

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

January 2019

Special points of interest:

◆ Future Meeting Sites

The NHVTCTA is always looking for possible sites to hold our Summer and Fall meetings. You don't have to have the perfect farm: there's no such thing, and besides, any "issues" on your farm just give the group more to talk about and learn about. We plan the agenda planning and help with the logistics; all you need is a willingness to host your fellow farmers for a day.

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Winter Meeting at Vermont Farm Show

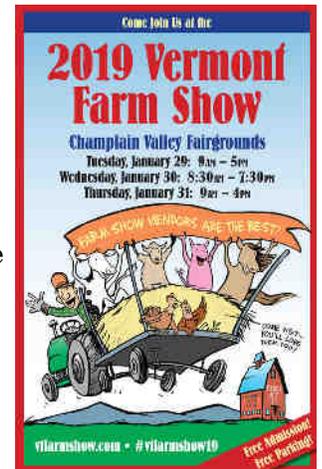
The 2019 Winter Meeting of the New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association will be held on Tuesday, January 29, at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Junction, Vt., in conjunction with the Vermont Farm Show.

There will be the annual tree display/competition, so if you are able, please bring a tree to the meeting—it's a great way to help promote our industry.

Following the morning business meeting, we will hold our annual "Sales and Marketing Update" roundtable. This is always a valuable time to learn about and share what trends are being seen when it comes to marketing and selling Christmas trees, whether it's wholesale, retail, or choose-and-cut. Find out (and tell others) what's hot, what's not, are prices rising or falling, how is consumer demand changing, etc.

After a sometimes dry and sometimes wet growing season, 2018 finished with some hellish weather just in time for sales season (see Editor's Note, page 2). With all of that in mind, we'll hear from Joshua Faulkner with the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture about how climate change is impacting farming in this part of the

country. Will things be warmer and wetter? Will we need to change the species of trees we grow and how we grow them?



After lunch, we'll be joined by Jim Corliss with the Christmas Tree Promotion Board, who will provide an update on that national program in advance of the upcoming re-vote in April that will determine whether the check-off program will be reauthorized.

The day will conclude with another valuable member-to-member sharing session, this one focused on two important topics: labor issues and land leasing. Find out how others have addressed these two challenges, and share any experiences you have had.

Registration for the meeting (without a guaranteed meal) is available onsite if you have not already sent in your registration form. Contact Jim Horst for more information at (802) 447-0660.

President's Message

It was the sales season from hell. That was one description offered at our latest directors meeting of the weather-plagued weeks and months that hammered both wholesale and choose-and-cut growers late in 2018 as they were trying to cut and sell their trees.

On our farm, weeks of wet fall weather got us worried about a muddy parking area, so we ordered 14 yards of crushed slate, which arrived one day before the temperatures dropped below freezing and we got 6 inches of snow. That made spreading the gravel, shall we say, challenging. At least two rounds of wet, heavy snow then followed, burying the trees in the field and weighing down bottom branches, which then froze into the snowpack, making it hard for customers to select and cut their trees. Then our two busiest Sundays featured all-day soaking rains. Sales were great, but the weather meant massive amounts of time spent plowing, sanding, shoveling—and some long, wet, cold days of selling.

By the sounds of it, we got off lucky. Hearing from other NH-VT Christmas Tree Association members, there were tales much worse. Some of

our larger wholesale growers had trees cut and laying in the field when the deep snows came, meaning they had to find thousands of trees under the snow and get these wet (and even heavier) trees out of the field. The rains led to tractors being stuck and fields being deeply rutted, which will mean more time and money spent in the spring on repairs. One member resorted to welding a trailer hitch on the back of a skidder to pull trees from the field when the farm tractor couldn't do it. There were reports of other members who simply couldn't fill all of their wholesale orders because their fields became inaccessible. Then there were numerous reports of how hard it was to keep employees coming back every day to work in the tough conditions. That added further headaches and costs.

While it's encouraging to hear that customer demand remains strong, let's hope 2019's weather proves to be a little easier on everyone. I look forward to seeing everyone at the Winter meeting, which will go on regardless of the weather!

