



## MEMBER PROFILE



### OWNER

**Gary Grossen**

### KNOWN FOR:

Branded agricultural equipment, and custom manufactured equipment.

### PEOPLE

**Gary Grossen**, CEO and outside sales; **Keith Grossen**, co-owner (retired); **JoAnn Agee**, Vice President and CFO, **Connie Lindsay**, marketing; **Mike Mader**, equipment sales; **Brent Selnau**, equipment sales; **Derrick Bratton**, greenhouse sales.

### CONTACT:

✉ P.O. Box 427  
Donald, OR 97020-0427

☎ 503-678-5525

@ clindsay@gkmaschine.com

### ONLINE:

[www.gkmaschine.com](http://www.gkmaschine.com)

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47 [NurseryGuide.com](http://NurseryGuide.com)

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# GK Machine Inc.

Founded: 1976 by Gary and Keith Grossen

**I**F YOU OWN A nursery or agricultural business, chances are **GK Machine** makes at least one piece of branded equipment that may help your operation.

And if the machine for your unique needs doesn't exist, the Oregon-based equipment design, manufacturing and repair firm can probably design, create or adapt something based on ideas or needs you may have.

"It could be anything from a small implement costing a couple thousand dollars, to a million dollar custom harvester," senior equipment salesperson Mike Mader said.

With the burgeoning needs of labor-starved agriculture and accelerating employer costs, the ever-expanding manufacturer is so busy it can hardly keep up with demand. GK currently employs about 180 people, but according to company management, they could easily employ at least 20 more once they find the right people with the right skills.

"We're adding engineers all the time, just to keep up with the new projects people throw at us," said Scott Grossen, a senior engineer with the company who is the son of co-founder Keith Grossen. "Often, we have to say, 'We can do your project, but it may be six months before we get to it.'"

About a fourth of GK's business is in branded equipment the company manufactures. For nurseries, these products include

GK 3-15 Pot-in-Pot Planter, the GK-1710-1 Root Ball Lifter, and the TR6 Sprayer, as well as a variety of general-purpose trailers and even portable restrooms.



Gary Grossen

But the company's nursery mainstay would be the H7 and H9 tree diggers. These accept a variety of implements that GK also manufactures — a tree top chopper, a bed lifter, a bed digger, a root pruner, and even a nose cone to move branches out of the way.

GK also makes machines for hazelnut growers and berry farms, such as an orchard leveler, nut sweepers, nut harvesters, nut carts, and a "berry ferry" for harvesting berries.

However, the vast majority of the company's business — better than two thirds — involves custom-designed, custom-made equipment for various clients. Some of the clients are companies that want to take equipment to market and need someone to design and manufacture it. Others are agricultural companies that need something special for their own operation. And of course, the company will repair and service equipment as well, whether made by them or someone else.

"There's at least 1,000 jobs on the floor at any one time," Scott Grossen said. "We ➤"

## GK Machine Inc.

A large team of about 180 people drives the innovation at GK Machine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GK MACHINE

wrote our own software just to manage and track all of these different jobs.”

### Starting small and growing big

The cliché among certain world-beating companies, most famously Hewlett-Packard but also Apple, Amazon and others, is that they got started in a garage.

For the smaller but still innovative GK, not quite. It was a barn.

Two brothers, Gary and Keith Grossen, grew up on a Willamette Valley, Oregon dairy farm their parents operated for many years. In the early 1970s, they started fixing old farm equipment in an old barn near the small town of Donald.

Growing a reputation for completing quick repairs, they formed GK Machine in 1976, using their first initials to make the name. They soon moved to a machine shop on Main Street in Donald. “The vision, in the beginning, the goal was to support local Oregon farmers and the nursery industry with great ag equipment,” Gary Grossen said.

At the time, some of the key industries GK would serve — like vegetable farming, grass seed, and nurseries — were just beginning to take off.

In the 1980s, growth continued and GK needed more room. They built a new 50,000 square foot shop on Donald Road, on the edge of the city. By this time, the company had 40 employees. They added a parts counter, a greenhouse department and a machining department.



But the turning point of the company came in the 1990s, when the company added engineers to the staff. This allowed them to design and manufacture their own agricultural equipment, designed expressly for Oregon farmers. Their proprietary machines included agricultural sprayers, harvesters, scrapers and choppers. The company’s size grew to more than 100 employees in this decade.

The company then had its largest expansion yet in 2015, adding a whopping 175,000 square feet to its facility on Donald Road.

“Now we build ag equipment for customers all over the world,” Gary said.

There’ve been no particular mentors who showed the two brothers how to do this. They pieced it together as they went. Listening has been key.

“I’ve worked with bankers, attorneys, business consultants, and others who gave me advice along the way,” Gary said. “Over the last 45 years, I’ve attended hundreds of trade shows all over the world to learn about the various industries. I just kind of figured things out as I went along.”

GK is well known for its adaptability. When the Great Recession hit in 2007, the company experienced no downturn. It was able to repurpose existing equipment for new industries.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

resulted in new sanitation rules. Farmers had to provide more restrooms and wash stations in the field.

“That then spurred a significant spike in sales on our restroom trailers, and led to us developing some new hand-washing stations and things like that that were required in the field,” Mader said.

More recently, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration has imposed heat safety requirements. GK makes a shade trailer to keep workers out of direct sunlight and keep employers in compliance with the law.

### Family and the future

Although cofounder Keith Grossen retired a few years back, GK Machine continues to be very much a family company. In addition to Keith’s son Scott working there as an engineer, Gary’s son, Derrick, serves as a technical specialist in robotics, hydraulics and electronics. Gary’s daughter, JoAnn Agee, is the company’s chief financial officer.

The company also regards employees as family. As an inducement to retain them, co-owner Gary has purchased nearby housing to rent to them so they can spend more time with family and less time commuting eight miles or more from the nearest towns. Some now walk home for lunch.

And because housing is scarce in Donald, his next step is to develop new housing. Ground recently was broken on Harvest Garden Homestead, a 373-unit development that, roughly, will double the population of Donald once complete in about 10 years.

Gary’s guiding principle is to “invest in employees and create a great working environment to help your customers win,” he said. “And, remember to look for new opportunities along the way.”

Asked if there’s anything he would have done differently, he says nothing comes to mind. His philosophy is, “One way or another, no matter what, it always works out.” ©

