



Keeping drivers in the loop

Communication is key to treating truckers well during driver shortage

BY MITCH LIES

JACKIE WEISENBERGER OF **Oregon Pride Nurseries Inc.** rarely hears that a driver has backed out of picking up a load from her McMinnville nursery.

“Earlier this spring, we had that happen, but that was happening everywhere,” she said. “As things died down, as we got more into June and July, that has been very rare.”

Weisenberger can’t pinpoint exactly why she has a good record of getting drivers to show up at her nursery when they say they will. But she believes one key is because she treats drivers well.

“We offer things like a bathroom and a shower. We let them overnight here, if need be,” she said. “We have an employee break-room that they are welcome to use. I show them where the vending machine is. We will fill up their coffee for them in the morning.”

Weisenberger said she also encourages drivers to take advantage of a food truck that comes by every morning about 10

o’clock. “I will mention to the driver that ‘You are more than welcome to purchase something from the chuck wagon,’ which is what I call it,” she said. “And if they are here later in the day, I tell them there is a local pizza joint that will deliver, and I will hand them a menu.”

“We try to treat them very well. They do a lot,” she said. “That is how our product gets out there.”

Treating truck drivers well is one of several keys for nursery managers to ensure they get a good reputation among truckers. And, in the midst of a historical driver shortage that according to the American Trucking Association is expected to reach 100,000 by 2023, a good reputation may be the difference between a driver backing out of a load in favor of a better paying job or showing up.

Drivers have more chances to say no than they did



Keeping drivers in the loop

before, according to Dale Parra, sales manager at **Truck Transportation Services** in Wilsonville. “They can turn down loads. There are so many loads available,” he said.

“You want to get a good reputation where you are a driver-friendly nursery, because there are a few businesses that don’t have that, and the driver will be like, ‘Well, I’m not going to go there to pick up,’” Parra said. “And once you get a bad reputation, it is tough to get drivers to go there.”

Honesty the best policy

Among several steps Parra recommended nurseries take to pad their reputation among truckers, being honest is maybe the most important, he said.

“The first thing I would tell a nursery is to make sure they are honest with the drivers,” Parra said. “If it is going to take four

hours to load, you need to tell them that. Don’t tell them, ‘Yeah, we will get you out of here in two to four hours,’ either, because whatever the lower number you use is what the driver hears. So, when that two-hour mark hits, they are going to ask, ‘Why am I not loaded? What is going on?’”

Brad Hockersmith, shipping supervisor of **Eshraghi Nursery**, said he, too, believes that honesty is the best policy when dealing with truck drivers.

“Typically, where you will see the biggest problem with drivers is when they don’t know what is going on,” Hockersmith said. “That is when they start getting stressed out, when they don’t know how long they are going to be there, or what is going on, or why haven’t you started loading them. And I stay in com-

munication with them. That way it keeps them from getting too frustrated. And I try to be as accurate and as upfront as possible with them.

“I will say, ‘Hey, just so you know, you are going to be sitting here a little while, but we will try to get you out of here as quickly as we can,’” he said. “And I will go down and check with them. Especially on busy days, when they see other trucks that got

“We try to treat [drivers] very well. They do a lot. That is how our product gets out there.”

— Jackie Weisenberger, Oregon Pride Nurseries

here after them leaving before them, I will let them know that that guy was only getting three feet, so we loaded him up really quick. But we are going to get you out of here as fast as we can.”



Canby area

10.77 acre farm/nursery

PROPERTY FOR SALE

Gorgeous prime farm ground with 100 GPM (gallons per minute) irrigation well and exceptional valid water rights for 9.2 acres. Custom-built home location in highly coveted Canby farm belt area, only 5 minutes from town. Home has large country kitchen, living room with fireplace, large finished daylight basement with workshop and storage area. Additional 1,100 square foot detached building with kitchen offers great potential for ADU (accessory dwelling unit) conversion or nursery office space.