*Patrick White,
President*



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



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Copies of the Association bylaws and policies are available to members at any time by contacting the Executive Secretary.

2019 Tree Line Publication Schedule

| Issue | Ad/Submission Deadline |
|-----------|------------------------|
| January | — |
| June | June 7 |
| September | Sept. 6 |

Real vs. Fake: Environmental Assessment

Editor's Note: I came across this Environmental Assessment of Natural vs. Artificial Christmas Trees prepared by Dovetail Partners (the lead author is Jim L. Bowyer). It is billed as a "Consuming Responsibility Report" and it caught my eye because of all the studies showing that environmental considerations are important to millennials when they decide what products they will (or will not) purchase. This excerpt is food for thought, and good information for us as growers to have.

The question of natural vs. artificial Christmas trees is often a topic of discussion in the popular media as year-end approaches, suggesting more than casual in-

terest in the tradeoffs involved. Among those tradeoffs is environmental impact.

In 2016, 27.4 million natural Christmas trees were sold in the United States, about 9 million more than the number of artificial trees sold (18.6 million). Although more natural trees were sold, the difference in the number of real vs. artificial trees was the smallest ever recorded.

Changing consumer preferences raise a question as to what impact a shift to greater numbers of artificial trees might have on the environment. Which has less impact, natural or artificial trees? The answer is that . . . well, it depends. Which of these choices is environmentally better hinges on such factors as travel

distances from local tree retailer to home, the number of years an artificial tree is kept in service, what happens to natural trees at the end of the Christmas season, and what environmental impact measure is judged to be the most important.

In general, production and use of natural trees results in lower environmental impacts than production and use of artificial trees. However, long transportation distances from tree grower to retailer and retailer to home have a significant impact on a range of impact indicators, and can shift the advantage to artificial trees. Minimizing the environmental impacts of artificial trees requires that they be

Continued on page 4



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| Questions?? Contact Bill Asack evenings 6-8 p.m. | 1-802-754-6934 | | |

Real vs. Artificial: Environmental Assessment (continued)

Continued from page 3

kept in service for a number of years.

Examining the Holiday Tree

Virtually all natural Christmas trees sold in North America are grown within the U.S. or Canada. The vast majority of artificial trees sold are manufactured in China. Transportation distances and modes of transport from point of production to retailer are taken into account when determining life cycle impacts of trees.

The two studies cited in this report – the only two life cycle assessments of natural vs. artificial trees published – both indicate that natural trees result in lower environmental impacts than artificial trees, and most dramatically with respect to global warming potential (GWP). Results also indicate that if artificial trees are selected, they should be kept in service for an extended period. Assuming that the travel distances from retailer to home are the same for both artificial and natural trees, that natural trees are chipped and combusted for energy recovery or taken to landfill at the end of the holiday season, and that GWP is the most important environmental indicator, then an artificial tree must be kept in service for 15-20 years in order to achieve equal environmental impact to an equivalent number of natural trees. When a full range of environmental impact indicators, beyond global warming potential alone, is considered, results indicate that an artificial tree must be kept in service at least 4-6 years in order to

achieve comparable environmental impact to a yearly series of natural trees.

Two Life Cycle Assessments

This report is informed by two life cycle assessments which were published in 2009 and 2010. In these assessments the full life cycles of unlighted natural and artificial trees 6.5 and 7 feet (about 2 meters) in height were examined. As in all life cycle assessments, inputs of all raw materials (including water) and energy were determined, as were all outputs including emissions to air, water, and ground, and final products and co-products.

Natural trees were evaluated from seed to seedling within a nursery, planting and tree cultivation in the field, final harvest, wrapping for transport, transportation to the distribution site and then to locations where trees are used, and disposal upon end of use. For artificial trees, assessment began with production of PVC resin and steel components, forming of PVC needles and tree branches, assembly and packag-

ing of trees, shipment (from China, and from North American port of entry) to retailer, transportation from retailer to location of use, and finally disposal.

