

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

January 2014

Special points of interest:

♦ Meeting Sites

We're always on the look-out for meeting sites to host our Summer and Fall gatherings. We try to spread the meetings out to different regions of both Vermont and New Hampshire, and between both choose-and-cut and wholesale farms. If you would be interested in hosting a meeting, please email Patrick White at pwhitevt@aol.com.

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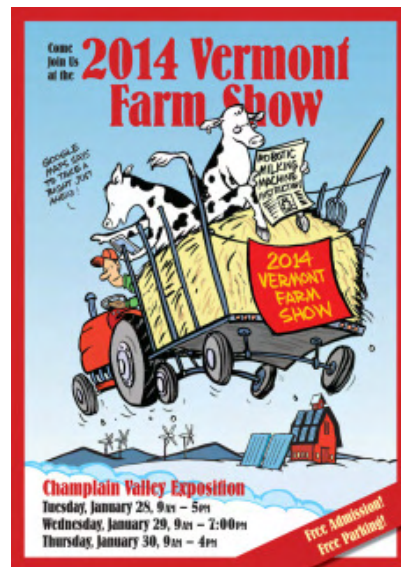
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Winter Meeting: VT Farm Show

The NHVTCTA's winter meeting will be held Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2014, at the Champlain Expo in Essex Junction, Vt.

As usual, the meeting is being held in conjunction with the Vermont Farm Show, which this year has worked to improve its tree and wreath competition. **NHVTCTA members are strongly encouraged to bring a tree (or two) or wreath to enter in the competition. It's a great chance to win some bragging rights for your farm, and it's a terrific way to ensure the thousands of people attending the farm show get to see real Christmas trees on display.**

The meeting itself will kick off with a business meeting, led by incoming NHVTCTA president Dan Beloin.



Larry Downey will then present information on how to grow Christmas trees on raised beds, something he is doing on his own farm.

The ever-popular roundtable discussion on sales and marketing will provide every-

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NCTA Update

Nigel Manley, NHVTCTA's representative to the National Christmas Tree Association, sends along this report on NCTA activities:



Tree/Wreath Contest

In 2014, NCTA will not hold a

convention or conference, returning to the biennial format it traditionally had. However, in 2014 the association will hold its annual Tree and Wreath contest

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President's Message

Hi all,

As I begin my 2 year term as your President I hope to make the NH-VT CTA bigger and better than ever. Bigger by increasing membership.

I've been in the tree business all my life and learned a lot from the ground up but joining the NH-VT CTA was the best thing I've ever done for my tree farm. I've never been to a meeting where I didn't learn something useful.

Better by sharing the latest and greatest information available. Remember that the only dumb questions are the ones never asked. A lot has been learned by asking sim-

ple questions of others who know more than you do. Sharing information among members is what we do best.

Hopefully everyone sold all the trees they wanted to last Fall. I've noticed a slowing trend in sales for the wholesale market the last 2-3 years as more and more trees become available. Buyers have more choices so it's more important than ever to maintain a strong marketing strategy to ensure continued sales.

The winter Meeting is at the Farm Show in Essex Junction, Vt. on Tuesday January 28. It promises to be very informative as usual.

Also, don't forget the Christmas Tree and Wreath Contest. Last year there was only one 6-foot tree entered. This year there will be at least two trees entered by me. That's a 100 percent increase already! Help me out and bring a tree please.

The NH-VT CTA will also have a manned booth at the Farm Show this year to put real trees and people together. Lets have a display to be proud of.

See you all at the meeting!

Dan Beloin
President



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



2014 Officers

President	Dan Beloin	(603) 237-8633
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Copies of the Association bylaws and policies are available to members at any time by contacting the Executive Secretary.

2014 Tree Line Publication Schedule

Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	—
June	June 6
September	Sept. 5



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Thoughts on Canaan Fir and Korean Fir

Bob White wrote up and sent along these thoughts on two popular species currently being grown by NHVTCTA members.

Canaan fir experience

At our fall meeting I asked the group three questions about Canaan fir as a survey. The three questions were:

- 1) How many people have grown Canaan fir? I didn't count but it looked like most in the tent raised their hands.
- 2) How many people have had nothing but good experiences with Canaan fir? About 20 percent raised their hands.
- 3) How many people have had nothing but bad experiences with Canaan fir? Again, about 20 percent raised their hands.

So, assuming everyone was pretty much awake at that point there is considerable room for improvement. The seed sources for Canaan fir run from very poor to very good, based on the appearance of the tree. Until recently we have had little understanding or control over what has been available.

