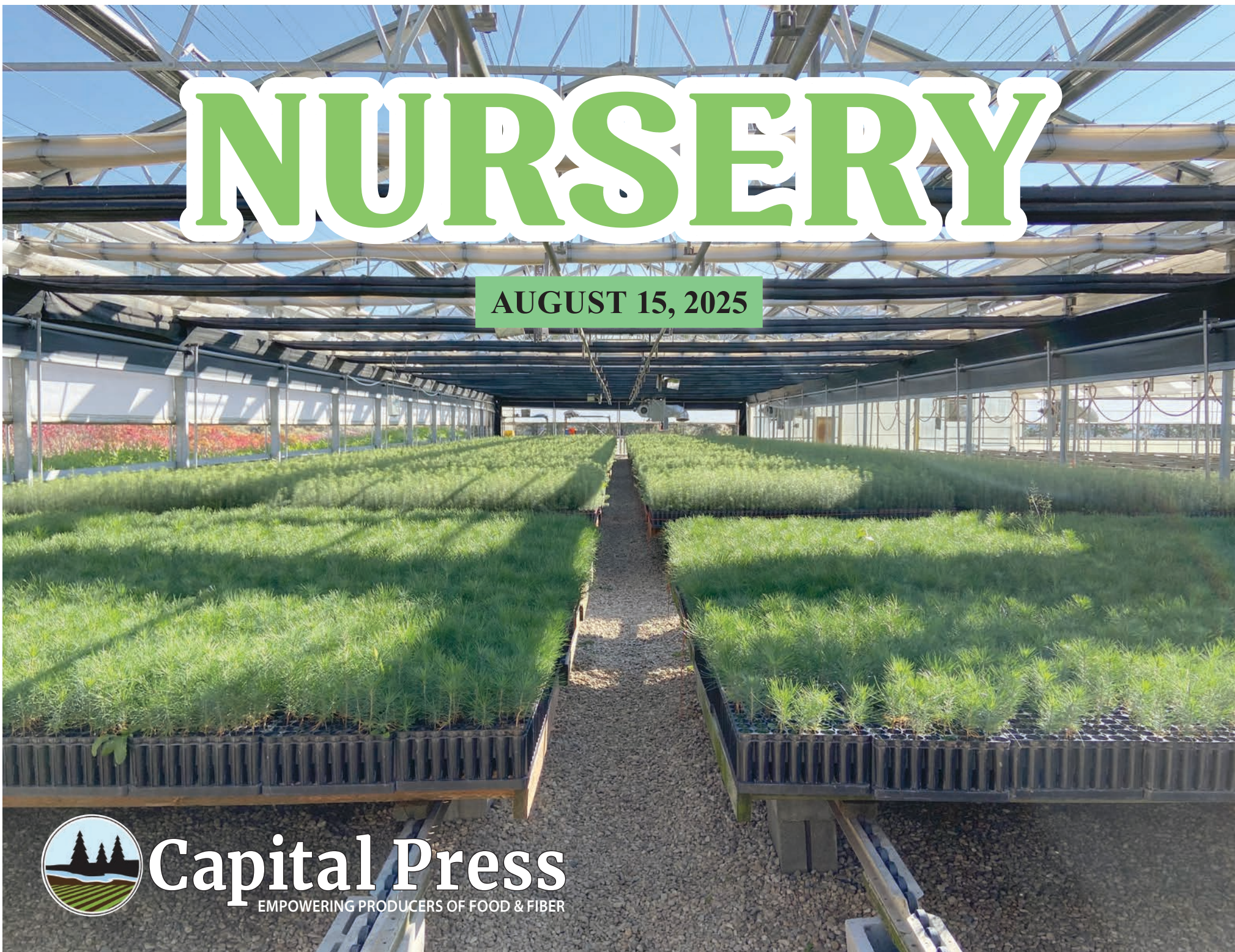
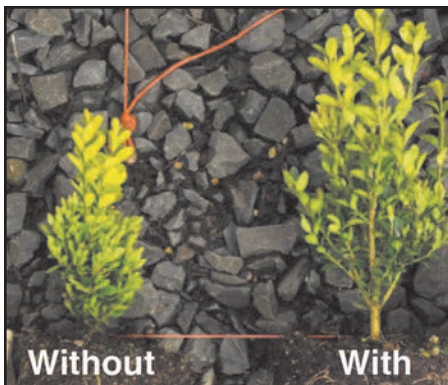


# NURSERY

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# BAXTER WHOLESALE NURSERY SUPPLIES LANDSCAPE TREES FROM SOUTHWEST IDAHO

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS  
For the Capital Press

This tree nursery near Emmett, Idaho is now owned by Matt Wolff. "My uncle, Randy Baxter, started the company in 1972 on 40 acres near Meridian, just west of Boise.

Within a few years, he moved the nursery to Emmett Bench — an area of farm ground just west of Emmett, Idaho. He started growing trees to sell to landscape professionals.

This was one of the first nurseries in Idaho to grow specimen trees and soon expanded to become one of the largest growers in the western U.S.

"I started working for my uncle in the 1990s when I was going to college, then fulltime in 2002. I started buying him out in 2012. This allowed him to retire, and I finished the purchase in 2017."

The nursery has grown to 310 acres. Here in southwest Idaho the seasonal climate and soil composition combine to create ideal conditions for cultivation of hardy, drought tolerant, and beautiful large-caliper trees.

"We plant bare root and containerized trees and grow them in our field for 3 to 5 years. Then we dig, ball and burlap them and ship them throughout the intermountain states and beyond," Wolff says.

This nursery grows more than 60 different varieties of large-caliper deciduous shade trees, flowering trees and evergreens, selling trees to certified nursery and landscape professionals throughout the U.S.

"We sell about 30,000 trees each year, and have about 115,000 trees in the ground growing. The finished product is a specimen tree ready for landscaping. Many nurseries sell young trees to be grown somewhere and transplanted, whereas ours are finished products to go to their permanent places in a landscape."

They are dug with a ball of field soil, wrapped in burlap.

"It takes heavy equipment to



Photos by Courtesy Baxter Nursery

Workers for Baxter Nursery work to harvest trees at the tree nursery near Emmett, Idaho.

move them; they each weigh about 300 to 400 to pounds. About 58% of our trees go to Colorado, another 20% stay here in Idaho and the rest go to Utah, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon and New Mexico. We ship trees with independent freight haulers, generally on flatbed semi-trucks," he says.

"We can only harvest the trees in the spring and fall when they are dormant and do a very large number in a very short period — shipping about 5,000 in the fall and 25,000 in the spring," says Wolff.

Customers usually order ahead of time.

"Most of our booking is done the summer before. We are taking orders right now for this fall and for the spring of 2026. The bulk of these orders will be shipped next spring."

The variety of trees include shade trees, ornamental trees and clump trees with multiple trunks — more like a large shrub.

In the field the trees are watered with gravity furrow irrigation, with



Young trees are shown growing at Baxter Nursery near Emmett, Idaho.

concrete ditches and syphon tubes.

"We have some backup wells on the property and these can service about 80% of our fields if we need to so some irrigation early, or late after the irrigation season ends," he says.

The trees also need to be pruned and cared for. Some of the work is seasonal, but the nursery has 25 fulltime employ-

ees, on average.

"In the spring, for 8 to 10 weeks we bump that up to about 50. We use the H2-A program and bring in workers from Mexico who are experienced. Most of them return year after year. A pruning crew starts the first of May and trims trees through August. Our crews are specialized in what they do."



The Baxter Nursery crew pauses for a photograph in the tree nursery near Emmett, Idaho. The nursery maintains a fulltime crew of about 25 employees and seasonally grows up to 50 workers.



Workers for Baxter Nursery prune trees at the tree nursery near Emmett, Idaho. A pruning crew starts in early May and trims trees through August.

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# BROOKS TREE FARM: STILL GROWING AFTER 45 YEARS

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**

For the Capital Press

It's been 45 years since Dave and Kathy LeCompte established a tree nursery on 25-acres near Brooks; a rural community nestled in the heart of Oregon's Willamette Valley.

"We had been driving truck and taking our young son along, but when he reached school age, we needed something more stable," Kathy said. "I'd been raised on a Christmas tree farm and nursery, so we sold the truck and started a small nursery."

