

# Digger

NOVEMBER 2020

## PLANTS ON THE MOVE

### THE TRANSPORTATION ISSUE

How 'The Year of COVID' affected shipping markets, loading docks and the drivers — and what's next

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# Digger



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## THE TRANSPORTATION ISSUE

How has COVID-19 changed the way plants are shipped to customers across the nation? We explain in three stories.

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COVID-19 threw nursery shipping for a loop, but things settled and stayed strong.

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On nursery loading docks, COVID-19 changed everything.

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Nurseries provide hospitality for drivers cut off from some basic amenities and their usual resources.

## 15 Meet the leader: Jesse Nelson

The general manager at Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc. serves in leadership roles with the OAN board, his local soil and water conservation district, and even youth sports.

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Whether one is dealing with plant pathogens or COVID-19, certain universal principles for preventing transmission still apply.

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**On the cover:** Load crews remain socially distanced as they stack trees in a freight truck. PHOTO BY JEFF LAFRENZ, J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO. **On this page:** Left: Only one member of the load crew is allowed to walk a tree into the truck during loading. PHOTO BY JEFF LAFRENZ, J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO. Right: Rhododendrons are tested as prospects for controlling *Phytophthora ramorum* in nurseries. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY



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PH 503-682-5089 PORTLAND  
PH 888-283-7219 NATIONWIDE  
FAX 503-682-5099 MAIN OFFICE  
FAX 503-682-5727 PUBLICATIONS  
info@oan.org EMAIL  
www.oan.org WEB  
www.diggermagazine.com NEWS BLOG

## STAFF

**Jeff Stone** jstone@oan.org  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 503-582-2003

**Beth Farmer** bfarmer@oan.org  
COMMUNICATIONS & WEB DESIGN MANAGER 503-582-2013

**Bill Goloski** bgoloski@oan.org  
PUBLICATIONS MANAGER 503-582-2009

**Curt Kipp** ckipp@oan.org  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS 503-582-2008

**Zen Landis** zlandis@oan.org  
EVENT & EDUCATION MANAGER 503-582-2011

**Allan Niemi** aniem@oan.org  
DIRECTOR OF EVENTS 503-582-2005

**Stephanie Wehrauch** swehrauch@oan.org  
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION 503-582-2001

## DIGGER

**Curt Kipp** ckipp@oan.org  
EDITOR & DISPLAY ADVERTISING 503-582-2008

**Beth Farmer** bfarmer@oan.org  
E-DIGGER PRODUCER 503-582-2013

**Bill Goloski** bgoloski@oan.org  
ART DIRECTOR & CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING 503-582-2009

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## 2019-2020 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Jim Simnitt**  
PRESIDENT  
Simnitt Nursery  
138 NE 22nd Ave.  
Canby, OR 97013  
simnittnsy@canby.com  
503-266-9640  
FAX 503-263-6330

**Kyle Fessler**  
PRESIDENT-ELECT  
Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.  
13009 McKee School Road N.E.  
Woodburn, OR 97071  
sales@woodburnnursery.com  
503-634-2231  
FAX 503-634-2238

**Josh Robinson**  
VICE PRESIDENT  
Robinson Nursery Inc.  
P.O. Box 100  
Amity, OR 97101  
josh@robinsonnursery.com  
877-855-8733  
FAX 503-835-3004

**Todd Nelson**  
TREASURER  
Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc.  
17280 Boones Ferry Rd. N.E.  
Woodburn, OR 97071  
info@bountifulfarms.com  
503-981-7494

**Mike Hiller**  
PAST PRESIDENT  
KCK Farms LLC  
11483 SE Amity-Dayton Hwy.  
Dayton, OR 97114  
mike@kckfarms.com  
503-864-9422  
FAX 503-864-4412

**Denece Messenger**  
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Decorative Bark Products  
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Tualatin, OR 97062  
denece messenger@comcast.net  
503-510-4029  
FAX 503-859-3764

**Wes Bailey**  
MEMBER AT LARGE  
Smith Gardens Inc.  
23150 Boones Ferry Road N.E.  
Aurora, OR 97002  
wes.bailey@smithgardens.com  
503-678-5373

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Tom Brewer**  
ASSOCIATE MEMBER  
HC Companies Inc. ProCal  
tbrewer@hc-companies.com  
503-686-8448

**Adam Farley**  
CONTAINER GROWER  
Countryside Nursery  
afarley@countrysidenursery.com  
503-678-0511

**Ron Kinney**  
CONTAINER GROWER  
Monrovia  
rkinney@monrovia.com  
503-868-7941

**Amanda Staehely**  
CONTAINER GROWER  
Columbia Nursery  
amandastaehely@gmail.com  
503-810-2598

**Jesse Nelson**  
FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER  
Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc.  
jnelson@hansnelson.com  
503-663-3348

**Chris Robinson**  
FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER  
Robinson Nursery Inc.  
chris@robinsonnursery.com  
877-855-8733

**Jay Sanders**  
FIELD / B&B GROWER  
KG Farms Inc.  
jsanders@kgfarmsinc.com  
503-678-3245

**Lorne Blackman**  
GREENHOUSE  
Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc.  
lblackman@wallawallanursery.com  
509-522-9855

**Ben Verhoeven**  
GREENHOUSE  
Peoria Gardens Inc.  
benv@peoriagardens.com  
541-753-8519

**Gary S. English**  
RETAIL  
Landsystems Nursery  
gary@landssystemsnursery.com  
541-382-7646

# What a long, strange run it's been

## One year ago, I assumed the position of OAN president.

I likened it to starting a long training run. I felt apprehension about my readiness, but I was excited for the challenge.

Boy, I had no idea what was in store.

The first major obstacle was like going up the first hill in a run. I just did not know how long and arduous that hill would be.

In February, we started hearing a lot about the COVID-19 pathogen.

On a Tuesday in the beginning of March, our OAN Board of Directors met in person. By that Friday, schools were closed, the NBA season was suspended, and our spring shipping and selling season was on the brink of closure.

There was no playbook to follow in this situation, but our executive director, Jeff Stone, immediately put us on offense. We sent emails and made calls to every official who would listen, explaining how our industry could continue to function safely. We laid out how the nursery industry would play an essential role for the public's well-being, as stay-at-home orders came into effect and people had nothing else to do but bake and work in their gardens.

Once we got confirmation from the governor's office that our industry would not be forced to close, our focus turned to other states and shipping lanes. Would customers in other states be open, and able to receive their spring shipments from us? Would the roads through closed states be open?

Many questions were being thrown around, but fewer answers. Each of the 50 states — not to mention the various Canadian provinces — had their own rules and emergency orders. Oregon, again, led the way. Working with Minnesota's association and the Nursery and Landscape Association Executives of North America, we set up an all-in-one map with real-time information on the status of each state. It was a game-changer for the whole industry.

Once we got through what ended up being a robust spring shipping season, we turned our attention to figuring out what the age of COVID would mean for our day-to-day operations. In numerous Zoom meetings within our association, as well as with the department directors at the State of Oregon, we talked about OSHA rules changing, lack of PPE availability, and liability concerns.

This started to feel like the middle doldrums of a run where you are doing the same thing over and over. In this case, we kept explaining how we have been dealing with COVID at the workplace since March, and doing a good job without state oversight.

It has amazed me how much work goes into getting what we know on the ground to those who regulate our operations. The loss of the Farwest Show was a big financial hit to the association. The subsequent revenue campaign to shore up OAN finances was an outright success because our members believe in what the association does. That positive energy has buoyed us into the fall and set up a much better outlook than I had imagined at midsummer.

Now that I am coming to the end of my presidential year, it feels just like ending a long run. It feels like it was just starting, and also like it would never end!

When I finish a run, I usually feel accomplished and excited — a runner's high — and ready for the next one. I am very excited for this next year. We have a great Executive Committee, with a wide range of voices, led by our next president, Kyle Fessler of Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas.