A Canadian Assessment

In the 2009 assessment, conducted by the Canadian consulting firm Ellipsos, a life of 6 years was assumed for artificial trees, based on a survey which found this to be the average life of such trees in North America. Natural trees evaluated were assumed to be obtained from a plantation located 93 miles (150 km) from Montreal, Canada for use in that metropolitan area. Artificial trees were assumed to be produced in China and transported via container ship to Vancouver, and then by rail from Vancouver to Montreal. Trees evaluated were 7-feet in height. Fifteen different impact categories were assessed and reported.

This study found greater environmental impact of artificial trees in seven of the fifteen impact categories, greater impact of natural trees in seven

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Real vs. Artificial: Environmental Assessment (continued)

others, and an essentially equivalent result in one more. A key finding was that climate impacts are over 1.5 times greater for artificial trees when the useful life of such trees is 6 years. Because climate change potential was judged to be of primary importance for the general population of Québec province, it was concluded that natural were the preferred option. In fact, a life of 20 years would be needed for an artificial tree to yield climate impacts as low as those of a natural tree.

The validity of the report's conclusions are strongly influenced by transportation distances. If, for instance, the transport distance from retailer to home is 10 miles (16 km) rather than 3 miles (5 km), then it is environmentally better to purchase an artificial tree, assuming a 6-year or longer useful life of the tree. This result is due to the fact that whereas purchase of an artificial tree would require only one round trip from retailer to home in a 6-year period, purchase of natural trees would require 6 round trips in the same time period.

A U.S. Assessment

In 2010 an assessment was done by the Boston-based consulting firm PE Americas under contract with the American Christmas Tree Association. In this assessment, the useful life of artificial trees was variously assumed to be 1, 5, or 10 years. Trees were assumed to be 6.5 feet in height. Natural trees evaluated were Fraser fir, the most preferred species in the U.S. Artificial trees were assumed to be produced in Guangdong, China, with the model of

tree evaluated the most common sold in the U.S. market at the time of the study. As in the 2009 study, all stages in production of natural and artificial trees were evaluated.

Shipment of artificial trees from China was assumed to be via container ship. Transport within North America was assumed to be on trucks. Based on 2007 data, the average haul distance for miscellaneous durable goods from manufacturer or port of entry to merchant wholesalers was 881 miles (1,418 km); this was the assumed truck transport distance from warehouse to retailer used in this study. The round-trip distance from retailer to end consumer was assumed to be 5 miles (8 km), while transport from end-user to landfill, compost or recycling site, or incinerator was assumed to be 20 miles (32 km). Five different impact categories⁴ were assessed and reported.

This study, which did not assume energy recovery from natural trees after disposal, found that when natural trees are landfilled at end of life, thereby sequestering the carbon they contain, and when the one-way distance from retailer to home is 2.5 miles (4 km) or less, natural trees are always preferable to artificial trees based on GWP. When the one-way distance from retailer to home is 10 miles (16 km), and natural trees are landfilled at end of life, an artificial tree must be kept in service for at least 9 years to yield the same global warming potential.

For natural trees that are composted or incinerated (no energy recovery) at end of life, the point at which GWP is equal is

where artificial trees have been in service for 4 years. Beyond that point, the impact of an artificial tree was found to be lower.

Context of Findings

The Ellipsos study found that CO₂-equivalent⁵ emissions resulting from production and use of one artificial tree kept in service for 6 years would be significantly greater than those resulting from production and annual use of six natural trees. The difference was roughly equal to CO₂-equivalent emissions that would result from driving an 18 mile/gallon (13.1 liters/100 km) vehicle a distance of 90 miles (145 km). In other words, again assuming a 6-year life for artificial trees, the global warming impact of 18.6 million American consumers choosing artificial trees rather than natural ones in 2017 resulted in an increase in CO₂-equivalent emissions equal to about 1.7 billion miles (2,736 million km) of driving an 18 mile/gallon vehicle, or 1.2 billion miles (1,931 million km) of driving a 25 mile/gallon (13.1 liters/100 km) vehicle. The PE Americas study led to comparable results.

Summary

Based on differences in environmental impact, natural Christmas trees are generally better than artificial trees. With respect to global warming potential, natural trees have a far lower environmental impact than artificial trees, particularly when natural trees are landfilled or chipped for energy recovery upon disposal. Differences are greatest when distances from grower to retailer to home are short.

