



# Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

June 2018

## *Special points of interest:*

### ◆ **Upcoming Meetings**

The Fall 2018 meeting will be hosted by Bill Tester in Greensboro, Vt., on Saturday, September 29.

### ◆ **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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## Summer Meeting at NH State Nursery

The Summer meeting of the NHVTCTA will be held on Saturday, June 23, at the New Hampshire State Nursery in Boscawen.

Registration starts at 8:30 and the business meeting will begin at 9:30, including an introduction of our hosts. The New Hampshire State Nursery has been in operation since 1910 and currently offers more than 50 different bare-root seedling species and specialty packages, all grown from seed in seedbeds on the property. The meeting will provide a chance to see how planting stock is produced.

In the morning, Morgan Dube with the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food will be on hand to discuss the phytosanitary requirements involved when exporting Christmas trees. Then, Jeremy DeLisle with UNH Extension will join us to discuss fertility management in seedling production,

including a case study of nutrient deficiency.

Just before lunch, Kyle Lombard, New Hampshire for-



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est entomologist will give a presentation on forest pest identification and control.

Following lunch, there will be a walking tour of the nursery given by Shawn Bresnahan, program administrator, and Howie Lewis, nursery manager. We'll look at aspects of the nursery ranging from seed extraction techniques to shipping room packaging and storage to growing in seedbeds.

**Registration for the meeting is available on-site if you have not already sent in your registration form.**

Contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-0660 with questions or for more information.

## Christmas Tree Promotion Board



At press time, the results of the recent industry vote on whether to continue the Christmas Tree Promotion Board had not been announced.

The decision may be known by our upcoming Summer meeting, and the results will be reported in the September issue of *Tree Line*.

## President's Message

I'm breathing a little sigh of relief at the moment as the temperature dipped to 34 degrees here on the morning of June 11. Hopefully you have all escaped frost damage this spring. Who knows what the weather will bring from now until the sales season, but if it's anything like the last several years, it could be extreme—either extremely wet, or dry, or cold, or hot, etc. And it wouldn't be surprising if members of the news media, always looking for a story, start trying to find out how the weather is affecting agriculture.

Back in 2016, it was drought conditions that got all of the press. And there was definitely some damage to young transplants in different parts of the Northeast. But in their quest for a good story (one with drama), reporters started asking growers how much of an impact the drought was going to have on that year's crop of Christmas trees.

A good answer would have been: "By the time a tree matures and is ready for sale, it has a root system plenty large enough to do just fine during a dry summer. And trees grow great in the sun, so this year's crop will be one of my best ever!" Unfortunately some growers who were interviewed

lacked any media savvy and gave cringe-inducing replies to reporters about how dry the trees were and how that was going to affect their health and how they would likely still be dry come sales time.

The lesson in all of this is to be prepared for questions if reporters should call. That doesn't mean to lie, but it does mean to frame the issue in the best possible light. If it's a wet season, you can talk about how trees love the moisture and are looking lush and beautiful, for example.

Another example: in recent years, reporters around sales season have been asking about customers finding ticks or other insects in their trees. If you feel caught off guard or don't feel comfortable answering a reporter's question, always feel free to direct them to the NH-VT Christmas Tree Association or the National Christmas Tree Association. Sometimes having a head's up to be able to research an issue and think through the best response can make all the difference in turning a potentially negative story into a positive one.

Hope to see you at the meeting on June 23.

*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.

### 2018 Tree Line Publication Schedule

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

# NHVTCTA News Roundup (continued on p. 10)

## Send in Your Survey

Jeff Taylor let us know that the University of N.H. Cooperative Extension is embarking on a project to train people interested in taking the N.H. Christmas Tree Category Exam and modernizing the exam questions to address current Christmas Tree related pest issues such as insects, diseases, environmental stresses and cultural techniques.

Part of this effort is to gather feed back information from current Christmas Tree growers as to what are the major pest concerns of individual growers from different regions within the State of N.H. **We would also like to encourage the Association's Vermont growers to participate and respond to the five-question survey that**

**was e-mailed to you through the NHVTCTA on June 5. Please complete the survey prior to our June 23 meeting.**

In addition, UNH Extension is in the process of developing a 360-degree training video which will scan a Christmas tree farm 360 degrees and then zoom in and focus on various tree related pest injuries to aid the grower in identifying various potential tree pests. This eventually will be available on line.