From my experience this year with flooding, we found there is a huge difference be-



tween various Canaan fir in the wetness they can tolerate. Overall, they tolerate flooding at about the same level as the blue balsam source that we grow. Looking at some of the original Ohio State research, it showed Balsam tolerating wet feet better than Canaan.

So they are not a silver bullet for a tree to grow in wet areas. But, like a Balsam, the first rotation seems to do pretty well in wetter areas; after that it gets more difficult.

To date, I have not heard of any needle retention issues with the tree, when cut at normal times and in our northern climates. In North Carolina, Canaan fir has had poor needle retention issues in the past; most likely they were cut before frost.

If anyone would like to see the Canaan Fir Company pres-



entation and Ohio State research presentation that they sold the tree with, I have it and can e-mail it to you. [You can e-mail Bob at whitechristmasvt@googlemail.com]

Korean fir experience

We sold our first volume of Korean fir this year, and the response was better than I expected.

The smell of a just-cut tree is pretty odd to some of us, but we have had people already say it was the best tree they ever had: They loved the smell and not a needle fell off. It is the tree they want in the future, so who knows.

Now that we understand how to manage the tops better, they are a pretty easy tree to grow. And they are the best tree I have seen to tolerate wet feet. They grow very fast at our farm, and seem popular with choose-and-cut customers.

I am glad we have a few thousand at our farm, not a field full. It looks like this tree has a place on our farms, but I do not expect it to become a large volume tree.

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Trees Sales Strong Last Season

Sales of real Christmas trees got off to a brisk start this holiday season and continued at a healthy pace, increasing by the highest level since 2008.

Purchases made in the first week following Thanksgiving rose by 16 percent compared with the same week in 2012, then tapered off for an 8 percent increase overall during the 26-day stretch between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Experts said the early rush was thanks to a shorter holiday season, which likely prompted consumers to buy their trees more quickly.

The newly released figures came from the ISI Group, an in-

ternational market research firm that tracks Christmas tree sales through weekly surveys of regional tree associations, farmers and retailers. The company had reported a 5 percent increase in sales for 2012.

The average amount that people spent on a real Christmas tree in 2012 rose to \$40.30, with total sales of \$1.01 billion, according to the National Christmas Tree Association. The group has not released its statistics for this holiday season.

"We found it was a pretty good season for a lot of the tree sellers," said Oscar Sloterbeck, head of surveys for the ISI Group. "It was better than it's

been in the last several years. A number of the people we spoke with said things were particularly strong right after Thanksgiving because the weather was conducive."

He said bad weather in later weeks across parts of the Midwest and Northeast slowed things down, but that many sellers still ran out of inventory by the end of the season.

For example, while Home Depot has not finalized its sales figures for real Christmas trees this holiday period, it anticipated selling 2.8 million of them — up from 2.5 million the previous year.

Source: www.utsandiego.com

The Way Things Were...

Editor's Note: I was organizing my filing cabinets the other day — that's the kind of thing you do with it's -12 degrees F outside — and I came across a copy of the NHVTCTA's very first newsletter, published February 1957. In it, association president Harry Lang of Colebrook, N.H., had some sound advice for the members, that I thought might be of interest. Much of the rest of the newsletter was devoted to issues of growing the membership, finding meeting locations and strategies for paying income tax on Christmas tree sales — proof that the more things change, the more they stay the same...

As Charles Lathrop Pack once said, "if the Nation saves the trees, the trees will save the Nation." Let us be aware that if the producers or growers keep the culls the premium trees will save our New England Christmas Tree Industry. It is becoming more prevalent each year that the New England producers must market quality or premium trees singly or bundled if we are to maintain or better our positions in the cities we sell too. After looking over reports and bulletins of other Christmas Tree Associations, of which there are now 11, not counting the National Association, it is apparent that wholesalers, retailers, and individual buyers are looking for "good-trees" only. The course for us is now laid out, we must supply good trees or take the chance of other species, not native to our area, taking the markets over. The N.H.-Vt. Association is off to a good start, we have had very good publicity from the East Coast to the West Coast and down to the Sunny South. Our area is the only area that produces good balsam fir and spruce, lets not allow ourselves to be sidetracked just for the sake of a few extra dollars; lets produce a good tree and be proud to say we produced it.

NCTA (continued)

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at a regional event hosted by the Michigan Christmas Tree Association (MCTA).

Further information on that event and the contest will be available on the NCTA website and in NCTA publications in the near future.

Early Harris Poll Results In

In early January, NCTA conducted its annual consumer poll, and top line results have come in.

While preliminary, the early results show an industry that continues to remain economically healthy and a vital part of America's holiday traditions.

