

Diversification helps company weather changes

By **JANAE SARGENT**
Capital Press

When the housing market crash of 2008 cut the demand for sod in half, Tom DeArmond knew the only way to keep Oregon Turf and Tree successful would be to diversify.

In 2015, the company added 10 acres of hazelnut trees to its 700-acre farm to offset the stagnant sales of sod.

In addition to sod and hazelnuts, the farm grows grass seed, shade trees and pot-in-pot trees.

Oregon Turf and Tree serves the Interstate 5 corridor and southwestern Washington.

The company started growing sod in the 1973 after DeArmond, the company's co-owner, said his father noticed new homeowners' and builders' need for instant

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Tom DeArmond co-owner of Oregon Turf and Tree

lawn gratification.

DeArmond said that during the recession, new houses were going up at half the rate they were before 2008.

While the industry has begun to recover, he said it's still not back to its previous level.

"We don't see the industry getting bigger anytime soon," DeArmond said. "I see (sod) becoming a smaller part of the farm."

Working more efficiently allowed Oregon Turf and Tree to retain 90 percent of its employees after the crash. DeArmond said the business is split evenly into three parts — grass seed, shade

trees and sod — so when sod wasn't doing well he could count on the other products to provide year-round business.

DeArmond said he noticed a big demand for hazelnuts in Asia and invested in growing hazelnuts as a stable product that is a strong crop in the Willamette Valley.

The sod Oregon Turf and Tree has been focused on growing is ryegrass and tall fescue — a drought- and heat-resistant sod that needs less water.

Tall fescue requires less frequent irrigation and tolerates partial shade better than other sods, he said. DeArmond said there has been

an evolution in drought-resistant sod over the last 30 years.

While DeArmond said the company is diversifying and may reduce sod production, he stressed the importance of grass and sod to families and their communities.

"Grass is sometimes regarded as non-essential because it doesn't feed animals or produce water but there are a lot of benefits to it," he said. "Two hundred feet of grass provides a family of four enough oxygen for a day."

Oregon Turf and Tree is in its third generation of family owners. DeArmond co-owns the company with his siblings, Brett, Tom and Linda. DeArmond's father is also still active in the company.

DeArmond is already getting the fourth generation around the company, bring-

ing his 3- and 5-year-old children out to the farm.

"They just think it's a big playground here," he said.

DeArmond said he plans to continue to diversify and

grow the hazelnut production in the future.

"Diversity has always been a focus of ours and will continue to be," DeArmond said.

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