Please take this opportunity to participate as what is happening on your farm is important and will assist the UNH Extension Service in developing training and recommended treatments for pests. If you have any questions, contact Jeff Taylor at [taylorstreepeople@aol.com](mailto:taylorstreepeople@aol.com).

## Website Marketing

Several weeks ago, members should have received sign-up forms for this year's listings on the NHVTCTA website.

For those who have not taken advantage in past years, this is a valuable marketing opportunity. Customers searing online for Christmas trees often end up on the NHVTCTA website, and having your farm listed allows these buyers—wholesale, choose and cut, retail, wreaths, etc.—to find out where you are, what you sell, and link to your farm website, if you have one.

For wholesale growers, information about tree species and availability can be updated as the season goes on. **Please return you completed form by July 10.**



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

## Technology for Tomorrow

Most Christmas tree farm owners rely on a low-tech, low-efficiency system to manage their inventory. Penn State student and Schreyer Honors Scholar Juan Munoz Valdez is part of a research effort that is looking to change that. The graduating mechanical engineering student recently completed his honors thesis, in which he developed an algorithm to analyze and store images of Christmas tree farms taken by unmanned aircraft. Applying that algorithm would provide those owners with detailed maps of their farms that would save them the task of counting their trees by hand and monitoring the health of those trees one-by-one.

The research is part of several projects in the Unmanned Aircraft for Agricultural Applications (UAAA) lab directed by Professor of Mechanical Engineering H. Joseph Sommer III, which also include data collections for apple orchards and predictive imaging for golf course maintenance. The goal of the project is to help scientists and farmers use unmanned aircraft to increase crop yields and reduce production costs.

Part of the challenge for Munoz in his thesis was getting the computer to distinguish trees from things like moss or grass in the images, a task, he said, that isn't always easy for humans. Using an image editor, Munoz experimented with various filters to determine how to better highlight the trees to distinguish them from other objects, using gradients to determine the centers of the trees.



Juan Munoz used an image editor filter to distinguish trees from other objects as part of his honor thesis.

"It wasn't perfect," Munoz said, "but it gave me excitement that there was a way to do this."

Now a graduating Schreyer Scholar on the University Park campus, Munoz was initially a student at Penn State Abington and a computer science major before he decided to switch to mechanical engineering.

That computer science background helped him this past summer, though, when he had an internship developing software for a startup group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that is developing an app that uses sensors in a normal phone to determine how well its user drives a car.



Munoz will graduate with a grade-point average of above 3.8, but he said he became a lot happier when he stopped putting pressure on himself to maintain a perfect 4.0.

He is proud of the work he has achieved at Penn State and excited about the future possibilities ahead for him involving machine learning. "There's a lot more to learn," he said. "I'm happy where I am right now, and I'm really grateful."

*Article and photos by Jeff Rice, Penn State News.*

## Around Our Region

**The Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York** will be meeting this summer very close to the Vermont border.

There will be a series of farm tours and educational sessions beginning Thursday, July 12, at farms in Ballston Spa, Malta, and Johnston, N.Y. The main meeting will be held on Friday and Saturday (July 13-14) at the Ellms Farm in Ballston Spa, with a number of concurrent sessions, a used equipment sales area, a lunch and a Friday evening banquet. Learn more at [christmastreesny.org/Meetings.php](http://christmastreesny.org/Meetings.php)

Matthew Wallhead is the new **University of Maine**

**Cooperative Extension** ornamental horticulture specialist and assistant professor of horticulture. Wallhead joins UMaine from the USDA Agricultural Research Service Application Technology Research Unit in Wooster, Ohio. His postdoctoral work there focused on improving spray efficiency for ornamental nurseries.

In Maine, Wallhead will be responding to the needs of the state's ornamental horticulture industry, including educating growers on management practices that will enable them to increase production efficiency and profitability. His current research projects include the evaluation of laser-guided air-assisted sprayers for commercial

nurseries and Christmas tree farms, and applications of small unmanned aerial systems for precision horticulture.

The five producers and one importer recently appointed to serve on the **Christmas Tree Promotion Board** include the first grower based in New England: Jim Corliss of Newburgh, Maine.

