

Profile of Jim Marshall, Suncrest Nurseries



Suncrest Nurseries is one of the oldest nurseries in California. First established in 1878 as Leonard Coates Nurseries, it was acquired by Stan Iversen and investors in 1989. The wholesale nursery specializes in California native plants and more unusual plants, with over 3,000 varieties in production at any given time.

“One of the long-term objectives was to make our water system more efficient... Just purely looking into the future and seeing that groundwater would become regulated at some point.”

larger potted plants. Low-pressure sprinklers are used on the smaller potted plants and the sprinkler system is optimized so that water is distributed uniformly. In addition, the irrigation system is automated, allowing for greater control over the application of water to specific areas. They have also installed a network of underground drains and surface ditches that collect drainage water and surface runoff. The recaptured tailwater is collected in a pond at the lowest point of the property, filtered, and mixed with well water before being reapplied. This “closed loop” system cut their consumptive water use in half and reduced the amount of fertilizer that needs to be applied. Marshall is currently experimenting with sub-irrigation mats that could decrease water use even further.

Manager Jim Marshall has brought a conservation ethic to the business. Suncrest has reduced its water use significantly, while increasing production, through a number of on-farm system improvements. Drip irrigation is installed on the



“When you use as much water as you have to in a business like this, you should be conserving it [but]... saving water still has to be a rational process to a grower, you know, what is it worth?”

Marshall believes that water supply challenges can be dealt with locally. “We really felt like one of the strongest means of keeping our watershed viable was through conservation. The agency [Pajaro Valley Water Agency] took a different tact and put a lot of emphasis on a pipeline to bring Central Valley Project/State Water Project water to the area. That met with a lot of resistance locally.” The work of Marshall and others in the area has stalled proposals to tap into the state’s large water infrastructure projects thus far.