

# Rationality is our friend

## The COVID-19 virus will most certainly impact families, friends and businesses.

It is already causing tremendous disruption in the economy, not to mention knocking our daily lives off auto-pilot.

In mid-March, I communicated with our membership the need to embrace that fear is not our friend — rationality is. We provided reliable resources people can draw on to inform decision-making, and will continue to do that. We created a resource page on our OAN website pulling together the best information we can find for all who need it.

Your association is a leader in the state of Oregon. We have shared our collective best advice with dozens of sectors within our agricultural community. This is not a time to be stingy on common sense.

### Adapting to a pandemic

Our industry is already very familiar with the concept of stopping a dangerous pathogen from spreading. Our experience with *Phytophthora ramorum*, which causes sudden oak death, has given us a head start. In response to that threat, we were key collaborators in creating the systems approach to pest and disease management.

The key to the systems approach is preventing transmission from plant to plant. This is done by reviewing your production system, from propagation and sourcing to final shipment, and eliminating opportunities for the spread of disease. Our key tactics include isolating incoming material until it is confirmed clean, and visually inspecting plants for signs of disease.

The systems approach is fundamentally different from the traditional end-inspection approach of inspecting plants just before shipment and diverting the infested ones. The problem with that approach is that by the time the problem is detected, the entire load may well be compromised.

Our familiarity with the benefits of the systems approach opens awareness for how we can cope with the COVID-19 virus.

With plants, one must know the pest or pathogen you are scouting for — how it manifests, how it is transmitted, how long it takes symptoms to be visible, and what to

do if symptoms are observed. With coronavirus, the same principles apply. It's important to know the symptoms of the disease, but it's even better to know how the pathogen transmits in the first place.

The virus incubates for a long period before symptoms manifest. The best solution is social distancing to stop it from spreading. Handwashing, surface cleaning and sneezing into the crook of your elbow are important steps — but keeping your distance is key.

### Protecting our workforce

Protecting your business legally is also a consideration. Peter Hicks of Jordan Ramis PC has suggested the following approach:

- Tell employees to stay home if they are sick. Tell employees you will send them home if they show up sick.
- Make employees aware that there is no penalty for taking leave they are entitled to by law. This includes employee sick leave if you offer it, or it may include leave taken through the Oregon Family Leave Act. Leave entitlement varies depending on the size of your business and whether you offer leave benefits that exceed the minimum legal requirements in your jurisdiction.
- Be particularly careful with workforce reductions (seasonal or otherwise). Under these circumstances there is an increased risk of possible sickness-related retaliation claims. Given this risk, we recommend you consult with counsel before taking any such actions.

OAN members are entitled to 30 minutes per month of legal advice on a non-continuing issue through our Legal Access benefit. If you are an OAN member and wish to use this benefit, feel free to contact Peter at [peter.hicks@jordanramis.com](mailto:peter.hicks@jordanramis.com). Be prepared to provide your membership number.

In March, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced the cancellation of all gatherings in the state of 25 people or more well into the month of April.

While COVID-19 will not be lethal for most of the population, we must recognize the danger that it poses for vulnerable individuals. We urge every nursery business to implement logical, common-sense practices to reduce transmission between people, thereby making the public health response the most effective it can be.



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Nursery and greenhouse operators utilize an abundance of common sense, so I am sure we are already adapting.

### The relationships that define us

The nursery and greenhouse industry has always done business on a handshake. Employees work shoulder to shoulder to produce top quality plants at their nurseries, and nursery leaders likewise work hand in hand to move the industry forward. We are still built on relationships, even if we are reducing and changing our person-to-person interactions for the time being.

Late this summer, the 2020 Farwest Show will take place August 26–28 at the Oregon Convention Center. This is our industry's showcase to the nation. We are planning for the show to take place as scheduled, and hopeful the threat will have passed by then. However, we will continue to monitor the situation.

### Universal advice from a nurse

As this pandemic plays out, I hear the calming words of my mother, Sandy Stone, a nurse and aid worker who traveled to dozens of countries and encountered a plethora of nasty viruses and pandemics.

First, be aware and understand what is going around you and use common sense. Second, wash your hands, and avoid picking your nose (that was for my brothers). Third, if you are starting to feel poorly, you will be taken care of — but separate yourself to not infect others. And finally, take care of each other.

Good advice and stay safe. ☺