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Oregon Association of ... Cannabis?

There is a tremendous amount of interest and speculation in Oregon's newest legal crop – cannabis – so much so that we devoted a segment at our convention in November and an article in this issue to the topic.



Leigh Geschwill
OAN PRESIDENT

But is cannabis who we are? Should we embrace Oregon's newest professional growers into our association?

Our bylaws clearly state that we will serve the interest of members who grow, handle and retail ornamental horticultural products.

It is true that we have many members that grow things other than ornamentals. Our membership includes people who also run farms, orchards, fruit stands, dairy and ranching operations, and commercial forests, to name a few. Some of these members choose to join additional organizations such as the Farm Bureau and Oregon Aglink.

But the reason they join our organization is our shared interest in achieving deliverables for horticulture.

We have proven methods of tackling issues and needs that we face as growers. These approaches have, for the most part, seen us successfully through the years. Our success is the result of a diverse set of growers coming together to be a cohesive voice — the voice of horticulture in Oregon, the West and the nation.

As an association, with the help of our volunteer leaders and members, we have built capital with our politicians, and state and federal agencies. They know we are issues-based, fair and willing to consider compromise when necessary.

Our ability to get things done has attracted other groups to our table before. At one point we added viticulturalists (wine growers) to the list of folks who could apply for regular membership. It is true that we do sometimes meet with the wine growers to discuss issues of mutual interest such as labor. However, their inclusion seems to me to have been part of a failed attempt at boosting membership that netted no real net gain for us as an association.

So how would cannabis growers fit into our mix? Cannabis is used for pharmaceutical products, as a recreational drug and for some non-perishable consumables (such as building products and textiles). While it is a plant, and has to be grown, so must flax for linen, barley and hops for beer, and tobacco for pharma crops.

Our strength remains our focus on the core set of topics and issues that we define and deal with.

There will be some crossover between these new growers and our current membership. We are actively working on water, pesticide and land use issues that affect all growers of agriculture, horticulture and forestry products. We also continue our work on labor supply and costs that directly impact our businesses.

But what we don't have in common is just as important. Our products are perceived as positive. They are life and environment enhancing. No one is going to ask why some child is in the hospital for an accidental overdose, or why there was a car wreck because they went out and planted a tree, or picked some flowers. Our products are not going to be responsible for the decline in someone's mental health — quite the opposite.

It is important for us to show leadership in helping this new industry get off the ground and up to speed. I just don't think it has to be within our organization. ©

Leigh