



Jim Simnitt
OAN PRESIDENT

Into the unknown

Spring is a hectic time.

Add in a worldwide pandemic with economic uncertainties, and it can be a recipe for disaster.

The most unnerving aspect is the unknown. As an industry, we are accustomed to unpredictable weather. We see damaging frosts, rainy weekends, and hot, dry summers stressing the growing season.

These are all hiccups we've been through before and can manage. What has changed rapidly in this pandemic is the way we conduct business and the way we grow our plants.

I have been impressed with how quickly our members have pivoted to navigate these uncharted waters. Retailers are offering curbside pickup, online ordering and home delivery. Growers and wholesalers have changed their order pulling, loading of trucks, and day-to-day interactions. Suppliers have made delivery of product and pickup more streamlined with less person-to-person interactions. All of these changes have happened in short order during the most stressful and frantic time of year.

As our executive director, Jeff Stone, likes to say: "The association is a mirror of the industry." When the industry does well, the association does well. When we come under stress, the association comes under stress.

Impressively, the OAN also pivots like our members do. Immediately as the COVID-19 crisis became apparent, the OAN office staff started working remotely. They started on the OAN website and built the coronavirus page that is updated daily at oan.org/coronavirus.

Jeff immediately reached out to other state nursery associations execs to build a coalition that could share ideas and solutions. He and Minnesota's executive director, Cassie Larson, spearheaded a webinar meeting to bring together a dozen state associations, five national associations, and economic experts to get real-time information out to our members.

When other state governors started issuing stay-home orders and ordered nurseries in other states forced to close, we went into action to ensure that would not happen in Oregon. Spring is when literally everything has to happen — shipping, potting, fertilizing, spraying, trimming and more. We cannot be shut down and left to rot on the vine. OAN members, Jeff and I all contacted the governor's office and explained what a shutdown would mean to the largest agriculture sector in Oregon.

We were in real jeopardy of having our doors closed during some of the biggest revenue-generating weeks in the industry. Hearing the governor's office respond to say "we hear you" was a huge win. Gov. Brown threaded that needle perfectly, in my opinion, by allowing nurseries to decide whether to shut, modify, or amend work protocols to meet new guidelines. We should make the decisions for our families and employees, not the government.

Nurseries reached out to customers across the country to see if markets were open, but there was a lot of confusion about each state's orders.

The OAN worked with the Arizona Nursery Association Executive Director Cheryl Goar Koury to repurpose code from the Plant Something state map into a COVID19 resource map. They made a simple online tool to find out which segments are open, restricted or closed in each state. You can find it at www.nlae.org/covid-19/

As we are told by the healthcare professionals, the best thing we can do is flatten the curve. But our time spent mitigating danger has covered up many of the spring days we enjoy.

We, as an industry, need to extend the spring season. We need to have plants ready for when the public get outside. One of the best things for a person's mental health is to beautify their yards by planting some plants. We want to be there for them.

We are in this together — and together, we can continue to grow. ☺



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