

Nursery blossoms as farm diversifies

By **DESIREE BERGSTROM**
Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — What began as a way for Diane Wavra to stay at home with her children has blossomed into a booming nursery business.

“The nursery was started basically as a way for me to stay home with the kids,” Diane Wavra of Wavra Farms and Nursery says, standing near the retail counter in the front of the farm’s greenhouse. Colorful hanging baskets line the nearby paver stone aisles from above, as she explains the nursery’s 18-year history.

“For a fun activity with the kids, I wanted a little tiny greenhouse,” Wavra says. Her husband, Dan, ended up surprising her with a much bigger greenhouse, where the kids had a playground in the back and she could have her plants in front. Over the years, the operation has expanded three times to reach its current size. She currently has 30,000 square feet of indoor growing space and about an acre outdoors.



Desiree Bergstrom/Capital Press

Diane Wavra and her husband, Dan, are the owners and operators of Wavra Farms and Nursery in Salem, Ore.

The Wavra family started out growing cannery crops. Over the years they have expanded to also grow nursery and seed crops and hazelnuts. They recently began an egg business as well and now have 180

chickens and 135 ducks that produce eggs that are sold to restaurants and grocery stores in the Salem area.

The nursery is known for its many hanging baskets — around 3,000 each year — that Wavra plants herself.

“I do almost all of my own baskets. ... I am really picky on what goes in my baskets,” she says. The nursery staff consists of Diane, Dan and three part-time employees.

When she first started, Wavra almost exclusively grew wholesale for some of the big nurseries in the area.

However, ultimately, she decided retail was a better fit.

“With wholesale, you never exactly know what other people are going to want. When I am retail I can gauge my customers,” she says. “When I did wholesale ... if a nursery was having an off week, they wouldn’t order, so it just gave me extra product.”

Wavra says some people believe operating a nursery isn’t a year-round job, but for the nursery to have inventory during the retail season, Wavra begins planting plugs in early January.

“We grow 95 percent of the annuals. I will ship in maybe 5 percent of our annuals, just to get a broader spectrum,” she says. “On the peren-

nials I am up to growing probably 75 percent of my own. Everything is from start to finish.”

As a former teacher, kids are important to Wavra.

“We are geared towards kids. ... We offer classes for the schools during the school year. In the spring we have three different classes that the teachers can pick from,” Wavra says.

In one class at the farm students learn about plants and how they get the nutrients they need. In other classes student learn about worms or about birds. Following all of the classes the students get time to go to the petting zoo.

While Wavra doesn’t see the greenhouse expanding in the near future, she does see the farm continuing to diversify.

“I am hoping in the next five years that we have possibly an organic produce stand as well,” Wavra says. “Just to be able to bring in our experience with the vegetable crops already.”

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