Our full Board of Directors that will be sworn in at the online convention in December is dynamic and engaged. The OAN staff has shown it is the gold standard in the industry by continuing to serve the members at an extremely high level during a tumultuous year. I am grateful and honored to have served as OAN president in 2020. Thank you. ☺



**Jim Simnitt**  
OAN PRESIDENT



# Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to [calendar@oan.org](mailto:calendar@oan.org) by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

## NOVEMBER 5, 17

### FIRST AID AND CPR CLASSES

The OAN Safety and Insurance Committee is presenting First Aid and CPR classes as a service to members and the industry. Successful completion results in certification that is good for two years. Each class runs from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. at GK Machine, 10590 Donald Road N.E., Donald, Oregon. The class on November 3 will be conducted in Spanish; November 17 will be in English. Seating is limited due to COVID-19 social distancing protocols. The cost is \$45 per person for those renewing their certification (two years) and for those taking the class for the first time. Register and pay at [www.oan.org/cprclass](http://www.oan.org/cprclass), or call Zen Landis, 503-582-2011.

## NOVEMBER 3-5

### AMERICANHORT HOSTS DIG CONFERENCE IN NOVEMBER

AmericanHort will be hosting an online DIG Conference: Disease, Insects, and Growth Regulators from November 3-5, 2020. The conference is composed of four education tracks that cover disease, insect and pest management, biocontrols, growth regulator best practices, new technology, sanitation, IPM strategies and more. There will also be networking opportunities through coffee chats, panel discussions, and roundtables. For more information or to register, visit [AmericanHort.org/DIG](http://AmericanHort.org/DIG).

## NOVEMBER 9-DECEMBER 8

### PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE TOWN HALLS

The Oregon Employment Department has scheduled listening sessions for employers and employees to collect input on the implementation of the Paid Family and Medical Leave program. The listening sessions will be held on Zoom and participants are welcome to share their ideas, concerns and suggestions for the rules. A session focused on benefits, including program eligibility, delivery, and requirements for employees will take place 6:30-7:30 p.m. on November 9. Small employers will learn about assistance grants to help with the cost of hiring temporary replacement workers or other related costs; and job protection provisions, and other topics 2-3 p.m. on November 17. Self-employed and independent contractors electing to participate in the program may attend a session 6:30-7:30 p.m. on December 8. To register, go to [www.oan.org/pestmanagement](http://www.oan.org/pestmanagement)

## NOVEMBER 10

### OAN NURSERY KNOWLEDGE WEBINAR: HOW TO BATTLE BOTRYTIS

*Botrytis cinerea*, also known as gray mold, is one of the most devastating pathogens in greenhouse ornamentals production. This 9:45-11:15 a.m. presentation by Dr. Luisa Santamaria of Oregon



Kyle Fessler

## DECEMBER 4-5

### OAN CONVENTION

The 2020 Convention will be held online Friday-Saturday, December 4-5, 2020. The event will include a virtual happy hour on Friday, and four hours of engaging presentations on Saturday, including the swearing-in of new OAN President Kyle Fessler and his board for 2021. Registration will open in November. Please save the date and watch for details on [www.oan.org](http://www.oan.org).

State University will cover different aspects related to the pathogen and the resulting disease, including its biology, epidemiology, and the best management practices for commonly affected ornamental crops. Attendees will come away with a better understanding of how to prevent and mitigate this disease using integrated pest management (IPM), with an emphasis on cultural control mechanisms for greenhouse and outdoor nursery environments. In addition to cultural management strategies, you'll learn about the most effective chemicals and biorational products and how to apply them safely. To register, go to [www.oan.org/pestmanagement](http://www.oan.org/pestmanagement)

## NOVEMBER 11

### OAN NURSERY KNOWLEDGE WEBINAR: CALIBRATING SPRAYERS

Proper calibration of application equipment is the key to efficiently and safely managing pests and pathogens on crops. Misapplication of chemicals is both dangerous and costly, but keeping up with the latest technology and techniques can be challenging for busy growers and landscape maintenance crews. Tim and Dan Schaal of Airtec Sprayers will dive into several sprayer options 9:45-11:15 a.m., and explain how to calibrate them for different chemical applications. This session will help growers choose the right sprayers for their

operations, minimize drift/runoff, and avoid harmful chemical misapplication. To register, go to [www.oan.org/pestmanagement](http://www.oan.org/pestmanagement)

## NOVEMBER 12

### OAN NURSERY KNOWLEDGE WEBINAR: CROP-ADAPTED SPRAYING

Crop adaptive spraying (CAS) can improve the safety and efficacy of any nursery's pest management program. This session shares the history of CAS and provides insight into the latest research on its application potential for nursery crops. From 9:45-11:15 a.m., Brian Hill will discuss which crops are best suited for CAS and demonstrate how to calibrate sprayers for efficacy on specific crops based on their planting arrangement, cultivar, maturity and crop stage/season. He will also explain how CAS can be implemented in your integrated pest management (IPM) program, eliminating excessive chemical application and reducing damage to non-target insect and plant species. The talk will provide a step-by-step method of adjusting sensor-based sprayer application rates while maintaining efficacy. While there is always an adjustment period for specific application, these steps will shorten the learning curve by providing a proven jumping-off point. To register, go to [www.oan.org/pestmanagement](http://www.oan.org/pestmanagement).



# Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email [news@oan.org](mailto:news@oan.org).

## Western Nursery & Landscape Association falls victim to pandemic

Members of the Western Nursery & Landscape Association (WNLA) have voted to dissolve the association, after the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of the Western trade show event that was set for January in Kansas City. The show was the 130-year-old trade group's main source of income. The board determined the association could not be sustained without it.

"We are saddened that we will not gather for another Western in Kansas City but the legacy of WNLA can live on if our members and supporters are active in a WNLA community inside AmericanHort, our national association who has done so much for our industry this year and in many years past," the group stated in an announcement.

The trade group was founded in 1890 as the Western Nurserymen's Association, and it covered the United States west of the Mississippi River. The group evolved into an association representing green industry firms in the Midwest.

The Kansas Nursery and Landscape Association will receive the remaining physical assets of the WNLA, which are limited. Meanwhile, the WNLA is working with AmericanHort to carry on the group's legacy and retain its identity. There will be a fundraising campaign for the Horticultural Research Institute to help honor WNLA's legacy.

Read the announcement at [tinyurl.com/y45f5s87](http://tinyurl.com/y45f5s87)

## NURSERIES REMAIN OREGON'S TOP AG COMMODITY

Nursery and greenhouse products remained Oregon's top agricultural commodity for 2019, according to new statistics released by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The agency estimated \$955 million in nursery and greenhouse sales for the year, down from the 2018 estimate of \$996 million.

"These numbers tell us sales were strong in 2019, and we've seen that continued strength in 2020 in spite of our share of hardships, from the pandemic to the wildfires," OAN Executive Director **Jeff Stone** said. "Oregon plants are awesome and people from all over the United States and Canada are buying products sold by our green industry to make where they live a little bit better."

Hay took over as Oregon's second highest seller with \$674 million, with cattle and calves in third place with \$625 million. Following were milk (\$552 million), grass seed (\$517 million) and wheat (\$283 million). Christmas trees ranked 12th with \$104 million. The top 20 commodities are listed in the official Oregon Agricultural Statistics brochure (Download the PDF at [tinyurl.com/y8rr7p9s](http://tinyurl.com/y8rr7p9s)).

Two other major commodities, hemp (for fiber) and marijuana (for recreational use), were not ranked, though both are known to be significant players in Oregon agriculture. It is expected that USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will begin gathering data on hemp soon, following its addition as a recognized crop in the 2018 Farm Bill. The state has no data on marijuana sales or gate value, as it is not a legal crop under federal law.

## MARKET SNAPSHOT LOOKS POSITIVE FOR NURSERIES

Healthy profits are anticipated for the nurs-



ery/greenhouse industry in the Pacific Northwest, according to the quarterly Market Snapshot report issues by agricultural lender Northwest Farm Credit Services. According to the report, stay-at-home orders under the COVID-19 pandemic boosted interest in home gardening and landscaping among consumer, while the housing market remains strong and will continue to support sales of nursery products. Although costs associated with COVID-19 mitigation efforts have cut into industry profits, margins are high, and operations should be in the green this year.

