

OREGON AGRICULTURE

Nursery crops again top list of Oregon’s most valuable ag commodities

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

PORTLAND — When it comes to ranking Oregon’s most valuable agricultural commodities, the greenhouse and nursery industry remains king.

The state Department of Agriculture has released its annual list of top 20 crops by value of production for 2020, with greenhouse and nursery products leading the way at \$1.18 billion.

Cattle and calves placed a distant second at \$587.8 million, and third was hay at \$569.1 million.

Rounding out the top 10, in order, are milk, grass seed, wheat, potatoes, winegrapes, cherries and hazelnuts.

Data for the rankings comes primarily from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Other industry estimates are also provided by ODA, Oregon State University, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Wine Board.

For Oregon’s greenhouses and nurseries, 2020 marked the second straight year with at least \$1 billion in sales.

Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, said getting to this point was a long time coming after the industry was ravaged by the Great Recession in 2008. The housing crisis and declining consumer confidence created what Stone described as “a perfect storm of economic calamity” for the industry.

“We lost one-third of the nurseries in the state,” Stone said. “We saw really good nurseries that had not made poor business decisions evaporate, because there was no market.”

In 2019, ODA initially valued greenhouse and nursery production at \$955.1 million before revising that estimate to \$1.06 billion. Last year saw another 11% increase, which Stone said was due in part to greater interest in gardening and home improvement projects during the pandemic lockdown.

Hay and cattle swapped places in the 2020 rankings, though both saw declines in value from 2019 of approximately 16% and 6%, respectively. Overall, hay production was down by 386,000 tons while the inventory of cattle and calves was down by 30,000 head, according to USDA figures.

Just cracking Oregon’s top 10 commodities were cherries and hazelnuts, which saw significant gains in 2020. Cherries increased 78% in value over 2019. Hazelnuts also had a record year in 2020, with growers harvesting 63,000 tons of nuts compared to 43,000 tons in 2019, to a 57% increase.

OREGON’S TOP 20 AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES

The Oregon Department of Agriculture and USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service have compiled the state’s top 20 agricultural commodities by value for 2020.

Greenhouse and nursery — \$1.18 billion

Cattle and calves — \$587.8 million

Hay — \$569.1 million

Milk — \$557.3 million

Grass seed — \$458.3 million

Wheat — \$273.7 million

Potatoes — \$216.8 million

Winegrapes — \$157.9 million

Cherries — \$133.8 million

Hazelnuts — \$132.3 million

Blueberries — \$119.6 million

Onions — \$118.6 million

Christmas trees — \$106.9 million

Pears — \$97.5 million

Corn, grain — \$77.5 million

Hops — \$74.8 million

Eggs — \$72.9 million

Dungeness crab — \$72.6 million

Sweet corn — \$41 million

Apples — \$39.2 million

Boosting safety

OTEC using virtual reality to share safety education messages

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative became the first electric company in the nation to use virtual reality technology to share safety education messages with the public.

This move helped start a high-tech campaign that today is gaining momentum. The virtual reality videos OTEC produced in 2018 have been so well received that plans are being made to produce more in the future, according to Joe Hathaway, the cooperative’s communications coordinator.

“We are trying to take our education a step further,” he said.

Plans will soon be developed, Hathaway said, to produce additional virtual reality videos about electrical power safety at home, in the workplace and in other venues. These will complement the two virtual reality safety videos OTEC has already produced to educate first responders about how to protect themselves when in the presence of fallen electrical lines and another aimed at helping farmers to work more safely when in the presence of power lines.

La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell said the virtual reality videos for first responders are valuable in helping law enforcement officers learn how to better work safely around downed power lines.

“I commend OTEC for using technology to show how to respond to hazardous situations,” he said.

Bell said law enforcement officers are often the first to arrive at the scene of live electrical lines that have been thrown to the ground by strong winds or after a motorist has crashed into a power pole.

“We encounter down power lines with a lot more frequency than people are aware of,” he said.