With a booming market, her family was happy to help them get started, providing guidance and loaning equipment.

Today, Brooks Tree Farm is a wholesale nursery producing 7 million conifer seedlings and native Pacific Northwest shrubs annually. It is composed of seven farms totaling 600 acres, plus the original farm which now serves as the hub for plug production, with facilities capable of generating 2 million plugs a year with plenty of onsite freezer storage.

Recent investments in packing operations and office infrastructure allow for the daily processing of up to 300,000 trees. They keep 35 year-round employees, a number that doubles during peak harvest.

The LeComptes' plant material



Photo by Brenna Wiegand

**Kathy LeCompte surveys the greenhouses at Brooks Tree Farm in Brooks, Oregon. The family owned wholesale operation produces 7 million conifer seedlings and Pacific Northwest native plants annually.**

comes into play in large-scale reforestation projects, and Brooks Tree Farm is Oregon's foremost supplier of native plants for stream-



bank restoration.

"Generally, we focus on growing products with multiple uses — like Douglas fir, which serves as both a forestry and Christmas tree," she said. "When local communities requested other native plants like Oregon grape, we expanded beyond our multi-use rule to meet their needs though we've since scaled back these shrubs due to variable demand and the unpredictability in propagating some types."

They also specialize in starter plants for Christmas trees and ornamental purposes and, with seven separate growing sites, can

choose the right soil, elevation and other factors, for the needs of each species they grow.

"The soil here on our home farm turned out to be too heavy so we got out soil maps to find the dirt we wanted and started knocking on doors," LeCompte said.

The region's sandy soils and extended growing season produce robust seedlings suitable for both field and container applications, and their high-elevation sites are ideal for the prized Noble fir.

Big believers in strength in numbers, both Kathy and Dave have served on or chaired numer-

ous committees including Oregon Association of Nurseries' Political Action and Government Relations committees and the Farwest Show board of directors.

Kathy has served at least once in most leadership roles of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, has twice run for the Oregon House of Representatives and has advised governors and U.S. presidents on agricultural policy. She happened to be in Washington, D.C. when the Twin Towers went down.

Dave, son of a state park ranger, has received awards from OAN for his work helping conduct the Far-



west Show. He's also behind the flashy street rods that have come to symbolize the Brooks Tree Farm booth wherever they go and has been president of Willamette Valley Street Rod Association for quite a while now.

Despite its advantages, the LeComptes do not recommend farming on several sites. It's Dave's job to travel between eight sites, spread over a 50-mile radius; a practice he has dubbed "wind-shield farming."

It's a good thing he likes cars.



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# FARWEST SHOW FEATURES OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT, INDUSTRY MOBILIZATION

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Apart from discovering the latest plant selections and “green industry” trends, visitors to this year’s Farwest Show can also find their next career opportunity.

A new “career boulevard” at the show is aimed at current students, recent graduates and those just looking for new jobs in horticulture, landscaping and nursery management.

“It’s really the whole ecosystem of the nursery industry that we are trying to include,” said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, which organizes the show.

The new feature will allow job seekers to receive feedback about their resumés, network with industry professionals, and learn about internships and open positions, but it also offers nursery companies the chance to develop their workforce, he said.

The nursery industry is aging, along with the rest of agriculture, and regularly contends with labor shortages, so it wants “to rebuild our bench” by exposing people to the field’s numerous work possibilities, Stone said.



Capital Press file

**Attendees at the Farwest Show looks at displays at the annual show.**

“We need to advocate for employment in the green industry, rather than just hoping they’ll come,” he said. “We want to get people interested in this as a career.”

Visitors who want to see on-the-ground examples of various innovations can head out of the Oregon Convention Center to attend three tours focused on wholesale growing operations, retail garden centers and cutting-edge automation used

by nurseries.

“There’s a whole bunch of education that happens,” Stone said.

The proximity of the show’s Portland location to the abundance of nurseries in Oregon’s Willamette Valley has long been a strong selling point, with visitors exploring the local industry both on official tours and on their own, he said.

“That’s a great advantage our nurseries have, that accessibility,”

Stone said.

