

Conservation SHOWCASE



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NRCS

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Nurturing Oregon's Nurseries: NRCS and OAN Make Connections for the Future

Boring, Ore. – The 180-acre farmland that makes up the Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery is tucked away in a quiet spot less than two miles outside the Multnomah County line east of Gresham. Accessible via a web of neatly paved back roads, the property is speckled with large puddles that reflect the nearby butte during the brief sunbreaks.

Inside the nursery's large warehouse facility, Hans Nelson & Sons is buzzing with activity, even on this cold June morning. Today, they are hosting the Nursery Production Field Tour for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). District conservationists from NRCS and representatives from the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) have come together from across the state to engage in an open dialogue about NRCS programs and services, and potential opportunities for future partnerships.

Established in 1965 by Hans Nelson, the nursery is now managed by Nelson's two sons, Dan and Jesse. This family business is dedicated to producing flowering and ornamental shade trees for the wholesale market. It is one a number of nurseries in the state that raise trees for shipment throughout the country.

During the tour, NRCS district conservationists discussed the operation's soil, water, and irrigation practices with Nursery Production Manager Jesse

ABOVE: Nursery production manager Jesse Nelson explains bud grafting techniques.



Young potted trees at the Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery

Nelson while searching for ways that Oregon nurseries may partner with NRCS.

As rain started to fall, the group of growers, nursery advocates and district conservationist made their way to an empty greenhouse where Nelson and a nursery employee demonstrated a bud grafting technique by joining one plant selected for its roots and another chosen for its stem.

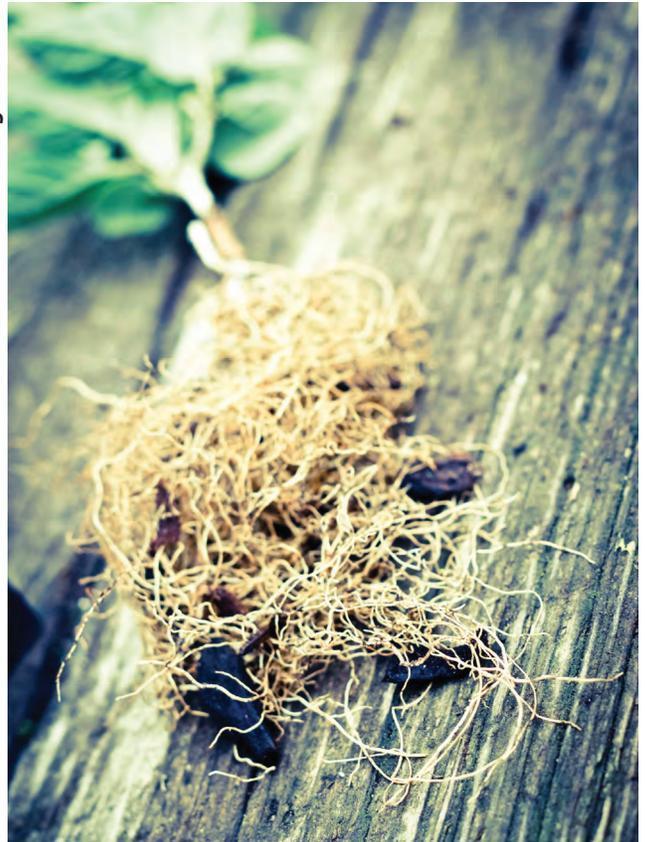
Following the demonstration, discussion turned to irrigation systems. While the family-run nursery uses drip irrigation in their fields, they use a micro-irrigation sprinkler system filtered through sand in their greenhouses. Water conservation practices have remained consistent in recent years because their current systems operates at near maximum efficiency, according to Nelson. OAN's Executive Director, Jeff Stone, noted that nurseries throughout Oregon are innovators when it comes to water quality management.

According to Stone, there are three primary threats to a nursery:—lack of labor, lack of water, and pest and disease—any one of which has the potential to cause significant damage. While Nelson has sanctions in place to counteract these threats, he remains concerned about the one element out of his control: the weather. Not only can it delay the bud stand, but certain weather events like heavy rain can be damaging if pesticides have recently been applied. Snow can pose a problem, too. Hans Nelson & Sons uses chicken coop heaters powered by natural gas or propane to keep the greenhouses warm when freezing temperatures pose a threat to crop health.

Energy conservation and road maintenance remain final opportunities for improvement. Nelson noted that trucks can tear up the roads in and around his property and that the installation of all-weather roads would be a welcome improvement. The cost of county road maintenance adds up quickly when debris builds up on the asphalt over the course of several months. An all-weather road improvement project may provide an opportunity for a partnership between NRCS and Oregon nurseries in the future. Both Stone and Nelson also expressed interest in energy audits to help nurseries improve energy conservation. They noted that upgrading to digital heating systems is just one of a number of conservation practices that have helped local growers save both money and energy.

At the end of the day, nursery advocates and conservationists agreed that success depends on market leaders like Hans Nelson & Sons taking the first step toward conservation improvements. When leaders take risks that pay off, others will follow.

Young tree roots



Drip irrigation in the fields of Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery

