

A green industry means a green environment

The Oregon Association of Nurseries educates people about the benefits of the plant material grown in Oregon.

Flowers, trees and grasses can perform janitorial services on the environment, and all you need to do is plant and maintain them.

As research has shown, one tree can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually, equaling 11,000 miles of car emissions. In urban and suburban settings, vegetation can reduce stormwater runoff, decrease pollutants and suspended solids in surface water runoff, and capture sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide and particulate matter from the air. Additionally, plants provide forage for pollinators, and tree canopies can reduce the heat island effect in cities.

Our industry's plant material can do all this, and we work hard to let people know. We developed downloadable, research-backed educational materials under the Plants Make Life Better banner (www.plantsomethingoregon.com/pmlb).

Our Plant Something Oregon website (www.plantsomethingoregon.com) gives tips on gardening, as well as an online mapping tool to help them discover our retail nurseries, from garden centers to specialty nurseries. (We also have our print map.)

All of this is part of your investment in OAN. We promote gardening so you can spend more time growing and selling plants.

But we also reach out to state and federal leaders, government organizations and nonprofits.

Currently, the OAN is working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Oregon Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and conservation partners with deep pocketbooks (such as The Freshwater Trust) for the mutual benefit of all.

The clouds are back

The roots of this approach formed out of necessity in the 1990s. The nursery industry was facing scrutiny for pollutants in water due to soil erosion and fertilizers.

But instead of waiting for the regulatory ax to fall, the industry adopted a voluntary water management plan for container nurseries. It was soon adopted statewide. Growers implemented water reuse and recycling on a greater scale. They showed that when it comes to delivering outcomes, innovation could triumph over regulation.

Now, 26 years later, we are poised to take another step. We're preventing a new generation of regulations that lawsuits threaten to lower upon us. And to achieve this, we're working with several partners:

NRCS — NRCS's natural resources conservation programs help reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and lessen the damage caused by floods and other natural disasters.

The federal agency was created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt after the Dust Bowl disaster in the 1930s. I got hooked into this story after reading *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan. Many others have heard about this disaster through filmmaker Ken Burns' excellent work on the early days of NRCS in his documentary, "The Dust Bowl."

NRCS has a variety of programs, predominantly funded through the conservation title of the Farm Bill — the largest single allocation of federal dollars in each five-year cycle. They also do landscape conservation initiatives, direct assistance to small-scale farms, and provide drought resources, grants and direct financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), among other programs.

The OAN has collaborated with NRCS to help specialty crops become more accepted in the minds of some fairly traditional farm programs. I give NRCS credit, in particular Ron Alvarado who serves as state conservationist, for working with what our needs may be and assisting those who want the help.

SWCD — This group provides technical, capacity and financial assistance to land owners. They help those who voluntarily wish to address critical problems on the nursery — in particular soil erosion, utilizing sensible, industry-accepted man-



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agement practices and obtaining dollars to get the work done on the ground.

In fact, in April 2016 the East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District did a study of our growers in that area to find out what needs are not being fulfilled. This is a good start.

The Freshwater Trust (TFT) —

Regulators consider increasing water temperatures to be a pollutant, as they are harmful to fish living there. When this problem became a serious priority on the Rogue River, TFT reached out to the OAN and asked for assistance with solving the problem.

TFT helped connect funders to growers in the Rogue River area and so far, 27 acres (3.6 miles) of stream have been planted with native plants, such as ponderosa pine, black cottonwood, bigleaf maple, Oregon ash and white alder. All the trees were locally sourced from OAN members.

This project is a win-win for both the economy and the environment.

We are a solution

These partners can provide our members with financial and technical assistance, labor and materials on some soil erosion projects, and a voluntary way to inoculate your operation from the regulatory storm clouds that are coming to our state and around the nation.

Through these partnerships, you can keep your soil, obtain a cost-share that lowers your burden, and receive on-the-ground help with getting started and following through on your project. They make it clear and simple.

I urge all growers to consider taking advantage of these resources. Together, we as an industry can emulate the leaders from over a quarter-century ago, by using our knowledge and plants to make a difference. ☺