



Aliya Hall/Capital Press

Treco Inc. in Woodburn, Ore., was started in 1941 by Brent Smith's grandparents.

Nursery specializes in fruit, nut rootstock

By ALIYA HALL
Capital Press

WOODBURN, Ore. — Brent Smith is the third-generation of Smiths to operate Treco Inc.

He has worked there since third grade, and finds it rewarding to see how the business has changed.

"It's just being able to keep it successful. We've gone through our hard times, too, like everyone else, and have learned from it, but every year there's some new challenge. We want to stay on the leading edge of things," Smith said.

Treco was founded in 1941 by Smith's grandparents, and initially they produced both 2-year-old fruit trees and rootstock. However, in 2000 Treco focused production strictly on rootstock because it was competing against its customers for orchard tree sales.

Treco is known for its apple rootstock, but has also started to grow hazelnut rootstock, as well as some pear rootstock.

"We have 75 years of experience growing it, and you can't beat this climate. There are other nurseries, but with our soil type and the amount of rain we get, it's ideal," Smith said. "We're very hands-on. Quality is a major

thing, customers will buy our B-grade stock knowing it's as good as others' A-grade. It keeps commercial growers coming back."

Treco's production is known as layering. They plant starter material in the spring and let it grow for a full winter cycle to defoliate. That following spring they will lay the material on the ground and let it send shoots off, which they cover with sawdust to help root.

That following winter, when the plant goes dormant again, they cut off the mother plant's rootstock and sell it.

"Rootstock controls the tree," Smith said. "There's very dwarfing rootstock that goes to garden centers for someone who is going to put a pot on their patio with a little fruit tree, and then there's the other side of the pendulum that is as close to standard trees as you can get."

Rootstock also determines how trees will grow in different soil and climate types.

"We have some from Russia and Poland that are really winter hardy. Then there's rootstock that has some disease resistance. We get a lot of that from Cornell University's Geneva Program," Smith said.

There's a lot more differ-

ence in apple rootstock than people think, according to Smith. His Geneva rootstock comes in crooked with spines that aren't easily propagated until it's in the orchard; older rootstocks grow straight with distance between the nodes and some that root better than others.

"They all have their little quirks. There is a ton of difference; no two rootstocks are the same. All have different characteristics," said Smith.

Treco was able to recover quicker than most nurseries after the 2008 recession, even though it had just gone through a hit from the fruiting industry in 2000. That dip in the market was due to producers' dependence on one apple — Red Delicious — that was overproduced, according to Smith.

However, the fruit market began recovering before the 2008 recession hit, which allowed Smith to ride it out.

"We saw a dip, but we didn't see the big recession like the other nurseries did; we recovered a lot quicker. We just hunkered down and waited for it. It helped being on the food side," he said.

In the future Treco will be focusing on the hazelnut market and finding that next edge to stay ahead.



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