For full details visit:
www.CanbyOregonRealtors.com

Equity Oregon Real Estate, Vince Pavlicek 503-266-2546 / Rod Adams 503-984-0950



OREGON NURSERIES FOUNDATION

Your contribution today helps prepare the nursery industry leaders of tomorrow.

Contact the Oregon Association of Nurseries for more information:
503-682-5089 or
888-283-7219.

The ONF is a nonprofit 503(c)(3) corporation. Donations may be tax-deductible; consult a qualified tax attorney or accountant.



Another key to driver relations, sources said, is doing everything you can to get trucks loaded as quickly as possible.

“If we have a parking lot full of trucks, we take all of our employees and

put them on a truck to load,” said Jennie Hummel of **Hochstein Nursery LLC** in Cornelius. “We will take them off the potting crew, the weeding crew, and everybody will load trucks if we are backed up.”

Hockersmith said Eshraghi has a similar policy. “If I have a truck pull up, and all of the product is there, or enough to get the truck started, I will call for another crew, have them come up and start ➤

We transport just like you grow - with care.

Plant care doesn't end where transportation begins.



At IDI, we put the same hard work and dedication into delivering your nursery stock as you do in growing it.

Second generation, family owned and operated.

Contact us today:

800-826-0430

independentdispatch.com/nursery-shipping



Keeping drivers in the loop



loading that truck,” Hockersmith said. “That way, that driver is not sitting there for an hour before anything happens.

“The other thing I try to do is to go down and personally talk to the drivers if there is a problem or if something is get-

“We will take [workers] off the potting crew, the weeding crew, and everybody will load trucks if we are backed up.”

— Jennie Hummel, Hochstein Nursery

ting delayed, and I will be upfront and honest with them and let them know what is going on. So, if there happens to be something going on that is going to cause them to sit there for a little while, I will let them know that right away when they get into the driveway.”

Signage important

Clearly marking entrances and exits is another key to driver relations, Parra said. “Good signage for where to pull in, for where to park is always important,” he said.

Hummel agreed, noting: “We don’t want them coming in the exit. We want them coming in the entrance, and we make that real clear.”

Hummel said she also encourages dispatchers to have a driver call when their

truck is approaching, both because GPS isn’t always reliable where the nursery is located and to coordinate traffic on what she characterized as a “pretty narrow road” leading to the nursery.

“I’ll ask the dispatch to have the truck call me, because then I can tell them, ‘Hey, I have a truck coming down our hill. Wait until you see that truck, because we are a pretty

narrow road and if we have two trucks meet on the road, it can get a little dicey.’

“I try to make it as easy as possible on truck drivers to get to our location,” Hummel said.

Hummel said she tries to stagger how many trucks the nursery gets in a day to avoid back up. “But in the spring, you can’t always control that,” she said.

Hockersmith said he also likes to go out and greet drivers as they show up to let them know both where to park and keep them informed of the nursery’s policies on getting out of the truck while on site.

“I have cameras set up in the shipping office, so, If I am inside the office doing paperwork, I can see whenever a truck rolls in, and we have pretty good communication, so if I don’t see a truck

pull in, somebody will let me know there is another driver here, and I will run out immediately and catch them in their truck before they have a chance to park,” Hockersmith said.

“That way, they don’t have to get out. They don’t have to wander around and I will get them signed in right there and tell them where to park so there is no confusion on their part,” he said.

Different nurseries have had different policies during the pandemic. Some have opened their break rooms and other areas to truckers, others have asked drivers to stay in their cabs. Most, according to Parra, are not letting drivers roam around like they used to. “Now, most places are like, ‘You need to stay in your tractor,’” Parra said.

Regardless of your COVID-19 policy, Parra said the bottom line for getting and keeping a good reputation among drivers is honest communication.

“Tell them that either we can get you loaded today, or we are not going to get you loaded,” he said. “What they want more than anything is truth, because time is money for them, and they don’t get any money just sitting around waiting.” ©

Mitch Lies is a freelance writer covering agricultural issues based in Salem Oregon. He can be reached at mitchlies@comcast.net.