Real vs. Fake: Market Share 1990-2016

By Blake Rafeld

Past President, NCTA

Over the last 30 years, the Real Tree industry surrendered one-third of the market for Christmas trees to the fake tree industry, largely because of the unwillingness of the Real Tree industry to collectively support a sustained marketing effort. Consider this: About 1965, Arthur M. Sowder, Extension Forester, USDA, retired, wrote in the *Journal of Forestry* that consumption of Real Christmas trees in the years 1960, 1962, and 1964 exceeded 40 million trees and they were displayed in nearly 90% of all US households. In recent years, consumption of Real trees has not consistently exceeded 30 million trees and they are displayed in fewer than 30% of US households, even though the number of US households has increased.

Starting in 1990, the National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) tracked Real tree and fake tree sales data that provide some data points about the consumer purchasing trends for Real trees and fake trees. The top chart on this page shows how many households displaying Christmas trees that Real trees have surrendered to fake trees. What it shows is that as the number of households in the US has increased, the share of the households which display a Real tree has declined.

When we examine the marketing dollars over that same period (bottom chart) that have been spent in collective marketing efforts by the Real tree industry and marketing dollars spent by the fake tree industry,

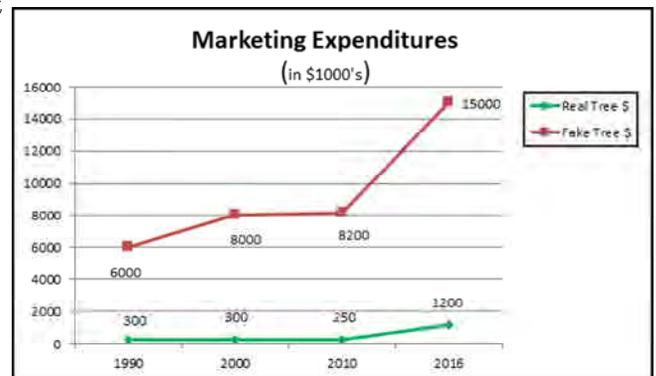
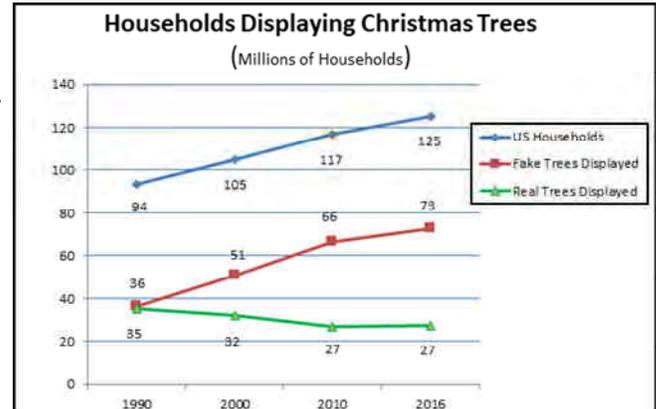
it is readily apparent why the fake tree industry has captured so much of the Christmas tree market. The fake tree industry has significantly outspent the Real tree industry to capture market share and is now spending more than ten times what the Real tree industry is spending.

Is it any wonder why Real trees are now displayed in less than 25% of US households that display a Christmas tree while fake trees are displayed in 75% of the households that display a Christmas tree? Until the beginning of the current marketing order (check-off program), the Real tree industry has been unwilling to support a sustained and industry-wide coordinated plan with meaningful dollars to maintain, let alone increase, our market share.

Some might argue that this chart demonstrates that the Christmas Tree Promotion Board Marketing order is not having an effect on the market. I disagree. The Christmas Tree Promotion Board data for 2016 and 2017, along with anecdotal stories, suggest that the CTPB promotion campaign is being effective at capturing new customers every year. While I am for recapturing market share as quickly as possible, I believe it unfair to judge the campaigns as

ineffective with but two years of marketing efforts.

