

# Countryside & Fairdale Nurseries

An optimistic outlook and sound approach have served owner Jim Farley well



Jim and Adam Farley

## Countryside Nursery and Fairdale Nursery

**Founded:** Fairdale in 1962, Countryside in 1991

**Principals:** Jim and Adam Farley

**Known for:** Japanese maples, grafted conifers, broadleaves, and flowering shrubs, sold as field-grown and container material to retailers and landscapers, both locally and nationally

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**A**s nursery owner Jim Farley discovered early on, a difficult economy need not be an obstacle to success.

In 1979, the economy suffered under the weight of what economists called “stagflation.” Consumers lost purchasing power, markets were subdued, and financing a new business was difficult. That’s when Jim purchased Fairdale Nursery.

“It was a tough time to get started, because of the recession,” Jim said. “You had a 22 percent prime interest rate.”

For the first five years, the business ran lean due to the lack of available financing. “I had to rely on my own resources, and I did,” Jim said.

But he knew he was building a strong foundation based on quality, service and responsiveness to customer needs. When the economy improved, he was ready to capitalize.

In the 1990s, he expanded Fairdale and purchased a second nursery, which he renamed Countryside Nursery. Both nurseries experienced strong growth

and market success in the years that followed. However, Jim has never forgotten the lessons from his early days. In fact, he and his co-owner, son Adam Farley, apply them every day.

“We grow our own seedlings, we do our own grafting, and we do our own cuttings,” he said. “It’s helped us during the recession. We’ve managed to remain debt free. That’s something I feel a little more comfortable about.”

## Early days

Jim grew up in Portland, but he did not grow up in the nursery industry. His dad was a patent attorney; his mother, a homemaker. “I never thought that I’d get into this industry,” he said. “It was the furthest thing from my mind.”

After high school, Jim attended college at the University of Hawaii, majoring in finance. The school was able to attract quality professors due to its location, and he enjoyed the islands’ abundant opportunities for boating, surfing and fishing.

In these pursuits, one quickly learns to respect the ocean, get a read on con- ▶

ditions, and capitalize. The same principles can apply to the business environment.

After graduation, during a job search, Jim interviewed at Oregon Bulb Farm in Aurora (now defunct). The owner needed someone to create an accounting and finance system for the business. It was a minimum wage offer, but Jim saw the potential.

"It turned out to be a very good thing for me," he said.

Over a period of years, he rose to the position of general manager and found that he really enjoyed working in horticulture.

"People are very generous and hardworking," Jim said. "It's a pleasure to be around, and it sets a higher standard of personal responsibility."

After an ownership change, Jim continued on, but things weren't the



The offerings at Countryside Nursery include *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Verdonii' and *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana Gracilis' on standard (both shown in 10-gallon containers). PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



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same. He started looking for his next opportunity. Around this time, a friend told him nearby Fairdale Nursery, in Wilsonville, was on the market.

Jim purchased Fairdale and 25 acres, and went to work for himself. He began with B&B production, but soon added containers so that he could sell products throughout the year.

In 1989, Jim added 100 acres. Two years later, he expanded container production there and added a pot-in-pot production area. He also purchased the former Oki Nursery near Aurora and renamed it Countryside Nursery. It would eventually become the larger of his two businesses.

Countryside was set up to run independently of Fairdale, but the two share many customers. Orders from both nurseries are invoiced separately, but

can be combined in one shipment.

In 2003, Jim added 40 more acres to the 66 that were already part of Countryside. Today, the companies have 271 acres in production, and they employ 35 full-time and 25 seasonal employees, combined.

"We've simply expanded as we had staff that could take care of the plants as we wanted them to, so the quality could stay the same," Jim said.

### Diverse offerings

Today, Countryside and Fairdale are very diversified in their offerings. They ship to customers in 35 states, including the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, the Rockies and California, plus Canada.

The plants grown include broadleaf material, flowering shrubs, conifers and Japanese maples. They grow main-

stream selections as well as some pretty specialized ones. They also offer living Christmas trees in containers and B&B.

"We grow over 400 varieties of plants, so we're pretty diverse," Jim said. "Most of our orders are small. We cater to people who don't need a huge order of anything."

Customers are mainly retailers and landscapers, both small and large. There's no minimum order, but to make shipping economical, customers should fill at least five feet of truck space. Shipping takes place throughout the year.

"We're big enough that we can get around to most parts of the country pretty regularly, and we do," Jim said.

Countryside and Fairdale will also do custom propagation for customers, as well as liners. One of their most unique offerings is the TimeSaver line ▶



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of trees in 5-gallon containers. "They're quite large liners," Jim said. "People wanted to start off faster so they could finish faster." Demand has been strong.

For landscapers and other customers based in Oregon and Southwest Washington, Countryside also has a sales yard, where the buyer can come by and select their own plants. About 70 percent of the material here is grown by Countryside or Fairdale, and the rest is from other growers.

**Looking to the future**

In recent years, Jim's son, Adam Farley, has taken on an increasing role in the business. Currently, he is in charge of sales in California, but he has also worked in propagation, production, facilities and the sales yard.

"I've worked in every department of the nursery, done a little bit of everything," Adam said.

Jim had a rule that his children had to work elsewhere first before they could go to work at the family business. "Adam's the only one who decided to come back," he said.

If you ask Adam, he wouldn't want to be anywhere else. He earned a math degree from the University of Oregon, later going to work for IBM as a programmer.

"It just didn't suit me," Adam said. "I wanted to come back here. There's really nothing else like it."

Adam, who will one day take over, believes in the same "customer first" philosophy as his father.

"Our customers have things they need, and it's our job to provide them," Adam said. "No excuses. They have their own issues. Our job is to provide service and solve problems."

Service and quality remain the top priorities at Fairdale and Countryside, because they earn customer loyalty.

"We've always stood behind our products," Jim said. "It's pretty much a no-questions-asked kind of a deal. When you're honest with your customers, your customers are usually real honest with you. That philosophy has worked really well for us." ©

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