Full results will be available online and in a NCTA hosted webinar in late February or Early March.

American Christmas Tree Journal Express to Debut

This year, NCTA will debut the *American Christmas Tree Journal Express*, a monthly newsletter available to association and TIP members.

The content of the publication will be similar to the content featured in the print version of the *Journal*, and include marketing and business management tips that will be directly applicable to member businesses.

Check your inbox in late January for the first edition!

Farm Bill Talks Continue

Negotiators from the House and Senate continue to hold out hope that a Farm Bill will be

finalized in the coming weeks, however, talks have hit delays due to differences in opinion on dairy subsidies.

Washington insiders still believe there will be a bill—and as a result a possible end to the stay on our checkoff—but talks continue to remain volatile. NCTA will work to keep you informed on the latest developments.

TIP State Dues Increase

At the association's annual meeting of the Board of Directors, the Board voted unanimously to increase TIP state member dues from \$20 to \$25, effective in 2014. The \$20 cost had been in place since the program was implemented nearly 20 years ago.

Originally based on the average retail price of one tree at the time, the dues have not kept pace with the corresponding cost to provide them, as well as their correlation to the cost of one tree. However, the Board believes that the cost increasing should be as reasonable, moderate, and affordable as possible.

In addition to the benefits TIP state members currently receive NCTA will provide our regular Advocacy Alerts to those participating in the program. Advocacy Alerts provide key information on how to take action on legislative or regulatory action (including fire code and labor issues) that may impact your business. Other benefits are in the planning stages.

Additionally, it may be helpful to specify that the increase amounts to less than 42 cents per month.



It's Your Industry – We Need Your Support

In 2013, the National Christmas Tree Association is continuing its focus on protection and advocacy, working to address issues that affect the present and future of the industry.

Most of the time, this work takes place behind the scenes, through the tireless efforts of NCTA's volunteers and staff and in collaboration with other organizations who share our industry's concerns.

There is often a misconception that legislative and advocacy issues only affect larger growers, those who employ a certain number of workers or who use the H-2A program. Supporting Real Christmas Trees is not a major grower, Choose & Cut, wholesaler or retailer issue.

It is the support and protection of the product that all members produce, no matter how many trees you sell. NCTA can make a difference on issues that affect our industry, but we need your help.

Make your contribution to the Real Tree Advocacy Fund or Legislative Action Fund today by visiting

www.christmastree.org or calling 636/449-5070.

Thank you to everyone who has made their 2013 commitment!

“Tree Mold” Stories in the News

It seems like there’s some manufactured media crisis that crops up right in the middle of tree sales seasons—a time of year when reporters are clearly looking for something to cover that relates to the holiday.

This year it was reports of a “mold problem” with real Christmas trees. The National Christmas Tree Association responded with talking points for growers should they be contacted about the matter, as well as a consumer alert to let tree buyers know there really was nothing to the reports.

It’s worth keeping these points in mind, in case the subject comes to the media’s attention again next year:

□ There is NOT a “mold problem” with Christmas trees as some overzealous news outlets are reporting. What some farmers with true fir species in low-lying areas of their farm are dealing with is *phytophthora*, a type of soil fungus.

□ Fungi are microorganisms that include yeasts and molds as well as the more familiar mushrooms. Many plants, including many grown on farms (from soybeans, to iceberg lettuce, to conifer trees), can have their health and vitality inhibited when the *phytophthora* fungus is present in the soil and get a condition known as root rot.

□ Root rot is not a new thing. What’s new is that a multi-university team of scientists have a grant from the Specialty Crop Research Initiative of the USDA to study *phytophthora* and how growers can deal with it effectively.

□ *Phytophthora*, among many other pathogens and insects, are something that farms must deal with all the time ever since the invention of agriculture thousands of years ago.

□ The Christmas trees harvested and sent to market are not affected by root rot, so consumers would NOT notice any difference this year or any year.

□ Christmas trees are somewhat unique in that it takes a number of years from planting until they are of a size that can be harvested and sold (anywhere from 3 feet tall to 14 feet or more).

□ *Phytophthora* will NOT have any impact on tree prices, so if a Christmas tree retailer tells you the price of a tree is higher “because of root rot” we suggest you shop for a tree somewhere else.



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Turkish Fir Experiments

In December, North Country Public Radio aired a story on growers in New York and Pennsylvania who are planting Turkish fir in hopes it will help them fight root rot problems. Some excerpts are included here:

Elizabeth Lamb is a professor at Cornell University. She works with Christmas tree farmers on how to protect their trees from disease. "Any wet soil is a potentially good host to the pathogen of the phytophthora root rot. And you cannot remove it from the soil aside from fumigation which is cost prohibitive on a big scale."