Download the full Nursery/Greenhouse report at [tinyurl.com/yyhfpmw0](http://tinyurl.com/yyhfpmw0).



## More COVID-19 coverage online

Further updates on how the COVID-19 virus is impacting the greenhouse and nursery industry is online at [www.diggermagazine.com/category/coronavirus](http://www.diggermagazine.com/category/coronavirus). We are reporting on the most current information as of press time, but please check online for the most up-to-date information.



**OAN LEADERS TOUR NEW AGRICULTURE COMPLEX AT CHEMEKETA**

OAN leaders toured the active building site for a new Agriculture Complex at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon on October 5. Situated on an 8-acre site at the southeast side of Chemeketa's Salem Campus, the new complex will serve as an important hub for the surrounding agricultural community and industry with classroom space, a greenhouse, hoop houses, garden/farm demonstration fields, an ornamental yard, soil labs, and a beneficial insectary.

Participating in the tour were **Jim Simnitt** (Simnitt Nursery), **Kyle Fessler** (Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.), **Leigh Geschwill** (F & B Farm and Nursery) and OAN Executive Director **Jeff Stone**.

The complex will include new indoor



and outdoor facilities for Chemeketa Community College's agriculture and horticulture programs, along with space for its partners, Marion Polk Food Share, industry consortia, and local school districts. Central to the development is a new

20,000 square foot classroom and partner building that will feature three community classrooms, a science lab classroom, a lab preparation room, two seminar/conference rooms, a student resource room, faculty offices and work area.



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The community classroom space has an operable partition wall so it can be configured three different ways: three 30-person classrooms, two classrooms (one for 60 people and one for 30), or one large classroom with a 100-person capacity. These shared areas will enhance the overall spatial efficiency and create a culture of collaboration key for a vital community hub.

The facility incorporates solar power, natural light, radiant heating/cooling and architectural design, thereby achieving a net energy consumption of zero. It is being built entirely with materials locally sourced from suppliers within a 60-mile radius of campus.

In a future phase of the project, officials hope to construct a 60-foot-by-60-foot greenhouse comprised of four 30-foot-by-30-foot quadrants, so they can isolate unique grow operations for student learning.

## PANDEMIC MAY BOOST DEMAND FOR REAL CHRISTMAS TREES

With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing people to stay at home more, the demand for real Christmas trees is expected to rise this season, the *Capital Press* agricultural newspaper (Salem, Oregon) reported.

Results from a survey by the Christmas Tree Promotion Board indicate that 92% of consumers know their holiday will be different this year, and 39% will buy a real tree (compared to 21% who said they would not).

Marsha Gray, executive director of the promotion board, said they would use this information to remind people that real Christmas trees are a way to finish a bad year with good memories.

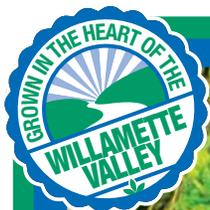
Read the full article at [tinyurl.com/yxlcwq2b](http://tinyurl.com/yxlcwq2b).

## WILLAMETTE VALLEY AG EXPO CANCELED FOR COVID-19

The Willamette Valley Ag Association board of directors voted to cancel the 2020 Willamette Valley Ag Expo due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a release from the association. It was to have been held in November. Executive orders from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown prohibit gatherings of more than 100 people, and the expo draws more than 3,000 attendees.

“The board felt that it would be unlikely the expo could operate in a realistic manner with the state restrictions in place,” said Jill Ingalls, manager of the association. “This is a huge loss for the industry, the county and certainly for the greater Albany community in lost revenue to member vendors and area hotels, restaurants and more.”

The expo’s scheduled dates for >>



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2021 are November 16–18. More information can be found on [wvaexpo.com](http://wvaexpo.com).

### DEAD SPOTTED LANTERNFLY REPORTED IN OREGON

A shipment of planters and ceramic pots sent from Pennsylvania and received in Oregon contained one dead female *Lycorma delicatula*, also known as the spotted lanternfly (SLF), according to a release from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

The invasive pest feeds on nearly 70 different plant species, including apples, cherry, chestnut, hops, maple, peaches, pear, pine, plum, poplar, oak, rose and walnut. SLF has been found in 11 eastern states, but four dead specimens have been found in California so far. Download a fact sheet about the Spotted Lanternfly from the ODA at [tinyurl.com/y2p4pmus](http://tinyurl.com/y2p4pmus).

In the event of a suspected sighting, people are asked to contact the ODA Insect Pest Prevention and Management Program right away at 1-800-525-0137 or [emailplant-entomologist@oda.state.or.us](mailto:emailplant-entomologist@oda.state.or.us). ODA has not offered any control suggestions, but is focused on preventing establishment in Oregon.

### AGGRESSIVE ASIAN GIANT HORNETS STRESS BEEKEEPERS

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) has set up an emergency phone line for beekeepers to report Asian giant hornets attacking honeybees. A WSDA Facebook post from October 1 shared a video of the first trapping of a live hornet. If beekeepers see one of the huge insects, have seen evidence of a hive slaughter, or are actively witnessing a hive attack, please call 360-902-1880.

According to the agency website, in late summer and early fall the pests begin their “slaughter phase” and kill entire hives in a matter of hours. Informational videos, resources, and trapping information is also available at [tinyurl.com/y38c48ar](http://tinyurl.com/y38c48ar)

### DISASTER RELIEF AVAILABLE FOR BUSINESSES

Many businesses have been affected by wildfire, winds, smoke and the COVID-19 pandemic. A federal disaster declaration has made assistance available for many companies. The Small Business Administration is accepting applications for federal disaster loans to businesses and private nonprofits in Clackamas, Douglas, Jackson, Klamath, Lane, Lincoln, Linn and Marion counties.

Go to the Small Business Navigator to find current information for concerned business owners. Wildfire-related information can be found at [wildfire.oregon.gov](http://wildfire.oregon.gov). Contact the Secretary of State Corporation Division at [corporation.division@oregon.gov](mailto:corporation.division@oregon.gov) or 833-604-0880 for questions about your business registry.

### RESEARCHERS EXPERIMENT TO CREATE BIOCHAR IN THE FIELD

Retired Umpqua Community College professor Ken Carloni and nonprofit Yew Creek Land Alliance are attempting to create a process for producing carbon-rich soil supplements in remote areas, according to a report in the *Capital Press* (Salem, Oregon). Ecologists are harvesting evergreens from native oak tree areas and bringing them to forest slash piles.

There, they burn them to make biochar — charcoal that improves soil health, sequesters carbon, and is created through the process of pyrolysis — on private land, instead of hauling the slash to kilns offsite. When biomass is heated to high temperatures with low levels of oxygen, it fails to combust and release carbon into the atmosphere. Biochar stores carbon in the ground for hundreds of years. Read the full article at [tinyurl.com/y513gmw5](http://tinyurl.com/y513gmw5).

### Announcements MA INTRODUCES MYCOAPPLY INJECTOR ECTO

Mycorrhizal Applications is offering its first ectomycorrhizae-only offering to the U.S. market, MycoApply® Injector Ecto. The product expands on the existing



Injector series of mycorrhizal inoculant products and is formulated with a diverse range of ectomycorrhizal fungi species that specifically benefit conifers, hardwoods, some woody shrubs, and nut trees.

The fungi act as a living extension of plant root systems, increasing the its ability to absorb nutrients and water. The five ectomycorrhizae species included in this product are *Pisolithus tinctorius*, *Laccaria laccata*, *Scleroderma cepa*, *Rhizopogon villosulus*, and *Suillus granulatus*.

Using a soluble humic carrier, MycoApply Injector Ecto can be applied through boom spray, sprinkler, drip irrigation, hand spray, deep root feeding/soil injection, and other methods. It comes in 100-gram bags, which can treat 500 gallons of application solution.

