

Bailey Nurseries

BY CURT KIPP



Bailey Nurseries is a national wholesale nursery headquartered in Minnesota, with growing locations in Oregon, Washington and Illinois, plus a small woody ornamental breeding operation in Georgia. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

Founded:
1905 by John Vincent Bailey

Key people:
Terri McEnaney, president;
Pat Bailey, vice president;
John Bailey, chief financial
officer; Shane Brockshus,
general manager of
West Coast operations

Known for:
Shrubs, trees, perennials and
vines in containers, bare root
and liners, including several
branded lines and a regular
stream of new introductions.

Head office:
1325 Bailey Road, Newport,
Minnesota 55055,
1-800-829-8894

West Coast main office:
9855 N.W. Pike Road, Yamhill,
Oregon 97148, 1-503-662-3244

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Farwest Show booth:
#17019

THERE ARE NURSERIES that are somewhat diversified, and then there's Bailey Nurseries.

The 112-year-old Minnesota-based wholesale grower, which is entirely family-owned, has a presence in five states, including a well-regarded Oregon operation that recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

The company's Oregon farms, at Yamhill and at Sauvie Island, now grow about half of the company's material.

As far as diverse offerings, most of Bailey's sales are in ornamental and fruit trees and woody shrubs, but they also offer vines, perennials and other plants. They sell plants at every stage of development and in various sizes to nearly every type of wholesale customer you could name. Geographically, customers range all across the United States and Canada, with a focus on the northern half of the U.S.

"We certainly have a diverse customer base, which helps, from garden centers, landscapers and growers to rewholesalers, and we've ventured into the big box arena to some extent as well now," said company vice president Pat Bailey, a fourth-generation owner of the company.

Many of the company's best-known plants

and trees are a part of branded lines, such as Easy Elegance roses, Endless Summer hydrangeas, Jump Start liners and First Editions introductions.

It's a complex operation, but the company applies a stream of constant innovation in order to stay ahead of problems that might develop.

"With great diversity comes a lot of complexity," said Shane Brockshus, general manager of the company's West Coast operations, which are based in Yamhill, Oregon. "It's all about finding the right balance. We have to make sound business decisions while continuing to improve and, most of all, maintaining the quality and service that we're known for."

The nursery is currently run by a three-member management team, all of whom are great-grandchildren of John Vincent (J.V.) Bailey, who founded the nursery in 1905. In addition to Pat, they include Terri McEnaney, president, and John Bailey, chief financial officer. (McEnaney will be the free keynote speaker at this year's Farwest Show; see the information on Page 63 of this issue for details.)

Together, the three make day-to-day decisions for a 112-year-old company that has grown steadily while never forgetting that quality must always be the top priority. 

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“Bailey’s philosophy is to try to do everything in house, to establish quality every step of the way,” said Ross Dumdi, who manages production at the Yamhill growing site. “We don’t want to be the biggest, we want to be the best.”

Early days

John Vincent Bailey officially founded the nursery in 1905 outside St. Paul, Minnesota, on the same parcel of land where the company is still headquartered today.

He and his father had been farming the area for several years, selling berries, melons and tree fruit at local farmer’s markets.

“It was a typical farm with various crops, animals and orchards,” Pat Bailey said. “It was a diversified subsistence on the farm.”

From the beginning, the founder embraced a strong spirit of innovation in his growing practices. “To get those melons to market sooner, he got out photographic plates and made boxes to cover the mounds and accelerate the growth,” Pat said. “He could get the melons to market sooner and command higher dollar for the product.”

John Vincent also was among the first to use an automobile to move product to market when others will still using a horse and buggy, Pat said.

The operation developed an excess of fruit trees, raspberry plants and shrubs, so John Vincent set up a retail nursery to sell them to area residents. By 1911, the company started a mail order catalogue so it could sell to people farther away. The nursery started selling to wholesale customers later.

The founder’s five children all joined the company in the 1920s. When he passed away in 1943, sons Gordon Bailey Sr. and Vincent Bailey took the reins. The nursery continued with wholesale and retail sales until the 1950s, when the decision was made to focus on wholesale and discontinue direct sales to the end consumer.

“With the housing boom and the baby boom, there was a good demand for plants at the retail level, so we started focusing on that with retailers and landscapers,” Pat said.

Around this time the next generation became more involved with the company. Gordon Bailey Jr. and Rod Bailey took on leading roles as the company expanded its reach into new territories.

“There was more focus on plants for the northern half of the country,” Pat said. “The plants found their way out to broader markets. We expanded region by region.”

Then, a major turning point arrived. In 1977, Bailey made the decision to expand its growing operations into Oregon.

Company leaders wanted to be able to produce more of their own liners, which they had been purchasing from West Coast growers. Oregon’s soil and climate provided the best place for them to put down new roots, so to speak.