The other new appointee to a three-year terms was Roger W. Beyer, Molalla, Ore. Reappointed producer members include: Paul F. Battaglia, San Martin, Calif., Della Jean Deal, Laurel Springs, N.C., and Beth Walterscheidt, Elgin, Texas

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## Trying New Things With Fertilizer

*By Bob White*

There are a bunch of methods being used to feed trees with nitrogen in our region, some appear to work vastly better than others, most all work better than no food at all. Soil conditions and timing likely play a roll in how successful we are.

The two methods that I most commonly hear about are a spring/fall application with urea, or just spring alone with urea. These applications are usually around one ounce per tree.

Last year several farms in our region, including mine, moved over to try using ammonium sulfate fertilizer. Ammonium sulfate is twice the price of urea and requires at least two applications per year in order to spread the quantity of fertilizer applied out some.

At my farm, the soil and foliar tests taken in 2017 and 2018 were almost identical for nitrogen level and soil pH, so there was no rapid change or major difference to the soil when switching to ammonium sulfate. Switching to ammonium sulfate did not increase the stored amount of nitrogen in the tree over the winter.

However, in our fraser field (sandy soil) there are areas that no matter what we have ever done we could not get the greenery up to where we wanted it—it stayed a dingy green). When we would take greens from these areas to our wreath shop they would get thrown back out the door rapidly.

But after two applications with ammonium sulfate last summer the greenery completely changed to a deep green and



stayed that way all winter, they still are looking really nice

There is a whole bunch that we do not understand as far as using ammonium sulfate in Christmas trees, like how much trees can take in one application or in a year, or what makes the difference compared to urea, but there is a difference.

While there are still questions left to answer, some of the reasons it may work better: It does not need to be converted to be available for the trees, it has a whole lot of sulfur, it does not evaporate when surface-applied, especially under trees that shed the rain. It also has far more effect on soil pH than urea over time.

At our main farm, trees also look really good this year but they looked good with urea as well so there was not as clear of a difference in just one season.

The bottom line: Is it worth more money to use ammonium sulfate rather than urea? For me, the answer is yes.

Will the positive effects hold up over time, with pH control? Some say yes, but it's still uncertain. Hopefully we Christmas tree growers can find someone with knowledge and experience with ammonium sulfate fertilizer who can explain what is really going on.

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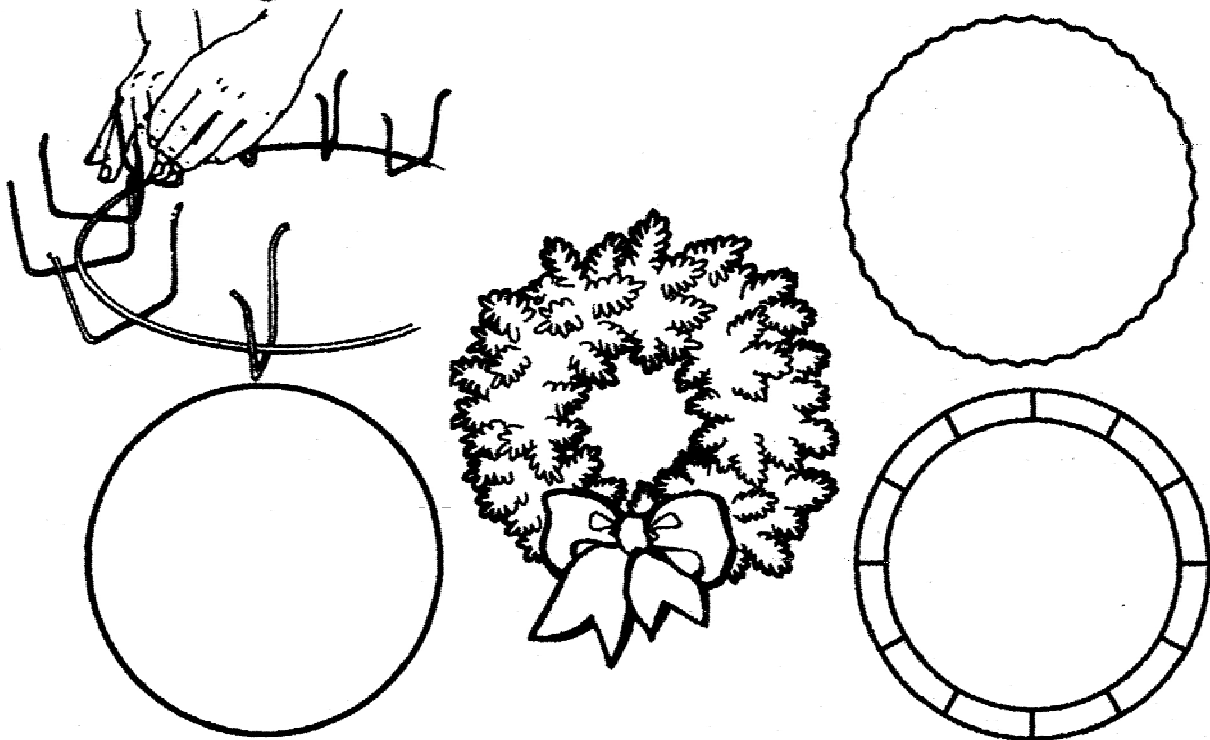
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## Christmas Trees in the News