Buyers have increasingly been purchasing nursery stock online, and have been relying more on “just-in-time” re-orders for the past couple of decades, he said.

Though the industry’s “buying tendencies have changed,” the Farwest Show is holding its own, with the opportunity for in-person experiences continuing to draw nursery and garden center operators from around the region and the nation, Stone said.

“The show is still a gem in the West,” he said.

Having so many nursery professionals gathered at the same site is a chance to confront challenges facing the industry, on which organizers hope to capitalize with this year’s “climate summit.”

The event will be spread over two days, beginning in the afternoon of Aug. 20, with researchers discussing such topics as the life cycles and carbon-sequestering capacities of different plants.

The next day, participants will hear from representatives of the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Northwest Power and Conservation Council, among others, followed by a roundtable discussion that will in-

clude audience involvement.

“What do they want from all this?” Stone asked.

For example, nurseries may want to seek more regulatory relief or representation in the “carbon market,” in which companies that help mitigate emissions are compensated for their efforts, he said.

The nursery industry deserves more credit for its positive climate contributions, but recent presidential administrations of both parties have largely set the tone through executive orders and agency rule-making, Stone said.

If nursery operators pull together and identify their priorities for climate action, it will hopefully give them a greater voice steering programs in the next farm bill several years from now, he said.

“It’s not looking at this one but the next one,” Stone said. “That is the one I’m hoping we could build a consensus.”

During recent visits to nurseries, Stone has been discussing the challenges they’re confronting, which he intends to distill into his “state of the industry” presentation at the show.

Though he’s been accused of being an “Eeyore” in past speeches by focusing on problems, Stone

said factors like housing construction and consumer confidence have recently favored the nursery industry overall.

“It does seem on a national scale that people are still spending,” he said.

Of course, the industry is vulnerable to economic downturns along with producers of other “non-essential” products, which people tend to de-prioritize when times get lean, Stone said.

“We’re a luxury item,” he said.

Nurseries have re-adjusted their revenue expectations after sales boomed during the COVID era, when pandemic restrictions kept consumers home and investing in yard projects, he said.

Meanwhile, turbulence with trade and tariffs has been a double-edged sword, Stone said.

For example, a nursery with traditionally heavy sales to Canada has suffered as sentiments there have turned against the U.S., while another company that sells cut flowers has benefited from tariffs that have leveled the playing field, he said.

“We’re seeing it cut both ways on that issue,” he said.



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# MELAD TREE FARM SPECIALIZES IN PROVIDING LARGE TREES

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**  
For the Capital Press

Nathan Melad started Melad Tree Farm in 1992 in Nampa, Idaho and now has three farms, including one in Caldwell.

"We specialize in large-caliber specimen trees and primarily sell to home owners who want instant shade or a beautiful tree — people who either had to remove a tree and want to replace it or just want a big tree and don't want to wait for a small one to grow," he says.

"Most of the trees we sell are from 7 to 25 years old, and range from 5-inch to 14-inch caliber — both deciduous and evergreen. To handle the biggest trees, we have the largest tree spade in Idaho, a 102-inch Big John. Those bigger trees weigh about 20,000 pounds apiece."

People looking for big trees can easily find them here. "We have a strong presence in Google under 'big trees' and 'tree transplanting' and people find us easily online. Many new people are moving into our area and often rely on the internet to search for products," Melad says.

"On our website we have an inquiry page and people can set up an appointment to come look at trees. We can take people around the farm on an ATV and show them trees and they get to pick out their own. Often they have someone

take a picture of them standing next to their tree and take that photo home and call at the space where it will eventually be," says Melad.

"When they tag their tree at the farm, we write up a contract. We dig up and install the trees while they are dormant — October through March. The rest of the year — April through September — we are busy farming, growing the trees. This entails cultivating, irrigating, spraying and pruning. Everything is gravity-irrigated (flood irrigation with furrows and syphon tubes). We are also busy selling trees all summer."

These big trees go as far as Baker City and North Powder, Oregon. We cover the entire Treasure Valley in Idaho. Trees are shipped longer distances on lowboy trailers after we ball and burlap them — with 90 to 102-inch root balls. We have also shipped trees to Utah," he says.

