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An important partnership

In 1888, the Oregon Agriculture College (OAC) established a horticulture department with sights on building a single greenhouse and creating its own laboratories to conduct experiments.

In the subsequent 132 years, OAC became Oregon State University (OSU) and the horticulture department has grown. When I graduated from OSU in horticulture 20 years ago, there were many greenhouses and a brand-new horticulture department building with many labs, classrooms, and a lecture hall. Things have come a long way from then to the present day!

As an industry, we should look to the OSU Horticulture Department as a partner, and do everything we can to foster that relationship. Here are just a few examples of thorny issues where OSU researchers worked with our industry to make things better:

Pathogens and pests threaten our plants. One such pathogen is *Phytophthora*, which affects many crops from the Northwest. Some of the best research comes out of OSU, specifically Dr. Jennifer Parke. She works with growers to identify causes, critical introduction points, and solutions. The Grower Assisted Inspection Program was a result of her work with growers. It has helped many nurseries implement better practices to become better growers.

Pesticide applications are time consuming and expensive but needed. To reduce the inputs, Robin Rosetta (retired) worked with tree growers to develop smart sprayer technology. This tool developed a better spray coverage with less product. Bottom line results!

New and cool plants are always on every grower and retailer's mind. Dr. Ryan Contreras is an energetic and passionate breeder at OSU. Already bringing new varieties to market and many more in the pipeline (50 genera!), it is exciting to see what will come out of Corvallis, Oregon next. With an eye on commercial appeal, Dr. Contreras' work also takes into account the production side. Making sure these varieties will be a workable addition to growers is part of the process and the success.

There's more! OSU's North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC) in Aurora is a wonderful asset for the Willamette Valley since it was purchased in 1957. Dr. Lloyd Nackley's research on minimal water use and increased water quality will help growers continue to be on the cutting edge of water management.

The more the OAN members work with OSU, the more success we can all achieve.

We know we are good stewards of the land, and conscientious water managers, but we need the information to back it up. I can see a need in the near future to partner even closer with OSU to work together to obtain real-world data on the impacts our growing and selling of plant material has on the environment.

We can explore ideas such as developing and growing non-invasive cultivars to keep beautiful plants in the landscape and trade. The public perception of our industry should align with what we know — that our industry is a solution to the changing climate.

Oregon nurseries have a jewel in the valley and we should continue to work with researchers providing greenhouse and field space for work in production settings.

We can support research financially and directionally on what problems we face and how to solve them in the future. And we can be supportive by growing, selling, and marketing the excellent plants that are developed here in Oregon.

Let's work together to improve the industry and show the public — with actions and data — that we are a very positive part of the solution for environmental issues and other problems. This will pay rich dividends going forward! ©



Jim Simnitt
OAN PRESIDENT