More information is available at [mycorrhizae.com/mycoapply-injector-ecto](http://mycorrhizae.com/mycoapply-injector-ecto).

### PAPÉ MACHINERY ACQUIRES WASHINGTON TRACTOR

Papé Machinery Agriculture and Turf purchased Washington Tractor, according to a release from the company. With this expansion of the business, Papé will now operate 35 locations in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and California.

“We are pleased to welcome John Deere customers from throughout Western and Central Washington to Papé Machinery Agriculture and Turf,” said

Ryan Papé, President of Papé Machinery Agriculture and Turf. “For more than 80 years and four generations of family leadership, Papé has delivered exceptional products with the consistent, quality service our customers expect.”

Read more at [tinyurl.com/y5xjfdum](http://tinyurl.com/y5xjfdum).

### DRAMM RELEASES PROLINE IRRIGATION CONTROLLER

Dramm is expanding their existing RainPro controllers with a new expandable series, The ProLine, according to a release from the company. The new controller line has four programs; up to three of the programs can be active at once to cut irrigation cycle times when there is water available. ProLine can also be switched to manual for a single valve or the entire program, and

seasonal adjustments can be made without reprogramming each valve. The controller can also be upgraded with an AirCard and cellular service so growers can monitor and adjust the controller from a smartphone. Visit the product page on [www.dramm.com](http://www.dramm.com) to learn more.

### NEW BETTER BOXWOODS OFFERS FOUR BLIGHT-RESISTANT VARIETIES

Plant Development Services Inc. (Loxley, Alabama) and **Tree Town USA** (Houston, Texas) have partnered to offer a collection of blight-resistant boxwoods, Better Boxwood™.

Belgian grower Didier Hermans and the Flemish Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research have spent two decades conducting multiple trials for blight-

resistance in Europe. They have created a series of four different varieties with unique sizes and forms.

The products will be available for liner orders in September 2021 through Boxwood Solutions™ Inc. for spring 2022 delivery to the United States. The Better Boxwood™ line will be available to consumers in spring 2023.

“Understanding the importance of boxwood to the North American landscape and the devastating effects of the Boxwood Blight, we are proud to provide consumers and landscape professionals with the largest collection of new varieties actually bred for blight resistance,” David Kirby, Executive Vice President of Tree Town said. “The four uniquely shaped Better Boxwood™ varieties will fill a wide variety of landscape needs.”



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**In Memoriam**

**LEONARD ADRIANUS POOT**

The OAN is saddened to report that Leonard Adrianus Poot, founder of Grower's Nursery Supply (Salem, Oregon) passed away on September 30, 2020. He was 84.



Leonard was born in De Lier Holland, The Netherlands, and immigrated with his 11-member family to the United States in September 1955. His future wife's family sponsored the Poot family. He married Elsie Boerman on September 30, 1960 in New York.

In 1964 Leonard moved his family to Ohio for a year before settling down to the San Joaquin Valley in California for 20 years. Leonard and Elsie first ran a chicken ranch and later a greenhouse operation that produced hothouse tomatoes and European cucumbers for grocery stores.

In 1985, they moved to Oregon where Leonard managed Nurseryman's Supply in Hubbard for a brief time, and then ran a Kubota and Snapper dealership shortly after. In the same town, he started Grower's Nursery Supply in November of 1992. The business was moved to the north Salem area in March of 1995. The privately-owned distributor business provided supplies, growing media, tools, chemicals and greenhouse accessories.

The business was sold to Don Top in January 2005. Leonard's daughter Janet Poot has been with the company since 2003, who continues her dad's legacy.

Leonard retired in Salem with this wife. They were married for 60 years and enjoyed camping, cross-country road trips, and being active in the church. Leonard served as an elder in the consistory.

Leonard continued to grow plants and flowers to sell. He suffered a massive stroke in August of 2013 and was wheelchair-bound, but he continued to make flower baskets until he passed.

A memorial service was held on October 8. Contributions in memory of Leonard can be sent to Immanuel's Reformed Church, 4653 Sunnyview Road N.E., Salem, Oregon. ☺

# 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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## PLANTS ON THE MOVE

# Freight with uncertainty

COVID-19 threw nursery shipping for a loop, but things settled and stayed strong

BY JON BELL

**G**ARY “BERT” BERTLESON USED to have it pretty good in the summer.

The head of nursery over-the-road sales for **Integrity Logistics**, a freight shipping and trucking broker in Wilsonville, Bertleson would regularly take an entire month off in the summer. He was able to do so largely because of the seasonal slowdown in nursery shipping during the summer months.

That didn't mean he wasn't logging some hours. Bertleson would still make sales calls to customers and hit the occasional trade show, but it was far from the hectic nature of the busy spring season.

But not this year.

This year, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in demand for nursery products around the country — demand fueled by stuck-at-home folks sprucing up their yards like never before — there was no summer slowdown.

Trade shows were canceled or moved online, and early fall sales, which don't usually start until just before Labor Day, ramped up weeks earlier than normal and just kept going. “We have just been extremely busy all year. It's just amazing,” said Bertleson, who was himself a truck driver who hauled nursery stock for years until joining Northland Express Transport as a dispatcher in 1992. “My summers off are a thing of the past.”

COVID-19 has made a lot of waves this year, including across the nursery industry. People forced to stay home and not travel have spent more time remodeling their homes and freshening up their landscaping. That's boosted demand for plants, trees and other products.

Although some states initially closed nurseries and garden centers at the start of the pandemic, most were allowed to reopen as essential services, a move that has allowed business to continue at a steady clip.

The impact has been felt throughout the nursery industry, including on the freight side. Rates are up, as is demand. Drivers are still in short supply. Meanwhile, new restrictions have slowed loading, unloading and processing all around. Throw in the scorching wildfires that ravaged the West in September, and you've got a year for nursery shipping unlike any other.

“This is something that nobody expected,” Bertleson said. “It just dumped on us.”

### Far from normal

In a more normal year, the shipping routine in the nursery business would ebb and flow a little more than it has this year. The big spring push to get product out in time for garden center and nursery sales around Mother's Day would be followed 

## Plants on the move: Freight with uncertainty

by a bit of a drop-off as the busy season waned for the slower summer months.

This year, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, it initially threw the industry for a loop of uncertainty.

“The pandemic put us in a place of the unknown immediately,” said Matt Frederick, logistics coordinator and owner at **K&M Distribution**, a transportation broker headquartered in Rogue River, Oregon.

He said new government guidelines were being implemented and changed, sometimes on an hour-by-hour basis. Some states had regulations that were more stringent than others, and nurseries and garden centers in some states were allowed to remain open, while in others they weren't.

“Some states were uncertain as to what they could or could not do,” Frederick said. “Sending product from the

West Coast to the East Coast or Southeast was challenging to coordinate as states opened and closed.”

In addition to the disruption caused by uncertainty, new rules on social distancing and contact complicated the situation even more. Where once a nursery might have four workers helping to load a truck, social distancing rules meant fewer people could be in a trailer or on the dock.

“That probably led to a little longer loading times,” said Dale Parra, sales manager at **Truck Transportation Services** in Wilsonville, Oregon.

Drivers, too, had issues early on when truck stops, restaurants and even rest areas closed, depriving them of places to stop, sleep and eat.

“During the shutdown, drivers stayed in their trucks,” Frederick said. “(They) didn't have the chance to stop for a meal

due to truck stops not being able to open up and were more isolated than usual. Nurseries worked hard to accommodate truckers, often providing them with snacks and beverages.”

Compounding the issues injected by the pandemic was the ongoing shortage of truck drivers. According to the American Trucking Association's “Truck Driver Shortage Analysis 2019,” the industry was short roughly 60,800 drivers in 2018 – an almost 20% jump over 2017. If current trends continue, that could climb to a shortage of more than 160,000 drivers by 2028.

Not only does that make it harder for nurseries to find carriers to ship their products, but combined with the strong demand during the pandemic, it also makes it more expensive. Frederick said he's seeing rates “we haven't ever experienced.”