The farm has four big tree-spade trucks. "One is the 102-inch Big John and we have two 90-inch Big John tree-spade trucks, and two 45-inch Big John tree-spade trucks. We also have a 90-inch Big John tree spade mounted on an articulated front-end loader, and a couple of skid-steer tree spades as well."

Everything is custom-done. "We go to the customer's place and dig a perfect hole for the tree with a tree-spade truck.



Photos courtesy Melad Tree Farm

## Three of Melad Tree Farm's four spade trucks that are used to plant large trees are lined up on the farm.

We remove the dirt and bring it back to the farm. Then we dig and deliver their selected tree to their home, (place) it right in the hole and it's a perfect fit," he says.

In recent years the farm has started growing new cultivars that haven't been out on the market yet — trees you can't find at other nurseries. We are now specializing in a lot of nice new cultivars of maples, sweet gum, and oak, such as the red-point maple cultivar from

Schmidt Nursery (J. Frank Schmidt & Son) at Boring, Oregon. We buy all our baby trees from them because they have the latest, greatest cultivars," says Melad.

"We are currently trying to buy another 40 acres and also looking for a production manager and other key employees to help us achieve our goals as we expand. This will be our 33rd year. I love what we do; I love growing trees, and helping people with trees."



Nathan Melad poses for a photograph next to one of the large spade trucks used for planting large trees.



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# OREGON FLOWERS PRODUCES MILLIONS OF FLOWERS A YEAR

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**

For the Capital Press

Schuyler Dunn is a young orchardist near Yakima, Wash.

"Our family homesteaded here in 1876. My great-great-grandfather, Capt. Robert Dunn, came from Scotland and served in the U.S. Army prior to and during the Civil War before coming West on the Oregon Trail," Dunn said.

"My dad farmed with my grandfather. They raised cattle, grain, corn and alfalfa," Dunn said. "In 1980 my father and one of my uncles started an orchard in Zillah. They grew pears and apples, but pulled out the apples in 2002 and replanted just pears. I grew up working on both farms, went to college at WSU and then started working with my dad."

In 2021 he began leasing four small orchards, then added another lease and purchased an orchard.

"I grow only pears because that market is steady. It's tough to make money with apples anymore, and cherries are shaky with the Western X and little cherry disease."

Dunn has several markets for his pears.

"In the past, our Bartlett pears all went to the cannery — Del Monte —



Courtesy Oregon Flowers

**Megan and Tyler Meskers visit a greenhouse with children (left to right) Kase, Vivian, Beckham and Brooklyn. Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Ore., supplies more than 10 million cut flowers a year to customers throughout the U.S. and Canada.**

but now some go to the fresh market pears go to Matson, a fruit company in and some of my D'Anjou and Bosc Selah, Wash.," he said.



**Megan and Tyler Meskers visit a greenhouse with children (left to right) Kase, Brooklyn, Vivian and Beckham. Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Ore., supplies more than 10 million cut flowers a year to customers throughout the U.S. and Canada.**

"The nice thing about the cannery is they are quick to pay. By contrast the fresh market starts paying in January the following year but you could wait a whole year for payment because the fruit is in storage awhile," he said.

"That's one disadvantage to growing tree fruits. Once the fruit is sold, the retailer has a period after delivery in which to pay, then the warehouse eventually gets the payment back to you." All of his leased orchards are in

the Parker Heights area, southeast of Union Gap. His own place has 16 acres of pears. "They are inter-planted, at slightly higher density than the older plantings, so production per acre is good. I have about 64 total acres of pears," Dunn said.

To do all the work required, he has one fulltime hired man and seasonal crews that come for harvest in August-September, and for pruning in winter.

"One family has been doing our pruning for 20 years; they started doing this for my dad and uncle and know the technique we like. They are honest and hard working and do all of our orchards; my dad's orchard is about 50 acres," he said.

"If you manage your trees properly and prune them correctly you don't need to rely as heavily on fertilizer. You also get better air flow and spray penetration. This reduces the need for chemicals and labor-intensive inputs, which in the end saves money," Dunn said.

