



Sowing the sustainability seeds

OAN's Sustainability Initiative aims to make growers – and the planet – a little better

By Jon Bell

Ask Whitney Rideout, business development manager for the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN), about the size and the scope of the association's sustainability initiative, and she'll tell you: it's big.

So big that it's practically taken over Rideout's job since OAN officially launched the initiative last summer.

So big that, just for starters, it will stretch out over multiple years.

In fact, the initiative is so big that there's probably not another state doing anything even close to what Oregon is when it comes to sustainability.

"The Horticultural Research Institute is doing a lot in the realm of sustainability, but I'm not aware of any nursery trade association doing anything

Your guide to the *Digger Sustainability Issue*

The concept of sustainability can be broken down into three components: people, planet and profits. A company is sustainable to the degree it protects all three of these. The components are explored in detail in the following articles:



Planet – As more nursery customers (wholesale and retail) become aware of sustainability, it is becoming an expectation rather than just a premium product feature. It's all part of **the greening of the marketplace** (Page 27). But how do you and your customers know you're doing the necessary things to care for the planet? **Getting certified** (Page 33) through a recognized program is a good start.



People – Creating humane working conditions, treating employees well, and training them to look out for your business is simply good business. More nurseries are realizing the importance of **building a sustainable team** (Page 35).



Profits – While employees and customers will appreciate sustainability efforts, there can be cost barriers to overcome as needed capital improvements are made. You can get help through these **sustainable incentives** (Page 39). You can learn more about sustainability at two upcoming events.

The OAN will present its Top Five Sustainability Findings at this summer's Farwest Show, Aug. 26-28 in Portland. And, on Oct. 10, the OAN will hold its Sustainability Summit. Watch www.farwestshow.com and www.oan.org for further details on each of these.



Top five findings coming at Farwest Show

By now many of you have heard about the Climate Friendly Nurseries Project (CFNP), a joint project between the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) and the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) whereby 13 nurseries are detailing and quantifying their energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, and identifying specific ways to reduce both. The project's central goals are to help participating nurseries reduce energy inputs and greenhouse gas emissions while achieving greater economic efficiency and profitability, and to summarize and publish key findings in the form of a best management practices guide for our entire industry. The best management practices guide will be showcased at the Farwest Show this Aug. 26-28. It will include a "top five" list with case studies and examples, ROI analysis and a full list of learnings from the project. It will illustrate how you can make more 'green' by being green.



targeted toward its members that is this extensive," Rideout said, "This is a huge opportunity to help our growers implement sustainable practices, improve their efficiency, and better their bottom line."

Formally kicked off last July and underwritten by a grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the OAN's sustainability initiative is an overarching effort to help Oregon's nursery growers incorporate sustainability into their operations. Its major components overlap with one another and bring together data collection, sound and realistic recommendations, a third-party certification program, online tools and resources and much more.

Ultimately, growers will be able to identify opportunities at their nurseries and implement changes — variable speed drives or linear irrigation systems, for example — that make sustainability a bigger part of their day-to-day operations.

But using water more wisely or applying fertilizer differently is about more than just paying lip service to the whole sustainability movement. Fortunately, the OAN's initiative aims to help growers not only become more sustainable, but to improve their bottom lines, as well.

"Our approach to this all along the way is that by helping our growers operate more efficiently and utilize the least amount of resources to produce the maximum yields, they'll be better businesses," OAN Executive Director John Aguirre said.

What 'sustainability' means

As a word and a movement, sustainability is everywhere these days. From homebuilding and farming to hybrid cars, bike lanes and cloth grocery bags, just about anything and everything has taken on a sustainable accent.

But what does sustainability really mean? Defining the term for nurseries was one of the first and most important goals of the OAN's Sustainability Task Force, which includes representa-

tives from a range of different nurseries across the state.

