us do a better job representing our members, and I hope they continue long after my term as president is over. For me, these visits have been one of the most rewarding parts of serving you. ☺