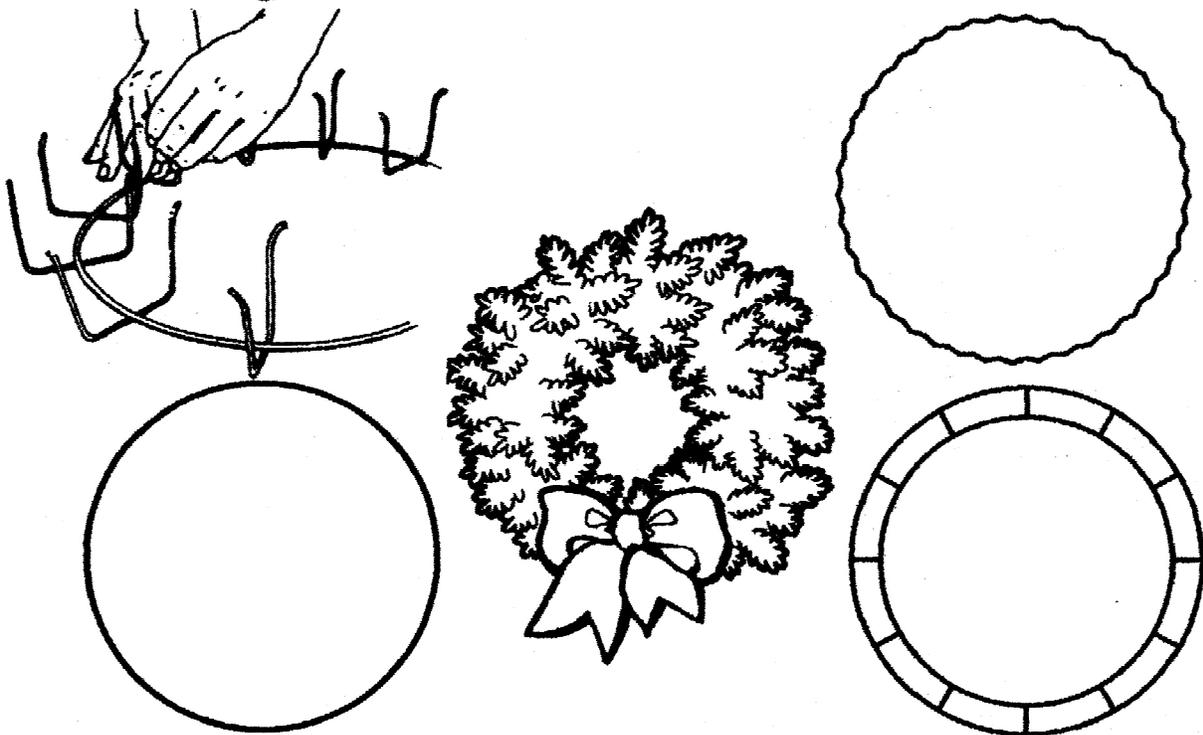
I do not suggest that it will take marketing dollars similar to fake tree expenditures for Real trees to reclaim a larger share of the market. What I believe is that the Real tree industry needs to have an adequately funded, coordinated, and sustained marketing approach that promotes the distinct benefits of Real trees to our best target market, the millennials. The benefits of Real trees will be readily recognized by the millennial generation if we effectively and consistently deliver that message to them. Millennials are the largest generation currently with young children who are the most likely to be wanting a traditional Christmas tree experience with their family that only Real trees can provide.



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NHVTCTA Update

Tunbridge World's Fair

The tree and wreath competition at the Tunbridge World's Fair was just wrapping up as the September newsletter went out, so we're including the results here. Rich Rockwood reports that six Christmas trees and seven wreaths were entered.

"The six trees were all outstanding and it was hard to judge them," Rich said. Gilbert Tree Farm of Williamstown, Vt., won the best in Show with a balsam fir because of the better density of their tree, edging out a Fraser fir from Bunny Acres of Bethel, Vt., and a Fraser fir from Nichols Trees LLC of Lyme, N.H., who all got blue ribbons. Nichols Tree Farm of Orford,

N.H., Bunny Acres, and Werner Tree Farm of Middlebury, Vt., were the other entries.

A non-tree farmer won Best in Show for her single-sided, decorated wreath. Nichols Tree Farm got three blue ribbons. There were other entries from Nichols Tree Farm and Werner Tree Farm.

