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# It's good to be the king (of ag commodities)



**Mark Bigej**  
OAN PRESIDENT

## Leading Oregon in sales has its advantages

After falling from the top perch for the past two years, greenhouse and nursery products have recaptured the No. 1 position in terms of production value among Oregon's diverse agricultural commodities!

Newly released figures from the Oregon Department of Agriculture show that our industry generated \$909 million in sales during 2016. This is encouraging news for our industry. It continues to demonstrate a steady recovery from the depths of the nation's economic recession earlier in the decade.

Although greenhouse and nursery products have been recognized as either the No. 1 or No. 2 agricultural commodity in Oregon going back many years (we seesaw with the cattle industry, depending on the price of beef and other factors), this wasn't always the case.

Prior to 1992, our economic impact wasn't measured, so it couldn't be reported nor recognized. That year, several leaders from what was then called the Oregon Association of Nurserymen went to Washington, D.C. on their annual pilgrimage to talk to our federal representatives as well as officials. (This is the same annual lobbying trip we continue making to this day.)

Once in D.C., our leaders visited the USDA and asked if they could find funding in their budget to take a survey of Oregon's nursery and greenhouse industry, and use the resulting data in the annual USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service results.

We received the grant, the survey was conducted and the results showed that nursery and greenhouse crops were Oregon's leading commodity by sales.

We had always suspected it. Now we knew it for sure — and others did, too.

It wasn't until this first survey took place that the nursery industry gained notoriety as being the biggest economic force in Oregon ag — recognition that we and others are now used to seeing on a regular basis.

As we soon learned, the political advantage of being known as the "top dog" in ag is substantial!

In areas where we had struggled to have a voice or receive funding, now people were more willing to listen. They started taking the nursery industry more seriously.

It opened doors at the state and national level. Congress started putting more value on our industry. They recognized the impact we had on the Oregon economy, including sales revenue, exportation of products produced in Oregon, and the jobs our members contribute to the state's employment.

Suddenly, we had a voice and we were learning how to use it!

In my experience with lobbying for our industry over the past few years, I am constantly amazed at the respect lawmakers give our organization. While this respect has been hard earned and not entirely due to being the No. 1 ag commodity in Oregon, having the sales figures to back up our legitimacy as an economic force sure doesn't hurt!

I would be the first to recognize the hit that our industry took over the most recent recession. It has been painful to watch some nurseries, greenhouses and retailers go out of business. It has also been painful to see the effect it has had on our organization.

However, it has been rewarding and energizing to see our industry AND our organization rebound and start building again. I am eager to see that growth continue in the years to come. Cheers to No. 1! ☺

*Mark Bigej*