**(CONTINUED ON PAGE 22) >>**

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The OAN is your vigorous advocate for the nursery industry. It matters every year, but this year it mattered like never before. Coronavirus threatened to shut the industry down. The OAN prevented that from happening, but in the process still lost this year's Farwest Show — a major revenue driver for the association — due to the pandemic. It left a major gap in the association's budget, even after budget adjustments, including the layoff of three staff members, reduced hours and salary for the rest.

81%

So many of you stepped up in response. You donated your Farwest Show booth payments to OAN, made direct cash donations, and responded to our call for supplemental dues funds. So far we have raised **\$200,820 towards our \$250,000** fundraising target, thanks to the kind generosity of our member businesses.

Although we have made impressive progress, we still have not reached our goal. Please chip in with a donation to OAN! Your donation will mitigate the impacts of the OAN's budgetary shortfall and help restore the association to healthier footing.

Warm regards,

**Mark Bigej**, Al's Garden & Home  
OAN Past President (2017)

**Pete Brentano**, Brentano's Tree Farm LLC  
OAN Past President (2006)

**Tom Fessler**, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.  
OAN Past President (1996)

**Leigh Geschwill**, F & B Farms and Nursery  
OAN Past President (2016)

**Rod Park**, Park's Nursery  
OAN Past President (1991)

**Doug Zielinski**, Alpha Nursery Inc.  
OAN Past President (1999)

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## Plants on the move: Freight with uncertainty

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18)

“When you’ve got 10 trucks and five loads, the trucks are fighting for the load and rates are low,” Bertleson said. “When you’ve got 10 loads and five trucks, now the rates go way up.”

### Sticking together

Though COVID-19 has made for a challenging time in the freight business, once the initial shock subsided, nurseries and shippers adjusted to the new reality and things smoothed out a bit. Schedules may have been drawn out some and shipping rates may have stayed high, but products got shipped and delivered throughout the seasons to meet steady demand.

The September wildfires in Oregon knocked some shippers off course and created bottlenecks when nurseries had to close because of smoke and fire danger. But, as it has with other unforeseen circumstances in the past, the industry adjusted and adapted to get through.

The COVID-19 related demand that has kept the industry strong this year is expected to remain solid as the seasons shift from fall to the holiday tree and wreath seasons. Para said TTS is already hearing about large orders coming in for 2021. Bertleson said the holiday season should be a busy one, and then after that, it’s right back into bare root shipping season.

“It’s a never-ending cycle,” he said.

As for Frederick, he said the year has been a different and challenging one, but the industry and shipping for it has faced difficulties before — and gotten through them.

“This is a business with many, many good people, and we will continue to stay in tune with what is going on in our market,” he said. “I know it’s a cliché, but we honestly are all in this together. Consideration, flexibility and tolerance toward others will help us all work together better through these difficult times.” ☺

*Jon Bell is a freelance journalist based in Oregon who writes about everything from craft beer and real estate to the great outdoors. His website is [www.jbellink.com](http://www.jbellink.com). He can be reached at [jontbell@comcast.net](mailto:jontbell@comcast.net).*



## PLANTS ON THE MOVE

# Making room for safety

On nursery loading docks, COVID-19 changed everything

BY BILL GOLOSKI

**U**NCERTAINTY AND PANIC ABOUT the COVID-19 pathogen quickly took hold of shipping companies and nursery loading docks across the United States earlier this year.

“It was the third week of March — that Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,” said Matt Frederick, logistic coordinator and operations manager of **K&M Distribution Inc.** (Rogue River, Oregon), which primarily serves the nursery industry. “It was a beast of a week for all of us.”

Executive orders were coming down from each state’s governor, often prohibiting the movement of people and goods to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. They cast a dark cloud over transportation and logistics companies, and the nurseries they served.

Like the flick of a switch, the pandemic had arrived.

“Nobody knew anything,” Frederick said. “States were shutting down — we were on an hour-by-hour standby with customers from New Hampshire down to Florida, all the way out to Colorado and everywhere in between.”

Al Herzog, traffic manager at wholesale tree grower **J. Frank**

**Schmidt & Son Co.** (Boring, Oregon) did not initially know how much impact the virus would have on his nursery, and how it shipped trees.

“When this all started, we all thought this would last a couple of weeks or a month,” he said. “We didn’t realize it was going to last this long, and still be nowhere close to being over.”

Like the flick of a switch, the pandemic had arrived checked in at the loading dock.

### Protecting employees

Thanks to the OAN’s lobbying efforts, Oregon nurseries were deemed essential businesses and stayed in operation during the shutdown.

“Thank God nurseries were exempt,” said Dale Parra, who coordinates logistics at **Truck Transportation Services** in Wilsonville, Oregon. “That would have been a disaster.”

State officials soon began issuing new safety guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus for agricultural workers. Their social distancing guidance required crew members to work at 

## Plants on the move: Making room for safety

**Previous page:** The sign at the entrance to J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. was changed to direct drivers to a mobile check-in process.

PHOTO BY NANCY BULEY, J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

**Below:** Load crews form a line to fill J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. a truck. PHOTO BY JEFF LAFRENZ, J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

**Opposite page:** Products are widely spaced on the loading dock at J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. PHOTO BY JEFF LAFRENZ, J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

least six feet apart.

Following these guidelines wasn't as difficult for planting crews spread out in the field. For workers loading nursery stock onto refrigerated trucks, however, it created a significant bottleneck for shipping procedures. Immediate changes were needed at the loading dock.

Adjusting an operation's process would typically involve a sit-down conversation with many folks on the nursery. But, in this scenario, J. Frank Schmidt's traffic manager, farm manager, shipping clerk — and pretty much everybody in upper management — had to work things out through phone calls and emails.

"It was very unusual, to be honest," Herzog said. "People were told to work from home if they could, so a lot of people weren't here. But, pretty much everybody was involved in the discussion."

The team had to think on their feet. Onsite managers and crew members began pitching ideas back and forth, figuring out the best way to keep everyone safe.

"It was not just the trucking — it was everything," Herzog, explained, including a company-wide social/safe distancing policy that requires masks or bandanas be worn in all situations where a worker can potentially come within six feet of another person.

J. Frank Schmidt loads at two locations in Boring, Oregon, and operates three farms. Movement between them had to be cut off. If workers at one farm were to get infected, it was important to contain the outbreak to just that one farm. Consequently, the container farm crew needed to stay at their farm, the bareroot crew at their farm, and the same for the seedling farm.

"Each manager was on top of it, and just did what needed to be done," Herzog said. "It was pretty interesting to watch happen, and how quick it happened."

### Changes on the dock

Overall, there were no physical changes to J. Frank Schmidt's loading docks, aside from the mental adjustment

for workers to keep their safe distances.

"When a load is spread out on pallets around the staging area, it takes a good 75 to 100 feet long," Herzog said. "It's not hard to keep people spread out."

The nursery adjusted their loading crews so there would be one person to walk the trees into the trailer, and one person inside to arrange the load.

According to Frederick, other nurseries faced the same dilemma and responded similarly.

"Some companies have trimmed their loading crews down to three people, instead of five," he said. "It creates more distance in the back of the trailer when loading."

Some nurseries were also cutting off areas of the loading dock, Frederick added.

"Every shipper is different depending on plant varieties, sizing, and staff, but a couple of common COVID-19 distancing practices have been more separation on loading docks," Frederick said.

For example, a nursery with three loading docks in a row might block off





the middle one and leave it empty. It gives anywhere between a 10–15-foot barrier between the staff at the loading docks.

**Accepting visitors**

Drivers — those still on the road and not subject to quarantine — were arriving at nurseries from out-of-state locations far and wide. Because of this, they posed a unique risk of Coronavirus transmission. Consequently, each business started looking for ways to limit contact between arriving drivers and their workers.

“Nurseries were just trying to keep their employees — and the drivers — safe,” Parra said. “If a driver passes it to

an employee, the next thing you know, the nursery will be missing a loading crew. It’s a smart call.”

