

One can't be green without the green industry

The nursery and greenhouse industry knows a simple truth.

And that truth is: what the green industry grows and ships throughout the country and world is a benefit to the climate. It is as real as the promise of buds in spring and the trucks waiting to be loaded with product.

You can imagine the frustration when urban legislators and activists play politics, or some academics focus more on tenure and publications than real-life solutions that are right in front of them. I honestly don't know what is worse — those who simply do not know what they do not know, or those who presume to know everything.

When state leaders appointed a work group to look at the state's new Climate Protection Program (CPP), I was chosen as the primary agricultural voice. I was engaged and forceful — but in the end, I was ignored for the expediency of political egos.

Ahead of its time

With a federal grant in 2010, Executive Director Cheryl Goar at the Arizona Nursery Association created the Plant Something program. It was intended to be similar to the "Got Milk?" campaign by the dairy industry — something irreverent but compelling to promote our product and boost sales.

The program highlights a coherent set of research-proven benefits of planting things in our built environment. Oregon was proud to be one of the first states to join in this program. 23 other states and British Columbia have joined in. The research (as seen at www.plantsomethingoregon.com/pmlb) was compelling then and now — plants help the climate, and that's a fact. Recent reports have indicated that the loss of biodiversity and nature could put up to \$31 trillion of cities' gross domestic product (GDP) at risk, according to research released by the World Economic Forum.

The assessment is sobering — more than 70% of the 576 biggest urban centers worldwide, comprising more than 1.4 billion people, are at elevated or extreme risk from environmental hazards such as pollution, water contamination or extreme heat.

Without action, heat dome events like

the one that occurred in a heavily carbon-friendly state like Oregon last summer will become more likely. What is clear to me is that the urban areas need rural agriculture to save their collective bacon. Is that where policy is headed? Are we trying to incentivize greener fuel sources? No. We're trying to punish everyone for the sins of China and other areas of the globe.

The 2021 State of Cities Climate Finance Report found \$384 billion in climate finance went to urban areas in 2017–2018, compared to an estimate of \$5 trillion needed. We've elected to throw money at it instead of reinvesting in working lands, thus clearing the way for ag to do what ag does best — grow our way out of this mess.

Ignoring the consequences

During discussions with a large stakeholder effort within the CPP, the summary judgement against fossil fuels and natural gas was akin to the Salem witch trials to purify the soul of Oregon. During that time, I was pointed in my comments. I asked, "What kind of economy do you want in 20 years?" The economy is not a speedboat. It is a large vessel at sea and needs time to turn. I was greeted with blank stares.

Certain truths remain. The price of electricity along the West Coast is likely to spike over the next few decades, and weather events and droughts are also likely to impact the reliability of the coast's power grid.

The nursery and greenhouse industry long ago accepted its need to become more efficient. It made a decades-long investment in natural gas to heat growing spaces and water. Across the board, operations invested and made use of this source of energy, then recommended as the cleanest option.

But now, the state-adopted CPP sets steadily declining caps on emissions from fossil-fuel suppliers, including the natural gas our producers spent all that money installing. Punishing green industries now with higher fuel and natural gas costs seems illogical, when it won't help the climate much.

Instead of adding these costs to thin-margin producers, we should be ramping up production to provide sequestration on a massive scale.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Batteries are dirty business

Plug-in stations nationwide will eventually happen, just like the gas stations that preceded them. Electronic vehicles (EV) are growing in market share and will be part of the fleet options in the coming decades.

There is a difference, however, between consumer choice and governmental directives. Americans love their cars, and the green agenda has a dirty little secret — the lithium batteries used for EVs contaminate water and the environment.

The U.S. has more than 9% of the world's known lithium reserves, but only one domestic mine in Nevada. The source produces about 1% of the global output, and it must be shipped abroad for processing.

About 90% of the world's lithium is produced by Australia, Chile and China. China processes almost 60% of the metal for use in batteries. Trade wars could cripple American consumers, so pay attention. But one cool thing on the horizon is the new high-performing Ford F-150 EV trucks.

Taking responsibility for outcomes

When it comes to climate, I get feisty and protective of our industry. When policy is a hammer — everything looks like a nail. A fundamental question: Will Gov. Brown, DEQ Director Richard Whitman and the environmental community take responsibility for treating everything in a regulatory way and ignoring how agriculture should have been supported and not harmed?

Of course not. The entire exercise was about the politics, not the impact Oregon has on the climate. It is a great disappointment and sadly, it was predictable. We stand ready for our opportunity to help — I hope it comes. ☺