Nick Vora, emergency manager for Union County and a La Grande Rural Fire Department firefighter, also



Dick Mason/The Observer

Charlie Tracy, left, director of engineering at Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, provides guidance to Nick Vora, Union County’s emergency manager, as he tries OTEC’s virtual reality training on Sept. 30, 2021.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Lea Hoover, right, director of administration and strategic services with Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, on Sept. 30, 2021, watches an OTEC virtual reality safety training with a headset while Charlie Tracy, OTEC’s director of engineering looks on.

said he is impressed with the work OTEC has done to create the safety videos.

“The downed power line training videos that OTEC has developed really demonstrate its commitment to ensuring the overall safety of the communities they serve,” he said.

Vora said virtual reality videos make it possible to

MORE INFORMATION

The Golden Shovel Agency of Minnesota produced OTEC’s seven virtual reality videos, and production of the videos was sponsored by Federated Rural Electric Insurance. OTEC’s VR videos can be seen on its website, www.otec.coop. People interested in having safety presentations using the virtual reality headsets should call OTEC in La Grande at 541-963-3115 or in Baker City at 541-523-3743.

paced learning methods,” he said.

Vora also said virtual reality training addresses an important need because many first responders are volunteers who work diverse hours.

“The VR headset training is an effective conduit to deliver consistent training to first responders who may have difficulty finding time to attend traditional classroom-based training,” he said. “This is especially relevant for agencies staffed by volunteers with varying work and life schedules.”

Anyone putting on a headset takes a dive into the

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Survey: Workers prioritize values in job

By **SUZANNE ROIG**
The Bulletin

SALEM — Workers value having a job they can be proud of, that is close to home with flexible hours and that has health insurance, according to a survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

Rated the highest by all demographic groups by those surveyed, at 63%, was having a work-life balance, according to the survey.

The second highest workplace feature was health insurance and working with people who the survey respondents respected.

“It’s unsurprising that most people rank earning a good salary as the most important consideration when choosing a place to work and that it is really important to people without a college degree because a good salary can be more difficult for those to come by,” said Amaury Vogel, associate executive director of the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, which conducted the survey Sept. 14-22. “The ranking tells us a little bit more because it makes people choose a few priorities.”

Earning a good salary was a priority for 72% of those participating in the survey who were 30-54 years of age and 64% for



EO Media Group, File

A survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Cetner shows that employees today place a higher value on jobs with flexible hours.

all respondents. While it makes sense that earning a good salary ranks among the top priorities, Vogel said the work-life balance probably was not something workers placed such a high value on 20 years ago.

“Oregonians in the 30-44 age range are more likely than other age groups to have young children and therefore prioritize a flexible schedule, but it’s a bit surprising that those 18-29, who are often just establishing their careers, would prioritize flexible hours.”

When Annis Henson was a

full-time worker, health insurance was a priority for her and her family. The Bend resident worked for Habitat for Humanity as a field staffer prior to retirement. As a worker she valued the collaborative nature of the work and having a supervisor who valued her opinion.

“My work was very satisfying,” Henson said. “I could see results in the work we did.”

The center’s online survey was sent to 1,124 Oregon residents. The survey’s margin of error is 1.7% to 2.9%. The Oregon Values and Beliefs

MORE INFORMATION

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a nonpartisan charitable organization, has partnered with Pamplin Media Group and EO Media Group to report how Oregonians think and feel about various subjects.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is committed to the highest level of public opinion research. To obtain that, the nonprofit is building the largest online research panel of Oregonians in history to ensure that all voices are represented in discussions of public policy in a valid and statistically reliable way. Selected panelists earn points for their participation, which can be redeemed for cash or donated to a charity. To learn more, visit www.oregonvbc.org.

Center is an independent, non-partisan organization.

Looking at the demographics, people of color and white people aligned on what is important about where they choose to work, according to the survey. The top priorities in both groups were earning a good salary, developing skills, flexible hours and feeling appreciated.

Urban Oregonians were more likely than rural residents to believe that contributing to society was ranked as a very important part of their work life. And both groups — urban and rural residents — placed equal importance on where they lived with 42% ranking this as a very important issue.