

# The new era of the industry is upon us

## It is easy now to look back at how the nursery industry used to be.

It's tempting to measure by the old markers of success, and pine for a time that seemed simpler. In families, business and within our national psyche, that's a natural reflex.

The opportunities and challenges confronting our industry are both familiar and acutely new. Over the past 15 years, the market has endured a few recessions, seen changing consumer expectations and purchasing patterns, and elected officials who wish to shape behavior through a crushing set of regulations and taxation. Yet the nursery and greenhouse growers, our member retailers, and our valued suppliers endure.

As my saintly mother would remind me in my youth, there is a reason you have two ears, two eyes, and one mouth. Listen and watch, then talk.

## The era of a mature industry

Some say the industry has survived and thrived because of the unquestionable quality of the plants grown and sold in our little corner of the Pacific Northwest. There is no doubt that this remains just as true now as it was in the 1980s. Back then, our fledgling industry established a national brand. We had the production capacity to satisfy every plant- and tree-hungry consumer.

Over the years, there have been a steady loss of the local, independent retailer. In its place, we now have big box stores.

States in other regions had to play catch up to meet Oregon's plant quality. But now, the playing field is evening out due to several factors. Growers are getting better at what they do. They know how to use the wholesaler pipeline to build more access to the markets Oregon had dominated for decades.

The days of "if you plant it, you will sell it" are gone. Now, we have "just in time" ordering. The old established market has changed fundamentally.

I have the great honor of engaging our titans of the industry — those who have

seen us grow through this time. More than anything else, what we're seeing is a mature industry. A mature industry is one that has passed both the emerging phase and the growth phase of industry development. Companies in these industries tend to be larger, older, and more stable.

At the beginning of the industry life cycle, new products or services find use in the marketplace. We are seeing this in our own membership. Being a leading state, we need to recognize how to adapt.

## The continued relevance of Farwest

The Farwest Show is the biggest show in the West. It is the front porch of access to some of the finest nurseries in the world. It represents a place where the innovation of production agriculture is on the cutting edge.

I looked at back issues of *Digger* from the past 25 years. The same comments were being made then as now. We want more buyers and gate numbers. We want to give every grower the opportunity to build their customer base and host valued partners for tours throughout the month of August. True then — and true now.

The Farwest Show, by far, is the greenest show of them all. Why should it not be? Travel an hour in any direction. You will see for yourself, in real-time, what abundant water, ideal climate and elite production practices can do.

Yes, Farwest is the place to gather, network, develop customers, learn, educate, and hear from top-line speakers selected just for this show. All true.

But in the end, it is our growers who make the show a success.

The new era of trade shows is no longer dominated by Oregon. Rather, Oregon growers go to trade shows throughout the country to bring their quality brand closer to the customer base. This makes sense when you consider that Oregon's nursery industry now is established and is acting like any other product that has achieved economic maturity.

While our growers expand their



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

marketing prowess, there is still one place where they all reside. And that is right here in the fertile Willamette Valley — a special place that can grow trees and plants to virtually every hardiness zone.

## Moving the nursery industry forward

Name a region with a nursery trade show. The best among them are run and operated by your industry trade association. The best of the best — whether in Maryland, Texas, Minnesota, Ohio, Idaho, or Colorado — all have committed leadership to produce a show that meets the needs of the membership.

I can tell you that all the executive directors are committed. These are not soulless for-profit organizations. Instead, the dollars are reinvested into the industry to pay for programs, products, and services and to fund much-needed political advocacy. In other words, the bang you get for your trade show buck far exceeds the value proposition of the cost of a booth.

I would submit that the association acts as your friend in challenging times — to do what you cannot do alone. And we can do that through memberships and trade shows.

The Farwest Show is guided by members just like you. Volunteers, all with different markets and green goods, come together to create something worth the trip. Whether traveling from Springfield, Oregon or Springfield, Massachusetts; Minneapolis, Minnesota or Moultrie, Georgia, the top-of-the-line professional events staff of the OAN will deliver an experience that will pay off in the future. In the end, business is business.

Hope to see you at Farwest! ☺