

WIGHT NURSERIES: SPECIALIZING IN EVERGREENS



Fifty miles of sprinklers water Wight's container stock in the fields.

Wight Nurseries, located near Cairo, Georgia, grows 250 acres of container grown stock and 125 acres of field grown stock. "Containers make up the vast majority of our stock, we have over five million," says John Wight Jr., president of the company. "You get 30,000 plants per acre in cans while you only get about four or five thousand in the field."

Wight is a wholesale nursery, specializing in evergreens. About 60 percent is broadleaf evergreens while the remaining 40 percent is coniferous.

The nursery requires approximately 225 full time employees. Because they are far enough south, seasonal turnover is quite small, not over 10 percent.

Sixty-five tractors and 14 pick-up trucks are included in the equipment inventory. Most of the tractors are under 35 hp and about 55 of them

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are used for pulling wagons. Four hundred wagons are used for moving the container stock around. Each wagon holds 361 cans and the wagons are usually pulled in tandem, two to a tractor. Equipment replacement includes about five pick-ups and 10 to 15 tractors a year.

Most of the irrigation system is permanent set, except for some in the field, according to Wight. "It is in



Acres of plants are grown under plastic.

beds 100 ft. wide and there's a row every 100 ft. We've probably got 50 miles of rows," he estimates. Water comes from eight lakes on the property and three deep wells that give 700 gallons per minute. All of the containers are irrigated with an inch of water every other day.

Equipment maintenance at the nursery is limited. The heavier jobs are sent to shops. "Equipment quality is good," says Wight, "The price has just gone up, up, up. We're buying all American-made tractors now and they are about 150 percent up from what we were buying them for six or eight years ago."

Most of the chemicals necessary are purchased near the beginning of the year. "In some instance we get bids on large quantities and base it on a year's supply," Wight says. "Lesser quantities we just buy when needed."

Containers are probably the major expense at Wight Nurseries. "We're using primarily one supplier," according to Wight, "and are spending a great deal with them, probably over half a million dollars."

Ninety-five percent of the plants are shipped by refrigerated semi. They are mainly shipped east of the Mississippi River, with occasional shipments into Arkansas and Texas. March and April are the nurseries' biggest months for shipping. We probably ship 40 percent then, says Wight. November through February, we have very little going into the North, but we also ship into Tampa and Jacksonville, Florida, New Orleans and other areas where there's no frost." About forty percent of the northern shipments go in August and September.

"We don't own our own trucks," Wight says, "and we have to compete with Florida produce. If they have a perishable item, they'll outbid you for trucks and then you get into a hell of a problem."

Advertising is done on the back page of "Nursery Business" and a couple of other trade papers with full page ads on occasion.

As far as trends in the nursery business, Wright predicts: "The big ones are going to get bigger. It's getting much more competitive and will continue to do so." **WTT**

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