

COVER STORY

NURSERIES

# A culture of clean

In taking a look at how forests work, the Oregon Environmental Council thought it would be prudent to also study trees at their earliest stages.

That's why the OEC, in a three-year study that ended in 2012, encouraged 14 nurseries to adopt new carbon-neutral practices. In the Climate Friendly Nurseries Project, OEC and the Oregon Association of Nurseries examined whether lowering greenhouse gas emissions can spur greater economic efficiency and profitability.

The results were encouraging. Participating nurseries slashed their greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent. And of the participants that reported revenue to the two groups, none revealed losing any money on the efforts.

One nursery, J. Frank Schmidt and Son



OREGON ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

Sam Doane of J. Frank Schmidt and OEC's Allison Hensey talk irrigation.

Co. of Boring, reduced its fertilizer bill by as much as 50 percent through such proven sustainable cultivation methods as fertigation and cover cropping.

Jeff Stone, executive director and CEO of the Oregon Association of Nurseries said the company uncovered a correlation between lower greenhouse gas emissions and operational savings.

"The 20 percent reduction in carbon meant they were managing costs better," he said. "They became more efficient with fuel use, they changed inputs on a variety of different fronts. We found that pursuing carbon-neutrality is both the right thing and the economical thing for nurseries to do."

The study is the first to examine nurseries' greenhouse gas activity.

Oregon's nurseries grow millions of seedlings each year. Oregon ships more such items outside its borders than any other state. Many help nurture seedlings that are eventually used at Christmas tree farms as well as by such civic groups as Portland's Friends of Trees.

OEC and the nurseries examined such factors as energy use on stationary and

## OREGON'S FORESTS, BY THE NUMBERS

**28M**

Roughly the number of acres of forestlands in Oregon, almost half of the state's overall acreage

**85,600**

The number of workers in Oregon's forest service sector

**14,000**

Number of jobs lost in Oregon's forest services sector since 2007, a 14 percent decline.

**\$527M**

The amount of income lost since 2007 in Oregon's forest sector industries.

**3.7%**

Oregon's share of the U.S.'s total forestland.

**12%**

The forest sector's contribution to Oregon's GDP in 1963.

**9%**

The forest sector's contribution to Oregon's GDP in 2009.

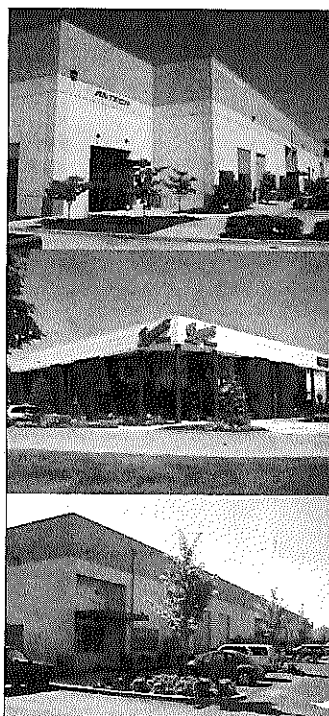
mobile equipment, purchased electricity, fertilizer use, freight transport, and on-site and off-site waste disposal.

If nothing else, the study showed nurseries also established a firm grasp on their resource-related costs. Having such data close at hand helped tree farms make better purchasing decisions, which led to reduced overall operational costs.

"We found that achieving good up-front results wouldn't be cost-prohibitive," said Allison Hensey, the Oregon Environmental Council's food and farms program director. "Some of these (nurseries) were figuring this out for the first time. And we're now able to share it so that others can adopt these practices."

The strategies include adding more efficient lighting, better monitoring moisture to conserve water use and, installing more energy efficient drip irrigation systems.

- Andy Giegerich, @SBOAndy



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