There was no quick solution.

“We went through stages at the very beginning,” Herzog said. “We ordered extra pens, so when the driver signed in, we would just give them the pen so we didn’t have to clean up anything.”

Frederick said it had also been the case with other nurseries as well. If the driver had to sign the paperwork, there often would be a rotating pen station. “That’s been the only hand-to-hand contact since March,” he said.

J. Frank Schmidt also installed

Plexiglas screens at the check-in window. But soon, since health officials were still unsure how the virus was spread, even disposable pens started to feel risky.

“Finally, we said ‘No, we don’t want any physical contact with the driver,’” Herzog said.

The drivers were asked to stay away from the clerk and crews.

The nursery began checking drivers in over the phone. The arriving drivers would see a stop sign when they entered the property. “It tells the drivers to please stay in their trucks and call a phone number instead of coming into the building and checking in,” Herzog said. >>



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## Plants on the move: Making room for safety

Other nurseries took similar steps, and relayed the information out to their shipping partners.

“It was pretty much one week where all of our shippers communicated with us to figure out exactly what their policies were,” Frederick said.

In Frederick’s experience, the process at most nurseries was well planned. “Our truck pulls up in the driveway, someone comes out from the office with paperwork on them, tells them which dock to back into, and then hands them over their paperwork,” he said.

J. Frank Schmidt found it smooth going. “In all actuality, everyone really likes it,” Herzog said. “Before COVID-19, we weren’t very well set up for the drivers when they checked in — they had to walk a ways. Now they just call. It’s very simple.”

Once assigned to a dock, the drivers

typically are asked to stay put.

“95% of our drivers are staying in the truck,” Frederick said.

It’s a practical solution.

A driver used to be able to walk around the nursery property, check on the loading crew, and see how things are going. COVID-19 stopped that.

“Nurseries are also staggering loading times to accommodate this change,” Frederick said. “They’re no longer queuing up trucks for 8 a.m. pick-up. They will have one at 8 a.m. and the next load ready for 1 p.m.”

He’s also had some shippers request the driver call anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour from pick up, to give them notice to get the loading crew ready from another job. K & M has dropped a lot of trailers off this year, and will get called back about an hour before the load is complete.

“We encourage the drivers to leave,” Herzog said. “When we try to get them to come out the afternoon before, we’re actually trying to help them in a sense, because nursery stock does take so long to load.”

### Longer to load

Load times are inevitably longer with smaller crews.

“I definitely think COVID has contributed to longer load times, which we’ve expressed to our drivers before about the situation,” Parra said. “When loading, divers could be in there four or five hours at a time. We let them know that they’re not going to have so many people on their truck.”

“It’s taken about 20% longer to load the trucks,” Herzog said. “We staggered the teams and we can only load one tree at a time. It is probably the biggest, most time-consuming change we’ve had to make.”

Frederick’s drivers haven’t been stalled too much by the longer load times.

“For the most part loading times have been very similar to other years for us,” Frederick said. Every load is different, where you can load a full truck of B&B in 2 hours, it will take 4–7 hours to load 10,000 1-gallon containers.”

Another way shippers have been helping this season is more racking. That way on the receiving end you will only need one person to pull the racked carts onto the truck, as opposed to 3–5 people on manual deliveries.

“Overall, I would give nurseries an ‘A’ for adapting to circumstances and making the changes while still getting the drivers out in fairly good times,” Parra said. “The first runs were a little crazy, but they got the kinks worked out.”

It wasn’t easy, but the changes made have been for the better.

“Each shipper we work with took the bull by the horns and immediately put safety actions in place,” Frederick said. “Growers are continuing to evolve to do the best they can to provide safety for employees during an uncertain time, and everyone was prompt in making adjustments.” ☺

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## PLANTS ON THE MOVE

# An oasis for the road

Nurseries provide hospitality for drivers cut off from usual resources

BY BILL GOLOSKI

**T**HE OPEN ROAD HAS been lonely for truckers in 2020. That's according to Matt Frederick, operations manager for of **K&M Distribution Inc.** (Rogue River, Oregon), which serves the nursery industry.

When moving a nursery stock shipment in a refrigerated truck, a driver headed to the East Coast typically will travel for several days. These professionals will spend their entire workday behind the wheel on long stretches of highway and country roads, with little companionship to see them through to their destination.

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold in America and health officials advised people to socially distance, most truckers had no issue staying safe. They were dutifully riding solo. However, it did not take long for them to find out that their

limited network of resources was getting turned upside down.

It really shows how intense the COVID-19 pandemic is when even the most socially distanced of truckers were stopped in their tracks — in more ways than one. Here are several ways truck drivers were impacted, and some ideas for making a truck driver's day a little better.

### Help them find basic amenities

"Many of the amenities that we take for granted, such as water or access to a restroom, became harder for truckers to access through COVID," Frederick said.

To stop the spread of the virus, health officials advised closing down highway rest stops and public restrooms. 



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**Plants on the move:  
An oasis for the road**

These high-traffic areas could easily serve as hot spots for unknowingly spreading COVID-19. For instance, not all men's room urinals are spaced six feet apart. Many bathroom stall doors have manually operated knobs and locks that could quickly become contaminated surfaces. The list goes on.

Unfortunately, these public amenities are often the only options a long-distance traveling driver have available. Shutting down these public spaces dramatically decreased the number of options they had for routine breaks and stops.

Privately-owned amenities were also becoming limited. Many nurseries have adopted a contact-free policy for interacting with drivers. This means their waiting rooms and other public areas are now closed until further notice.

Nurseries are advised to be aware of available spaces with clean and open restroom facilities in your area and share that information with the drivers when they arrive for deliveries. This information will help the traveling worker who does not know the ins-and-outs of the local area.

**Give the gift of water (or coffee)**

**J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.** (Boring, Oregon) is one of the many nurseries that had previously offered a waiting room.

"Most of the drivers did take advantage of it — check-in, get a cup of coffee, and go back out," said Al Herzog, traffic manager at the nursery. "They could drink as much coffee as they wanted."

Unfortunately, the waiting room has not been open since the pandemic. For many drivers, this is just another resource they have been cut off from. Coffee may seem like a small gesture, and like many things, one doesn't realize how much it's appreciated until it's gone.

It's not just about coffee, either. Water has often been scarce for drivers on the road during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Offering something as simple as having a bottle of water or snack can make a driver's day," Frederick said. Drivers are people, too. Growers and shippers are doing a lot more this year,

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and it's a simple way to thank them for their service.

Another idea is to give gifts.

Dale Parra of **Truck Transportation Services** recommends shippers, receivers, and nurseries invest in a little swag. All businesses are requiring guests to wear a mask — that's one idea.

"Why not have your logo imprinted on some face masks?" Parra asks. "When you deliver your shipping documents, give them a free mask to wear." It's easy advertising that could travel as far as the driver goes on their next trip, and the one after that.

#### Make best of the time

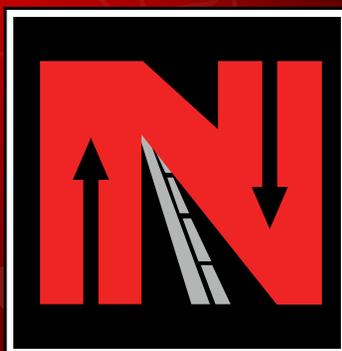
Exercising good customer service skills goes a long way with every business partner in the industry, and the faster the service drivers, the better. "We try to be as friendly as possible," Herzog said.

In trying to be as respectful to the drivers as possible, good growers aim to keep the loading process profitable for the them. "It boils down to the hours of service mainly," Herzog said. "Working with their hours is the biggest thing we can try to do to make shipping nursery stock a little more attractive."

For this reason, J. Frank Schmidt offers onsite overnight parking, which helps the driver complete their resets. For example, if a driver is scheduled to pick up a load on Friday, they invite the driver to drop off their trailer on the Wednesday before. The grower's crew will wait to load the trailer until Friday, giving the driver the ability to get their reset time in.