Rich also noted that, "The booth received the third place overall ribbon for concessions for appearance, cleanliness/neatness, and customer interaction." This is a tribute to all the work that Rich has put into the Christmas tree display and competition at the Tunbridge World's Fair over the years—please thank him if you see him

for helping to represent our industry so well to the public for so long.

Trees for Troops

Trees for Troops had another successful campaign in 2018, delivering 16,599 total trees nationally to 71 total military locations.

Nearly 600 of those trees came from New Hampshire and Vermont, including grower donations as well as 200 purchased by the Autosaver Group of car dealers and 187 purchased by the NH VFW.

FedEx picked up trees at 45 different farms and lots nationwide this year.

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Free Webcast Series: What's New in Christmas Tree Production

“What’s new in Christmas tree production?” is a five-week webinar series that will feature current Christmas tree research projects from leading researchers. **There is no charge for the webinar series but you do need to register by January 29** (A Google search for: “Michigan State University What’s New In Christmas Tree Production” will get you to that page). The series will highlight tree selection, cone reduction, nutrient/soil health, and pest management.

The webinar programs will be live from 12:30 to 2 p.m. EST every Wednesday starting Jan. 30 through Feb. 27, 2019. Participants will have the option to tune in to the live webinar or stream the recording on-demand afterwards. The program topics and speakers are as follows:

January 30: Effective Nitrogen Use

Presenter: Bert Cregg, MSU
Application of commercial fertilizer is an essential part of plantation management for many Christmas tree producers in Michigan. Dr. Cregg will discuss the results of several nitrogen trials that have looked at nitrogen sources as well as timing of applications.

February 6: Quarantine Pest Issues

Presenter: Jill Sidebottom, NCSU
This webinar will cover two invasive species that can affect product shipping and quarantines. Elongated hemlock scale can be a serious pest problem for fir, spruce, and hemlock. Spotted lantern fly is a new pest and even though conifers are not a host, this insect has the potential to impact tree sales and shipment.

Feb. 13: Evaluating performance of Turkish and Trojan Fir (CoFirGE)

Presenters: John Frampton, NCSU Bert Cregg, MSU, Chal Landgren, OSU, Rick Bates, PSU, Richard Cowles, CAES, and Gary Chastagner, WSU
Turkish and Trojan firs are emerging na-

tionally as new and popular alternatives to traditional regional species due to their disease and insect resistance, popularity in the marketplace, and ideal growth habits.

Feb. 20: Reducing coning in Fraser

Presenters: Dana Ellison and Bert Cregg, MSU and Jeff Owen, NCSU
Cones on Fraser fir are a major liability in Christmas tree production. They reduce the aesthetic value of trees and utilize internal resources that could have been used for additional vegetative growth.

This session will provide a look at possible options for reducing coning in Fraser.

February 27: Choosing Cover Crops

Presenters: Christina Curell and Dean Bass, MSU Extension
Cover crops have many purposes, including building organic matter, improving soil structure, reducing erosion, increasing soil biota activity, suppressing weeds, and providing habitats for beneficial insects. The MSU Soil Health team will review current cover crop trial data and look at options for Christmas tree growers.



Trading Post

FOR SALE:

Dana and Jane Blais have sold their trees and are in the process of selling their farm, Hidden Meadows Christmas Tree Farm. They have the following equipment for sale. Hardi BNL 53 sprayer \$750. Christmas tree baler, heavy duty on wheels with three cones, 12", 16" and 20" \$750. Christmas tree baler, table-top, 23", three years old, like new bolted, to very heavy, custom-made metal table, \$325 for both. Display lights, two strings of outdoor lights, 100 ft. each, with sockets every 10 ft.; one new in box, one lightly used, \$100 each. Large, rugged, weatherproof banner that says "Christmas Tree Farm," 3.5 ft. x 15 ft., \$50. Heavy wooden, stand-alone sign for displaying Christmas wreaths on two sides, \$50. Two "Open" flags, excellent condition, \$10 each or 2/\$17. Tyvek tags for Christmas trees or wreaths, box of 500-plus, \$25. Items are at 253 Hill Road, Bath, NH 03740. For more information, call (603) 747-2263.



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