Lamb describes phytophthora like having a problem with your circulatory system. "It's affecting the ability of the plant to take up water. And eventually you'll see a color change in the tree because it's not getting the nutrients and water it needs to survive."

That's why tree farmers across the country have started planting Turkish Fir. They hope it will be more resistant to phytophthora.

Ricky Bates is a professor at Penn State University and studies Christmas trees. Bates planted 3,000 Turkish Firs at 10 different sites. One in each of the major Christmas tree growing regions in the U.S. "They sure are pretty trees," he says. "The needles are nice and very glossy... very shiney."

Bates says that Turkish Fir isn't new to the U.S. but it has never been grown commercially. He's hoping his study will show it can be a success for growers. And one major benefit is that Turkish Fir has proven to be more resistant to phytophthora. "Hopefully it will be a crop that growers can make a little more profit on and not have to struggle with the same kind of dis-

ease issues that they do now with some species."

At Empire Evergreens [in New York], 12 rows of trees stretch for a quarter mile. They're a mix of balsam fir, Norway spruce, and the new Turkish fir. They're little, eight to 10 inches tall. A Charlie Brown Christmas tree would look big by comparison.

These were planted back in April to determine how well the species will grow in the area. The Turkish is a slow growing tree. And [owner] Dave Weil knows he is taking a risk by growing it. "If it takes 10 years that's too slow I really want a return in seven to eight years and get the next crop in and growing."

But Weil understands it's a useful research project. And says the risk is just a normal part of doing business with nature.

Cross Country Moisture Test

By Betsy Fradd, WSU Extension PUYALLUP, Wash. – Tucked within the massive Capitol Christmas Tree headed for Washington, D.C. [were] three tiny sensors most people will never see. They will collect information on how well the tree holds moisture during its 25-day journey from Washington state. Researcher Katie McKeever placed the data devices deep inside the canopy of the 88-foot-tall Engelmann spruce last weekend as it was loaded onto a flatbed trailer on the Colville National Forest in Pend Oreille County.

"These HOBO data loggers automatically measure temperature every 15 minutes, providing statistics about the ambient environment inside the tree canopy," said McKeever, a graduate student in plant pathology at Washington State University Puyallup. "Information will be collected to observe any changes in the moisture content of the tree during shipment."

Data from the Paul Bunyan-size tree will be compared with the results of work on traditional-size trees at WSU Puyallup where Gary Chastagner

leads the plant pathology research program on post-harvest moisture and needle retention of Christmas trees.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service technicians responsible for the Capitol tree [sent] daily samples of small twigs to WSU where they will be weighed and oven-dried to calculate moisture content.

The information will help validate post-harvest care and shipping recommendations provided to producers to improve the quality of trees available to consumers.

NHVTCTA Members Donate 450 Trees to Trees for Troops

This past season, members of the NHVTCTA donated 450 Christmas trees to the Trees for Troops program. The trees were delivered to The Rocks in Bethlehem, N.H., where students from Bethlehem Elementary School loaded them onto a FedEx truck for delivery to military bases. Nigel Manley will present a more detailed review of the effort at the NHVTCTA winter meeting.



Nation-wide, Trees for Troops provided

17,051 free, real Christmas Trees to military families and troops, bringing our total since the inception of the program to more than 139,000 trees. This year's trees were delivered by FedEx to 62 military bases in the U.S. and Middle East, covering every branch of the armed services.

Members of the National Christmas Tree Association and many state and regional Christmas tree associations are at the core of this effort.



Students from Bethlehem Elementary School help load 450 trees donated by NHVTCTA members at The Rocks Estate.

This is quite a logistical undertaking and a sacrifice, as these are quality, sellable trees being harvested, donated and collected during the busiest possible time for growers, and no doubt the busiest time for FedEx and its employees. They do it because they love the opportunity to say "thank you for

your service and sacrifice" to troops and their families. In total, 9,685 Christmas trees were donated by growers this year.

Consumers supported Trees for Troops by donating funds or by visiting the 60 farms and retail locations across the country that hosted FedEx trailers during Trees for Troops Weekend, Dec. 6-8, 2013. During Trees for Troops Weekend, consumers purchased and donated 7,216 trees that were placed in the trailers and delivered to U.S. military bases.

Deliveries to stateside military bases all over the country started in late November and ended in mid-December with a grand total of 16,901 trees, provided through the generosity of the Real Christmas Tree industry, consumers and FedEx.