"Obviously, sustainability is a big buzzword that's out there and it's having some big effects in certain markets," said Josh Zielinski, assistant manager at Alpha Nursery in Salem and co-chair of the task force. "Nurseries aren't exempt from consumer demand for sustainable products, so we wanted to define what it means to be a sustainable nursery."

One of the most widely circulated definitions of the term sustainability, and one that the OAN looked to in coming up with its own version, is that established by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. In it, the commission defines sustainable development as that which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

According to Aguirre, the OAN task force kept the spirit of that statement in mind when conjuring up a definition more specific to the nursery industry. As a result, the OAN defined sustainability as "production, handling and delivery of nursery products in a manner which is economically viable, ecologically sound and socially responsible."

Rideout noted that the definition is based on three fairly standard key elements — social, environment and economy — of any approach to sustainability.

Components of nursery sustainability

The initiative's major components, all of which interrelate and support each other, all fall under the OAN's umbrella definition of sustainability.

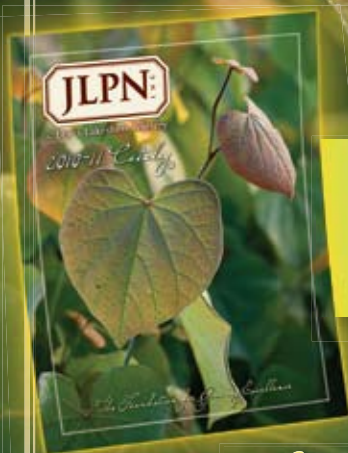
Through a partnership with the Oregon Environmental Council, the OAN launched its Climate Friendly Nurseries Project (CFNP) soon after the initiative's kickoff last summer. Geared to help nurseries reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, the three-year CFNP is helping nurseries — 13 so far — measure both and then identify



dba: Lew's Lakeshore Nursery



- Over 200 Varieties
- Band Pot grown seedlings and graft understock
- Cultivar rooted cuttings
- Fruit and shadetree budding understock
- One bundle minimum order



Reserve your 2011 Catalog Now!
1-877-490-7844
WWW.JLPNLINERS.COM

The Foundation for Growing Excellence



HEATHER LEVNER

For many nurseries, water conservation is a key component of sustainability. Watering by hand is one technique that some nurseries use. Proponents say that it directs all of the water to plants and not the greenhouse floor, thereby conserving the resource and lowering costs.

ways to reduce them. The big-picture goal is for nurseries to cut energy use and emissions on one end and achieve greater economic efficiency and profitability on the other.

Once the data is analyzed, nurseries will receive customized recommendations on how they can pare down their energy use and emissions. They'll also get a breakdown of the cost for making changes and the projected return on investment.

Even better, Rideout said, is that the project findings will be made available to all OAN members who can then decide if they wish to make similar changes at their own operations. "It's our hope that we'll be able to identify the items that people can take advantage of quickly and easily and then pool that information for everyone," she said.

"By helping our growers operate more efficiently and utilize the least amount of resources to produce the maximum yields, they'll be better businesses."

John Aguirre
Oregon Association of Nurseries

Similarly, a joint project with the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance is underway to establish an industry-wide energy reduction goal for nurseries and greenhouses. The project will actually bring the findings of the CFNP to all OAN members and also set up an online resource tool full of information on how members can reduce their own energy use. Members will also have at their fingertips extensive information about various grants, tax credits and other incentives.

Rideout said this project will be extremely valuable to members in light of projected increases in natural gas and electricity prices. (The Northwest Power and Conservation Council expects natural gas prices to increase nearly 2 percent a year until 2015; electricity is expected to rise nearly 4 percent a year between now and 2020.)

Another major component of the sustainability initiative is the voluntary Oregon Nursery Certification Project. OAN is working with the Food Alliance, a third-party certification organization that certifies farms, ranches and food handlers for sustainable practices, and Salmon-Safe, a similar nonprofit. The goal is to establish a certification program for nurseries that meet various standards in the sustainability realm.