"The biggest thing we have come away with from the challenges of COVID-19 policies is that we are all in this together and doing the best we can in these times." Frederick said. "The common goal is always to get as many beautiful plants across the country as possible annually." ☺

Bill Goloski is the publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries. He writes for and designs Digger magazine. He can be reached at [bgoloski@oan.org](mailto:bgoloski@oan.org).



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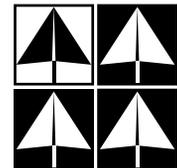
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# GROWING KNOWLEDGE

Series content is coordinated by Dr. Jay Pscheidt, professor of botany and plant pathology at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.



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An ongoing series provided by Oregon State University in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture and in partnership with the Oregon Association of Nurseries



Rhododendrons with symptoms of *Phytophthora ramorum* blight are quarantined pending diagnostic testing. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

## Managing epidemics

Whether dealing with plant pathogens or COVID-19, common principles apply

BY JENNIFER PARKE

**T**HE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has changed life as we know it, threatening human health, causing disruption to our society, and resulting in economic challenges. While impacts of plant pests and diseases may pale in importance compared to COVID-19, they still cause large-scale ecological and economic damage to forests, and urban and suburban landscapes.

We can learn some important lessons from the current human pandemic, and apply them to managing plant pest infes-

tations and plant disease epidemics. The converse is also true: our experience with plant diseases and pest infestations can also inform our response to COVID-19.

For this article, I will be drawing from my 19 years of experience working with the sudden oak death (SOD) organism, *Phytophthora ramorum* — a pathogen that has killed more than 30 million trees in California and Oregon. It has threatened both the timber industry and the nursery industry with reduced markets. >>



### Pathways of entry

Although COVID-19 is caused by a virus and SOD is caused by a water mold, both diseases result from new, exotic pathogens whose spread is exacerbated by the global transportation of people and goods. While international travelers initially drove the spread COVID-19, the movement of imported goods spreads plant pests and pathogens.

It is estimated that 69% of the insects and pathogens that damage American forests and urban landscapes enter the country on imported live plants. More than 3 billion live plants are imported into the U.S. annually, an increase of 500% from 1967–2009.

A secondary entry pathway consists of wood packaging materials, such as crates and pallets used in shipping (Lovett et al. 2016). Imported pests include emerald ash borer (EAB), Asian longhorned beetle, and balsam wooly adelgid; imported diseases include Dutch elm disease, chestnut blight, and SOD. While some regulations have been put in place to limit imports of high-risk plant material and require heat or chemical treatments on wood packaging material, we need to consider more effective strategies for preventing new pests and pathogens from arriving on our doorstep.

Preventative strategies cost significantly less than the work needed to control the spread of pests and pathogens once they have established. Now that the EAB is in the U.S., it has killed hundreds of millions of ash trees. The cost of responding to the damage through 2020 is estimated to be \$12.7 billion.

Quarantines that prevent shipments

of live plants and treatments of wood packaging from known infested areas can exclude many pests and pathogens. Points of entry, such as shipping ports, should be monitored closely to intercept new pests and pathogens. However, pests and especially microscopic pathogens are difficult to detect.

An alternative strategy is to require source countries to abide by “clean stock” production practices. A successful example of this is imported geranium cuttings, which must be produced according to strict phytosanitary guidelines required by the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

The “clean stock” certification program prevented the spread of the select agent *Ralstonia solanacearum* Race 3 Biovar 2 into the U.S. from 2004–2020. It is a bacterial pathogen that causes a deadly disease for potatoes and tomatoes.

Ideally, the health of human travelers should similarly be monitored prior to travel, including testing and certifying individuals do not have COVID-19 before boarding planes and cruise ships.

### Preventing transmission

Once a pathogen or pest has arrived in the U.S., early detection is key to preventing spread; pest identification, recognition of disease symptoms, and development of rapid diagnostic tests are needed.

Rapid testing and reporting of the results are key to identifying disease outbreaks. As is the case with COVID-19, diagnostic tests based on the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) are commonly used to identify of *P. ramorum* and other

plant pathogens.

Eradication of novel pests and pathogens is possible, but only in the earliest stages when the outbreak is small and localized. Bold, swift action — similar to the actions of New Zealand to stop the spread of COVID-19 — is necessary to eradicate pests and pathogens before they begin to spread. The effort to stop SOD from proliferating through the forests of Curry County, Oregon did not succeed because the areas around infected trees that were cleared and burned were initially too small. These efforts did significantly slow the spread of the disease, however.

If exclusion and eradication fail, the disease must then be managed over a long time frame. Effective disease management requires an understanding of how the pathogen is transmitted from one infected individual to another. For newly discovered pathogens such as COVID-19, it takes time for researchers to determine how it spreads. In time, researchers develop strategies that specifically target transmission.

For COVID-19, person-to-person transmission was initially attributed to large droplets and contaminated surfaces. As of the writing of this piece, it is now known that the virus primarily spreads by aerosols and large droplets — particularly in indoor environments. Wearing face masks has been shown to drastically reduce person-to-person transmission of COVID-19.

For *P. ramorum*, the initial focus was on preventing the localized movement of contaminated soil. Subsequent research indicated that *P. ramorum* produces spores in the tree canopy foliage, which are then carried by rain or turbulent air. >>>

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These findings explain the occasional, sporadic spread over distances of a few miles. Plus, this feature of its epidemiology makes it very difficult to predict when and where the spores will initiate new infections in the forest.

Aerial surveys are currently being used to spot early signs of infected trees and play a critical role in managing the disease. The long-distance spread of the pathogen across state lines was also traced to shipments of infected nursery plants.

### Superspreader events

As with COVID-19, “superspreader” events can result in large outbreaks. Superspreader events for *P. ramorum* can consist of a single nursery that sends contaminated plants to multiple locations across the country — something that has occurred several times since 2003.

Most recently in 2019, one nursery in Washington and two in Canada shipped *P. ramorum*-infested rhododendrons to their customers, and the plants were eventually distributed to 18 midwestern and eastern states.

When superspreader events occur, it is

vital to conduct trace-forwards and trace-backs (analogous to contact tracing for COVID-19) in a timely way to identify the source of infection. We must follow-up on potential new infestations before they spread to established vegetation.

As with COVID-19, where certain sectors of the human population are more susceptible to disease than others, *P. ramorum* also affects certain plant species more than others. Rhododendron, *Camellia*, *Viburnum*, *Kalmia*, *Pieris* (in nurseries) and tanoak and coast live oak (in forests) are all susceptible to SOD infection. Asymptomatic hosts exist for both pathogens, confounding disease detection and interfering with efforts to limit disease spread.

For example, with COVID-19, up to 30% of infected individuals do not develop symptoms, but they may still carry high loads of virus inoculum that infect other people.

In an interesting parallel, Oregon myrtlewood (also known as California bay laurel) is not killed by *P. ramorum*, and this species only develops inconspicuous leaf spots. However, infested trees will produce abundant levels of spores which can infect

and kill nearby oak and tanoak trees. We have much to learn about why certain individuals or plant species are at higher risk than others.

### Strategies for control

Sanitation and physical distancing are strategies which reduce disease transmission for both COVID-19 and *Phytophthora ramorum*. For COVID-19, sanitation involves handwashing, wearing face masks, cleaning of high-touch surfaces, and filtering of contaminated air.

For *P. ramorum*, sanitation in nurseries involves removing fallen infested leaves; solarization, steam-treating, or fumigating contaminated soil and containers; and disinfecting contaminated irrigation water.

Social distancing with humans means staying at least 6 feet apart, avoiding physical gatherings (especially indoors), and staying within household “bubbles” or small-group “pods” to limit exposure. Nursery managers are similarly encouraged to employ plant spacing between blocks of plants. That way, in case an infection arises, only plants within a continuous block need to be destroyed.

Moreover, just as visitors from certain states with high COVID-19 infection rates are urged to quarantine themselves temporarily, recent plant acquisitions from other nurseries should be isolated in a separate area and monitored for symptoms.