Don Pond was appointed to establish this new division. A site was chosen in the Coast Range foothills, near the small town of Yamhill, about 33 miles southwest of Portland. From there, the operation expanded gradually. It started with field growing of trees; container production followed in the early 1980s.

In 1990, Bailey purchased Pacific Coast Nursery, which was comprised of two farms that were formerly part of Zelenka Farms. It which was a major step providing the company with its first new West Coast growing areas outside Yamhill’s immediate vicinity.

The purchase included a bareroot production area on Sauvie Island, located on the Columbia River 13 miles northwest and downstream of Portland. The rich, but lighter alluvial soils provided a different growing environment than the company’s various farms around the Yamhill area.

“Lighter soils allow us to grow shrubs there, and the low elevation near the river means less risk of damaging fall/spring frosts on sensitive plants,” Brockshus said. “Using our different growing areas across the country is a way the nursery has set itself up to be able to offer diversity and spread risk. We grow a lot of trees there including most of our fruit trees, and also line out about 1.5 million shrubs a year there.”

The purchase of Pacific Coast Nursery also included an orchard and

bareroot production area in Sunnyside, Washington, located east of the Cascade Mountains in the heart of the Yakima Valley. Here, Bailey grows some of its trees and shrubs that don't like the wet springs in Western Oregon, such as lilacs and *Prunus*.

Today, the company's West Coast operations include 1,100 acres overall — 190 acres in container tree and shrub production, 10 acres in propagation houses, and the rest in bareroot production and seed/scion orchards.

Another significant expansion occurred in 2009 when the company purchased Bork Nursery in Onarga, Illinois, a wholesale container operation located about 90 miles south of Chicago.

"We've upgraded, renovated and expanded that operation so we'll be up to 125–130 acres at that operation after this fall," Pat said. "It's allowed us to diver-

sify and spread out the risk a little bit. In Minnesota, we might be frozen solid up into April. Having the Illinois location allows us to ship anytime we want to in the spring. It's a zone or two warmer, so we can have a palette of plants that we can't have in Minnesota."

The company's most recent acquisition came in 2015, with the purchase of Plant Introductions Inc., the Athens, Georgia-based breeding operation that was founded by Michael Dirr, Mark Griffith and Jeff Beasley. This added to Bailey's already-strong core competence in plant genetics.

Although it's a small operation, with just a few employees, it's expected to make big contributions to the company's success, both now and in the future.

"That purchase was to get us a breeding company that was already up and running, and access to genetics," Pat said.

"We acquired plants that were already in the trade, plus new varieties they were already working on."

A new generation

The newest generation of Baileys assumed control in 2001 when Terri McEnaney, daughter of Rod Bailey, took over as company president. (And now, a fifth generation is on board, with Terri's sons, Dan and Ryan, both working for the company.)

Since then, the company has continued to innovate in the spirit of its founder.

The product portfolio is constantly evolving. "New varieties has been something we've gone after, whether from breeders here in the states, or Europe, or trying to find new genetics in our own fields," Pat Bailey said.

Production methods have also changed. The company is automating >>

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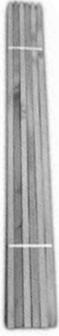
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where it can to save on labor costs and cope with poor workforce availability.

In a bid to boost efficiency with labor and resources, Bailey works with a Colorado-based consultant called Flow Vision to make shipping processes more efficient. Now all the shrubs are racked before being loaded onto trucks. They used to be “California stacked” (in layers, container on container), which required hand loading and unloading of trailers.

“FlowVision is helping us to evaluate the entire order pulling and shipping process, looking at it with a manufacturing mindset,” Brockshus said. “It’s a big initiative for our company at all container sites right now. The move to racking has also been an effort to be more freight friendly — trucking is tight. Folks don’t want to sit and wait five hours to get hand loaded and back on the road.”

The company is also slowly changing from sprinklers to drip irrigation. This solves not just a water challenge, but labor scarcity, too. Brockshus, who took over the company’s Oregon operations in 2011 when Don Pond retired, appreciates the company’s willingness to make the investment.

“Hauling hard pipe around in August is not easy to do, and it’s not easy to find people willing to do it,” Brockshus said. “I’m very thankful to ownership that is financially strong and supportive of what we want to do.”

According to Brockshus, company management is demanding, but supportive and progressive, as it should be.

“If we are looking at doing anything, making a major investment or change, they’re going to expect you to do your homework,” he said. “They’re going to ask good, hard questions, but once that’s done and you present the facts, I’ve always been impressed by their willingness, in good times and bad, to be forward thinking and invest in the business.” ©

Curt Kipp is the director of publications and communications at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and editor of Digger. He can be reached at ckipp@oan.org or 503-582-2008.



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