“The whole notion of third-party certification is to confer legitimacy of sustainable practices by the producers,” said Scott Exo, executive director of Food Alliance. “Survey after survey tells us that in terms of trust, consumers tend to give more credence to label claims about sustainability when those claims are backed by an independent third party, so there’s a real benefit here.”

Exo said some of the framework that Food Alliance has used in past certification programs in the agriculture area will transfer seamlessly to nurseries; others will take a little more work. In the end, the program, in conjunction with Salmon-Safe, will likely set standards in everything from soil and water conservation to working conditions.

Those nurseries who choose to become certified, and who market that difference well, are likely to see tangible, “get-on-the-shelf, stay-on-the-shelf” advantages with customers, Exo said.

“If you’re ahead of the curve because you’ve undergone certification, you’re at much less risk of losing out to someone who’s already done it,” he said.

The program is currently pursuing funding and is scheduled to begin taking more definite shape later this year.

The sustainability initiative also includes a market research component to identify not only whether there is consumer demand for sustainable plant products — “It’s clear that the consumer is becoming increasingly interested in how goods and services are produced and delivered,” Aguirre said — but how

NEED BARK?

Douglas Fir bark for containers and mixes in 3/4 minus and 3/8 minus sizes. Contact Rex at REXIUS for pricing at 541-335-8017 or toll free 888-4-REXIUS.

REXIUS

Sustainable Solutions

ask about our custom soil blends

address 1275 Bailey Hill Road,
Eugene OR 97402
phone (888) 4-REXIUS
fax (541) 343-4802



**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 800.342.6401

MIDAS

NURSERY SOLUTIONS, LLC

DESIGNING NURSERIES OF THE FUTURE

*Sometimes all you need are the
simpler quality tools...*



Attalink Tying Units



GreenElf Applicators



Quality Hand Shears

*...see better Results.
Trust the Experts to help!*

www.MidasNurserySolutions.com

TEL: 503-628-3059

Hillsboro, OR

OVS

We Sell Solutions

Equipment solutions for nurseries

Work Smarter, Not Harder!



For containers and field...

- Kubota and McCormick tractors
- Nursery trailers
- Sprayers
- Conveyor systems

High Speed Pruning Machines

- Wurdinger Mowing Deck
- Wiesner ShapeMaker 1500



Potting Machines

- Let OVS help you design a system for your unique needs
- Javo...the leader in potting technology



much Oregon growers already know about and incorporate sustainability.

And finally, the initiative includes an OAN sustainability summit, initially scheduled for October 13, 2010.

Better in the long run

Driving the OAN's sustainability initiative is a combination of market trends, member interest and business strategy. But there's more to it than that.

For one, Aguirre said that there's been talk in the marketplace suggesting that shipping plant material across the country from Oregon may not be the most sustainable option. Granted, shipping long distances may ding Oregon on the sustainability front, but if growers here use fewer resources and produce fewer greenhouse gases throughout the growing process than their competitors, that criticism isn't likely to hold water.

"If some people are going to criticize us as unsustainable, we have to address that issue," Aguirre said. "This initiative will help us challenge those kinds of statements."

Zielinski noted, as well, that being proactive about sustainability now — much the way they took steps in the 1990s to improve water recycling — could help prevent any sort of imposing overregulation by the government down the road.

Zielinski noted that the OAN's sustainability initiative will not only provide all members with the tools and resources they need to become more sustainable, but it will also serve to recognize those growers who've already taken steps in the right direction.

"It's a marketing thing, but it's also because we're concerned about our future," he said. "This is in our best interest to help take care of Oregon and keep it what it is — a beautiful place to grow plants." ☺

Jon Bell is a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore. specializing in environmental, business and other topics. He can be reached via his website at www.jbellink.com.

OVS McMinnville
McMinnville, Oregon 97128
Phone: 503-435-2700
Fax: 503-474-0476

OVS Aurora
Hubbard, Oregon 97032
Phone: 971-216-0111
Fax: 971-216-0112

OVS Online
www.ovs.com
800-653-2216