

## Position Paper for Nursery, Landscape, and Ornamentals

1. The Washington nursery industry, comprised of growers, retailers, installers and maintainers of ornamental and edible plants in landscapes, has an economic impact of \$3.2 billion dollars on the State's economy. Its raw agricultural value ranks as the seventh largest commodity in the State. Because much nursery stock is imported to the state, there is room for growth in the sales of Washington grown products. Most nursery products produced in Washington are sold in Washington, though there are several large exporters of rhododendron, bamboo, fruit tree saplings, and other plants. The Washington nursery industry is a national leader in the organic/sustainable movement in recognition that it is a strong part of the solution to climate change.

2. The nursery industry sector, with producers located in all regions of the State, has the ability to produce nursery products that are suitable for a wide range of environmental conditions from the arid areas of eastern Washington to the rain forests of the west coast. Expansion of nursery producers will increase that capability in the future as nursery products are increasingly viewed as high value agriculture contributing to environmental benefits. Those benefits of nursery products include carbon sequestration, oxygen production, soil stabilization, sound buffering and aesthetic satisfaction.

Agricultural nursery producers and horticultural businesses benefit from the clean and relatively inexpensive hydro-energy in our state. For growers in more urbanized areas, municipal and regional water utilities need to provide access to water for crops even in water-stress years. For rural producers, agricultural exemption from full or partial relinquishment of water rights would provide stability for an essential input for growers.

Thanks to expositions such as the Northwest Flower & Garden Show, Washington has a sophisticated market for high value horticultural products and services. The trend, begun in the western part of the state, is moving to the newer developing areas east of the Cascades. The expansion of farmers markets has created another marketplace for farm-to-market sales of horticultural products, including living plants and cut flowers. Small producers may sell product locally in keeping with current trends and market demands.

3. Washington producers have many opportunities that may be acted upon now in order to keep the industry profitable. Currently there have been joint efforts with universities to develop techniques and varieties of plants, as well as educational opportunities such as the baccalaureate program at WSU conducted at the Puyallup research facility. Education and communication are tools to promote the forward thinking essential to long-term success of the industry. Continuing education is available through non-profits such as the Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association, the International Society of Arborists, the Perennial Plant Society, University Botanical Gardens and others. WSU extensions have been working with industry members to provide valuable education as well as research on pests, diseases, turfgrasses, urban tree varieties, and top performing western fruit tree varieties. The Washington State Department of Agriculture's Nursery Advisory Committee considers allocation of nursery surcharge funds for research for the industry. In any given year funding is provided to assist at least eight research projects. In the ever-changing ornamental horticulture industry, these collaborations serve to provide industry members information and forecasting that help to keep producers and horticultural businesses viable.

4. There are multiple challenges to a strong nursery industry in Washington. Economic down-turns are particularly damaging to the nursery industry because horticultural products are often seen by the consumer as a luxury. High petroleum prices raise the costs not only of transportation, but also of production supplies such as fertilizers, pots, flats, labels, greenhouse plastics, and shade cloth, and strike at the core of the financial potential for producers. Land use regulations and tax structures challenge success for industry members. Local land use regulations that require multiple special studies prior to permitting a state-exempt greenhouse structure because of state storm water regulations can make the difference between viable or failing nursery businesses. County conservation easements as proposed by Snohomish and other counties prevent profitable operation of some nursery businesses.

5. The Legislature can support the environment for agriculture with respect to the nursery and green industry in a variety of ways. Statewide exemptions or easing of land use regulations for grower and nursery operations through Growth Management Act revisions or other preemptive laws would give agriculture an even playing field across the state, as opposed to the myriad of county and municipal regulations now imposed. The State could mandate a uniform template for purchase of conservation easements and purchase of development rights that would help protect existing agricultural land. The State could mandate that each county have a farmland tax classification to protect growers from exorbitant taxes based on "highest and best use" provisions used by regional taxing entities. The State can refrain from imposing conflicting rules and regulations through its agencies by analyzing and coordinating the different agency rules on the same topic or pursuit. The State could expand its apprentice support program to include horticultural and green industry apprenticeships. The State could establish grants or scholarships for prospective growers or green industry professionals to evaluate viable business options and opportunities. The State could create a variable minimum wage to help growers stay competitive with other states that seek to import cheaper products to Washington. The State can refrain from exacerbating the abysmal labor situation for all of agriculture by encouraging rational immigration reform by whatever means at its disposal.