One significant difference in the treatment of human diseases and plant diseases is the availability of therapeutic agents and vaccines. Therapeutic agents for human diseases focus on medicines administered to sick people to cure disease or reduce symptom severity. In contrast, few pesticides applied to plants have curative properties; most act as chemical protectants and are most effective when applied to healthy plants to prevent infection or infestation.

While developing an effective vaccine is the goal to control COVID-19, it is highly unlikely that there will be vaccines for any plant diseases because of the prohibitive research and production costs. However, plant scientists have a tremendous tool that medical practitioners

### For more information

#### SOD, sudden larch death, and ramorum blight

Parke, J. L. and E. K. Peterson. 2019. *The Plant Health Instructor*.

[tinyurl.com/yyk7t7cs](https://tinyurl.com/yyk7t7cs)

#### Live plant imports: the major pathway for forest insect and pathogen invasions of the US

Liebhold, A. M., Brockerhoff, E. G., Garrett, L. J., Parke, J. L., and Britton, K. O. 2012. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 10: 135–143.

[tinyurl.com/y6l637sy](https://tinyurl.com/y6l637sy)

#### Nonnative Forest Insects and Pathogens in the United States: Impacts and Policy Options

Lovett, G. M., M. Weiss, A. M. Liebhold, T. P. Holmes, B. Leung, K. F. Lambert, D. A. Orwig, et al. 2016. *Ecological Applications* 26: 1437–55.

[tinyurl.com/yyfnmdeg](https://tinyurl.com/yyfnmdeg)

#### Phytophthora Online Course: Training for Nursery Growers

J. Parke, J. Pscheidt, R. Regan; J. Hedberg; N. Grunwald

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must go without: the genetic manipulation of hosts to develop disease resistance through traditional breeding and selection, or through transgenic methods. (Although it is now possible to modify human genes to cure or prevent certain genetic diseases such as sickle cell anemia, this is fraught with many ethical considerations and therefore not an option in the foreseeable future.)

### The overall approach

Outbreaks of novel diseases and pests require a coordinated, multi-agency approach to monitor, manage and remedy each incident using the best available science. In the case of COVID-19, this is the federal Center for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institutes of Health, and state and local departments of health. In the case of plant pests and diseases, USDA-APHIS is the lead agency, coordinating with the state departments of agriculture and forestry (or natural resources).

Researchers at universities and state and federal labs are central to generating the scientific knowledge base. Approaches to disease and pest management must evolve to reflect advances in our scientific understanding of the pathogens or pests.

In conclusion, the global movement of people and goods will continue to deliver new diseases and pests, presenting new challenges to nurseries. We must be able to mobilize quickly to identify new threats to plant health and to quickly limit disease and pest outbreaks before damaging natural resources, agriculture, and forestry.

A robust, coordinated national strategy of monitoring and early detection is paramount. COVID-19 has increased the public's awareness of the power of microbes and taught us to think more broadly about epidemiology.

The lessons we learn can be applied to cope intelligently with new pests and diseases — those affecting humans as well as those affecting plants. ☺

*Dr. Jennifer Parke is a plant pathologist and research professor at Oregon State University. She can be reached at Jennifer.Parke@oregonstate.edu*



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# Strength and wisdom

**An adage says 'behind every great man is a great woman,' but it seems archaic to bring up these days with the budding ascension of so many women as national leaders.**

My two politically-active and college-aged daughters have watched Democratic vice presidential nominee Sen. Kamala Harris of California become a viable national force in real time. They didn't much care for Hillary Clinton, the 2016 nominee, but Harris — they like.

Although the 2020 presidential election results are not known at this writing, Harris may completely dispense with the "glass ceiling" that others tried to fracture before her. Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 (as Walter Mondale's running mate), Sarah Palin in 2008 (as John McCain's) and Clinton in 2016 (as the nominee) were all part of major party presidential tickets, but Harris could become the first woman candidate to do so and win.

My two daughters — one a future teacher, the other a future nurse — also grew up admiring the strength and wisdom of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

The "Notorious RBG" was a sentry of intellect and action who refused to be bound by gender roles, ascending to the top of a legal profession where women simply weren't allowed until relatively recently.

My daughters have grown tired of my semi-cogent recollections of how much friendlier the political theater used to be. Exhibit A was the deep and abiding friendship between RBG and Justice Antonin Scalia — two polar opposites. Their example should be the way forward for respectful disagreement and discourse.

## Influencers here at home

There is little doubt that our industry is shaped by strong leaders who bring real-life experience to the table. In our 80-plus-year history as an association, we have had seven female presidents. I have had the pleasure to get to know four of them.

Julia Hausch, co-owner of Roseway Nursery in Beaverton, became OAN's first woman president in 1948. She was

inducted into the OAN Hall of Fame in 1993 and was a true pioneer.

The OAN would wait another 31 years before the next woman served as our president in 1979, when our Oregon nursery industry was starting to fill its destiny. That year, Irene Burden of Hazel Dell Gardens took the helm.

The next woman to serve, Mount Hood Chapter icon Teri Dillard Lund of William Dillard Nursery Co., shaped the industry during a critical time of its national development. To this day she influences the association through her strong faith and community focus.

I still had the new car smell as an OAN employee when Rod Park, Park's Nursery, introduced me to Teri. Her strength and character rang through.

I only was able to meet Kathie Femrite of Femrite Nursery Company, who served as OAN president in 1992, a few times. Her stature was clear and the respect she earned from members made an impression upon me.

## 21<sup>st</sup> century trailblazers

Recency has a bias, and clearly, I have a significant bias for the next three women who served as OAN president: Kathy LeCompte of Brooks Tree Farm served in 2001, Kristin VanHoose of Amethyst Hill Nursery/Hydrangeas Plus® served in 2011, and Leigh Geschwill of F & B Farms and Nursery served in 2016.

All three were strong, visionary and singularly talented leaders, and each has grown close to my family and children.

Nobody tells Kathy LeCompte what to do. I was driving home from accepting the director of government relations post at the OAN when the phone rang and it was Kathy. At the time, she was chairing our Government Relations Committee, so she gave me a list of things to get ready. I told her that I would not start until the following week. She thanked me and told me that she would call me the next day to check on my progress!

When Kathy ran for the state Legislature, both of my daughters had \$20 to



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

their name and attended one of Kathy's fundraisers. I found out later that they brought their money and gave it to Kathy because she was our friend. That speaks volumes.

Kristin VanHoose hired me as your executive director, but our bond was formed well before that time. Super Bowl Sunday was a must-attend event at the VanHoose home. Several nursery families (including the Brentanos and the Klupengers) were regulars and my children were enthralled with an event that had two requirements. Everyone had to have fun, and every dish had to have bacon in it. Baconfest is awesome.

I have city girls and they got head-to-toe muddy in the fields behind the nursery. My youngest failed to pack "back-up clothes" and Kristin helped and gave her pants and shirts to wear home. The shirt? Kristin's own Washington State University Cougars. Where did Carolyn wind up going to college? WSU.

Leigh Geschwill (2016) has had a Mount Rushmore type of influence on the association. Smart, savvy and a leading voice of the industry, Leigh has led through tumultuous times, both economically and politically.

She is a go-to voice for the industry, and if anyone said a bad word about her, my family would go to war with them.

The association has been blessed with strong leaders. My two independent, sassy and wickedly smart daughters have a plethora of fine examples to model themselves after. Thanks to all who help shape our industry. ☺

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Persistent fruit  
Abundant blooms



**WEeping EXTRAORDINAIRE™**  
Flowering Cherry  
Extra-large, double blooms

# BRANCHING OUT

How do you top 20 years of offering the best woody plants on the market? By adding an exceptional line of Proven Winners® ColorChoice® ornamental trees to the mix. Outstanding beauty, disease resistant, landscape-friendly - they're the trees you've been waiting for.

For more information contact Maria Zampini, [Maria@UpShootHort.com](mailto:Maria@UpShootHort.com).

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