

OAN Convention signals the sprint into 2027

Sunriver Resort in beautiful Central Oregon will be the gathering place of friends, our talented leaders and volunteers, and where we swear in Darcy Ruef, AI's Garden & Home, as our new president.

Conventions are a turning point of the association's yearly cycle. We take stock of the past year and highlight those who have stood out. We issue a myriad of awards, hold discussions that shape the priorities of the association, and tackle head-on the issues that confront Oregon's largest agricultural sector.

Digging into the issues

Since the COVID pandemic, our chapters have struggled not only with their identities, but their ability to serve members. Hoping things get better is not a strategy.

The OAN board has given the green light for the membership to examine and implement realignment of our chapter borders. The concept is to go from nine chapters to four. This change will not cancel long-established and well-attended events. The association needs to meet the needs of the membership, and we feel a reset will do just that.

Our convention keynote speaker, Matt Mika, has a unique and powerful story of survival. The senior vice president of government affairs and chief advocacy officer at AmericanHort was among the victims of a shooting at a congressional baseball practice in Virginia. He will share his very personal and compelling first-person account.

Seven states now have packaging extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws: Maine, Oregon, Colorado, California, Minnesota, Maryland and Washington. Together they cover about one in five Americans, and any horticulture business that ships plants into them may owe registration, reporting, and fees on the pots, trays, tags, sleeves and cartons that go out the door. Only Oregon (since July 2025) and Colorado (since

January 2026) are invoicing producers today.

The key point for growers: these laws follow the product, not the business address. Product changes hands many times in our industry. As we learned at the Plastics Roundtable at the Farwest Show, there is very little awareness and understanding of the fiscal ramifications of the EPR law. It will not be confined to the seven states as the nursery industry is a national commodity. Oregon has been a leader on a national conversation, and the issue will be brought to you —front and center.

As always, we will have a legislative panel made up of bipartisan elected leaders, along with Matt Mika from AmericanHort, myself, and wholesale grower Amanda Staehely (Columbia Nursery), who by then will hopefully be the newly elected state representative from Oregon House District 18.

Issues at the federal level (trade and tariffs, labor reform, farm bill) and the state (agricultural overtime, commercial activities tax, land use, EPR and climate policy) will be brought to your feet for your engagement.

Why does this matter?

It is a common question. What does it matter if I get involved? Does my vote make a difference? That answer is an unqualified yes.

At the beginning of last month, eight major farm groups (including OAN) inked an editorial challenging both federal and state policies that are making it more difficult to compete. The editorial said, in part:

Many of the challenges facing Oregon agriculture today are not beyond anyone's control. They are the result of policy choices in Washington, D.C., and Salem, and our government has the power to change course or make different decisions. Agriculture has also absorbed costs and uncertainty from federal trade policy. Tariffs increase the cost of production, while retaliation and anti-American purchasing sentiment threaten markets farmers have spent years building. At the same time, the administration deserves credit when it gets things right. Efforts



Jeff Stone

to make the H-2A program more workable, updates to Endangered Species Act regulations, and improvements to grazing management on federal lands matter to Oregon's family farms and ranches.

Unfortunately, the problems coming from Washington are landing on an industry already struggling under costs imposed in Salem. Oregon cannot blame Washington D.C. for problems created here at home. Before adding another mandate, regulation or tax, state leaders need to consider what happens when those costs land on the same farm, in the same year, alongside higher fuel prices and uncertain markets. The status quo is untenable.

Oregon agriculture needs stability and common sense from Washington and real regulatory relief from Salem. We need a governor willing to stand up to the Administration when federal policy hurts Oregon, support the Administration when federal policy helps Oregon, and lead the fight to address the out-of-control costs and regulations our own state government constantly imposes.

Focused and ready to go

Your association is laser focused on being a fierce advocate for the industry — both in Salem and Washington DC. This is a critical election and time in the nursery industry where decisions made will have a lasting impact. We are up for the challenge.

Over the last decade the OAN has trained members to be platoons of on the ground advocates. But this is all for nothing unless you vote and make your voice heard. Regardless of one's personal political view, get out and vote. ©