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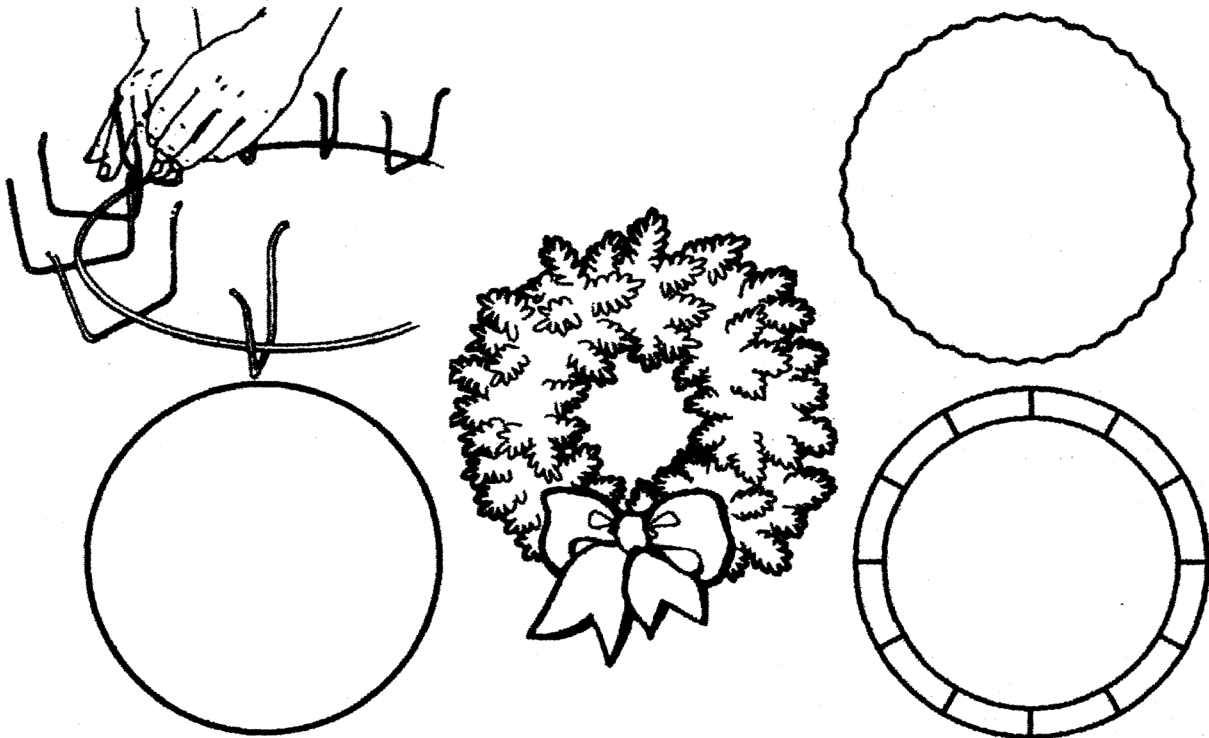
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NHVTCTA Winter Meeting (continued)

Continued from page 1

one (choose-and-cutters, retailers and wholesalers) at the meeting a chance to share their experiences during the last sales season, and learn what others experienced. Was demand up or down? Were prices being charged higher or lower? What were customers asking for? What trends are on the horizon? It's a great opportunity to offer input and learn.

It's been several years since Peter Mollica, NHVTCTA member and tax law expert, has given his take on the most advantageous ways for Christmas tree growers to approach income and capital gains taxes. New growers may learn a whole new way of filing their tree-related taxes, and those who have been using Peter's methods for years will want to take

note of what's new and different in the tax code.

After lunch is served, Veronica Frances of Notchnet, which manages the NHVTCTA Web site, will offer a presentation on Social Media Marketing/Accepting Credit Cards via Mobile Devices.

Disease Testing – Ann Hazelrigg, of the UVM Plant Diagnostics Lab will then discuss the capabilities that lab has for testing tree diseases. Finally, one great addition to the agenda that was mailed out several weeks back: Ron Kelley will be talking on "Root Aphids and other Pests of Concern" (twig aphid, wooly adelgid, and gall midge).

It's a jam-packed agenda. You can register at the meeting if you have not already mailed in the form. Contact Jim Horst with any questions at (802) 447-1900.

Trading Post

FOR SALE: Kelco TP300 Tree Planter; purchased fall 2011; used a total of 2 hours; excellent condition; 6 foot spacer wheel included - \$2,750 or b.o. Contact Rodney Phillips at 848-4375

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