

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

I grew up doing different little jobs around our family farm in Boring, Oregon, for as long as I can remember. My grandfather started **Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery** in the 1930s, which is now spread across a total of 180 acres. After I got my diploma from Sam Barlow High School in 1999, I studied business at Mount Hood Community College while still helping out on the nursery. Everything I know about working with plants and agriculture — from safely applying pesticides and managing different plant diseases — I learned on the job. I started working full time there around 2002, and I've been the general manager for six years.

I also participate in several associations, including the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District. A colleague nominated me to be a Zone 1 Director, and I was re-elected to serve my third term. I'm also on the local junior baseball association with my wife Katie. I coach my son's football and baseball teams

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Treat each customer with the utmost respect and provide high-quality plants at a reasonable cost. Our nursery has been very customer-oriented since it began, and we have been working with some people for a very, very long time. Keeping those long-term relationships has made us successful over the decades.



Jesse Nelson
General Manager
Hans Nelson & Sons
Nursery Inc.

OAN member since 2002

OAN roles/positions:

- Board of Directors – Field and Bare Root representative

WHAT'S A GOAL YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE?

My goals change almost every day because we are constantly trying to improve what we do. I want all our orders to be processed as efficiently as possible, and there are things we do all the time that could be done in different ways.

WHAT'S THE BEST BUSINESS DECISION YOU'VE EVER MADE?

The best business decision we made was to grow some products in containers. About 15 years ago, all we grew was bare root, and some of our selections just didn't transplant well from bare root. So, we started to grow a few things in containers, and slowly began widening what we offer to our customers.

HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

It's always difficult for me to forecast what to grow year-after-year. Planning for things 3–5 years ahead of the time is hard when everything is changing. It's like chasing the carrot on the end of a stick, but even the carrot turns into something new, too.

WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

My father, Dan Nelson, has been an enormous influence on my life. I really admire his work ethic and appreciate how he motivates me and others to be better. He's taught me that when things are hard, just keep going. Almost any problem can be fixed.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE:

Developing a good relationship with your customers is the best thing you can do. It's important to get their feedback and work with them to find out what they think of the plants on the marketplace. We don't grow very much on speculation. The diversity of our offerings is a deliberate choice — if one crop fails, it's easier to stay afloat with a wide range of plants to keep the revenue flowing. So, don't put your eggs in one basket, and ask your customers what they think.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

I love the people — the employees, the customers, my team — and how I get to do something different each and every day. I could be giving a customer a tour one day, or working with my team to improve a process on our nursery the next. >>

Meet the leader: Jesse Nelson

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

I think uncooperative weather patterns are my biggest challenge. I remember back a couple of years ago in January, the ground was still frozen and digging up orders nearly impossible. It was near the end of February before we could start processing orders, which is really late in the season. Otherwise, I believe there is almost always a solution to each issue we face as growers. Regulations and different pesticide rules come up every now and then, but I've always felt like we need to be the best stewards of the land — there's just no question about it.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I love this industry, and I also just love plants. I couldn't see myself working

in an office cubicle or any other job that wasn't related to growing.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I'm most proud of the collaborative skills of our team on the nursery. We have about 16–19 employees and they know that they can offer up ideas for improving the way we do things around here. We transitioned from sprinkler irrigation to drip lines several years over a decade ago, and that decision was a group effort. Together, we make our business grow more efficiently.

INVOLVEMENT WITH OAN:

Besides going to the Farwest trade show and Duffer's Classic golf tournament, I've been on the OAN Board of Directors for two years. I was nominated to represent the voice of field and bareroot growers. As

with Clackamas SWCD, I provide a calm, calculated interpretation of the issues on the table. I'm not there to be the loudest voice. Overall, I'm impressed by what the OAN does to make the nursery industry visible to our legislators, and talking directly to the governor is a rare opportunity that I really appreciate.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

Finding labor and the cost of keeping them is difficult for the nursery industry. We also have regulations and taxes that make it hard for low-margin businesses like ours, but labor is a huge component of our industry. ☺



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