"My dad is still a big help for my operation; he is the voice of wisdom. He and his siblings worked at a neighbor's orchard when they were in high school. He learned a lot about orchard production and expanded on that when starting his own orchard in partnership with my uncle. He's passed some of those lessons to me in the form of stories and sage advice. I wouldn't be where I'm at right now if it weren't for good family, friends and neighbors — and employees. We also have good crop advisors and chemical advisors," Dunn said.

There are not very many young people today going into agriculture or orchards in particular. A person has to love farming to do it.

"I think the hardest thing right now is that the margin of profit is so much thinner than in grandpa's day and the regulations much worse." Farmers and ranchers must be very efficient, know what they are doing and have some good luck as well.

"One of the challenges with fruit is that it is so labor-intensive and it's hard to keep good labor," Dunn said.

"When my dad was a kid, you could raise a family in a comfortable, middle-class household on just 30 or 40 acres of orchard. That's almost impossible to do, anymore."

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# SPRING CREEK GARDENS RELIES ON BENEFICIAL INSECTS TO FIGHT PESTS

By KYLE ODEGARD

Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — Spring Creek Gardens has about 50 permanent employees, but there also are thousands of beneficial insects working to help the wholesale nursery.

The business brings in parasitic wasps to spread out and attack aphids, cucumeras mites to battle thrips, and californicus mites to prey on problem mites.

"Our main go-to now is biocontrols," said Alex Sanchez, production manager.

Integrated pest management practices such as beneficial insects are critical for Spring Creek Gardens because pests can build resistance to conventional pesticides.

"You can't build resistance to being eaten," Sanchez said.

The nursery also uses natural insecticide sprays that include peppermint oil and clove oil to kill pests.

Renee Phelps, Spring Creek Gardens president and part of the family that owns the business, said the nursery has reduced chemical usage 55% on average since adopting IPM practices.

In its first year about a decade ago, the business spent \$1,500 on IPM. Now its annual budget for IPM methods is roughly \$20,000.

Phelps and Sanchez said the cost of IPM practices and conventional insecticides may be similar, but the business saves money on labor and time.

There's no need to don protective gear and the natural insecticides have zero re-entry requirements, so plants can be handled or even shipped immediately after being sprayed.

Beneficial insects and their eggs also can remain in place during shipping, resulting in more resilient plants for customers at stores.

Phelps said IPM has been steadily growing, and more nurseries are adopting those methods because they care about the environment and reducing chemical usage.

"It's the right thing to do," she said.

Sanchez said workers also feel more comfortable with non-toxic methods of fighting insects.

More companies provide IPM sprays



Photos by Kyle Odegard/Capital Press

**Alex Sanchez and Renee Phelps of Spring Creek Gardens said the wholesale nursery has ramped up its use of beneficial insects. While problem bugs can build resistance to conventional pesticides, "You can't build resistance to being eaten," Sanchez said.**

and bugs than just a few years ago, but Sanchez has to be proactive in planning ahead and ordering beneficial insects.

Thanks to strong relationships, however, he can sometimes receive the tiny predators the same week he purchases them.

Phelps said many biological controls aren't effective in controlling mildew or other fungal infections, so most nurseries still rely on conventional products for those problems.

Spring Creek Gardens sits in a niche market for Oregon nurseries because it

only does bedding plants — the nursery doesn't produce any trees or shrubs.

Among its major clients are Bi-Mart, Fred Meyer and independent businesses such as Jerry's Home Improvement Center in nearby Eugene, Ore., and Springfield, Ore.

"We really cover the whole state and a little bit of Washington," said Becky Peterson, sales manager.

Peterson said the business had produced nearly 61,000 hanging baskets by mid-June, each one with four to eight plants.

Spring Creek Gardens also produces about 650,000 vegetable starts and plants for clients.

Hot peppers have grown in popularity in the past few years, Phelps said.

Overall, the business covers about 20 acres, and 8 acres are under cover with greenhouse structures and hoop houses.

During peak season, which is from March through May, the business can have as many as 80 workers.

"We make 80% of our revenue in 10 weeks," Phelps said.



**By mid-June, Spring Creek Gardens had supplied nearly 61,000 hanging baskets to clients such as Fred Meyer and Bi-Mart stores. The nursery focuses on bedding plants and doesn't do any trees or shrubs.**



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