*There's been quite a bit about Christmas trees in the news lately, touching on a number of different topics. Here's a brief recap of some of the highlights (a Google search on any of these should give you more details if you're interested).*

Jefferson Public Radio covered the potential impact on Oregon Christmas tree growers of a looming trade war between the U.S. and Canada/Mexico. **Potential tariffs**, in retaliation for those imposed by the U.S. on steel and aluminum coming into the country, have some Christmas tree growers worried. The story drew a connection back to 2009, when Mexico put tariffs on Christmas trees: "A lot of the Christmas tree growers went out of business. Mexico takes about a million trees from Oregon and we ship roughly 5 million so that's 20 percent," said Rick Schaefer is the manager of Holiday Specialtrees, a tree farm in Clackamas County. "A lot of growers quit growing and a lot of them just simply went bankrupt.... If there was a 20 percent tariff on us, say it's a \$20 tree now, that's a \$4 hit. That's a big chunk. That would hurt us, I'm definitely concerned about that."

Reports out of the Maritimes say that **early-June frosts** did significant damage to Christmas trees there. "Lingering frosty weather has been damaging crops across the Atlantic region, threatening growth on popular vineyards and Christmas tree farms. The Christmas Tree Council of Nova Scotia estimates that the Yule-

tide staples took as much as a 15 percent loss in the province," reported CTV News.

There was plenty of reporting on a **shortage of Christmas trees nationally**, and *The Atlantic* magazine reports that the shortage is likely to remain for some time, especially from farms out west. "The Northwest's most popular variety, the noble fir, can take eight to 12 years to reach holiday height, which means that that spurt of over-planting two decades ago led to oversupply about 10 years ago. It was especially poor timing because this flooding of the market coincided with the Great Recession, when many people were scaling back their Christmas spending. 'Prices fell off the roof and growers were losing money, so they didn't have the incentive—and in some cases they didn't have the equity—to invest in planting seedlings,' says Tim O'Connor, the executive director of the National Christmas Tree Association. Another 10 years on, the effects of that under-planting are now being felt around the country, in the form of shortages and higher prices.... Supply is also diminishing, although not to the same degree, in North Carolina and Michigan, which have the nation's second and third largest Christmas-tree outputs. 'It is something the whole industry is feeling, but it is more expressed in the Northwest,'" O'Connor says.

Some also observed that in addition to fewer trees, the ones that were available last season

were smaller, reported WKUT. "North Carolina produces the second most trees in the U.S. each year, with most of those coming from a single county: Ashe County. 'If you look at our average sales in Ashe County, for the past three to four years, we've been right at 3.5 million trees getting sent out of our county. And that's not really fluctuated that much,'" said Travis Birdsell with the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension in Ashe County. 'If you did a deeper look at the sizes that are going out, you probably have constricted a little bit on the upper end.' That means, **on top of a national tree shortage, we're getting shorter trees.** 'Oh, heck yeah. We're seeing it firsthand,'" said Jimmy Coan, owner of Papa Noel Christmas Trees...a tree farmer in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina...." Coan blamed the shortage of trees on the fact that fewer trees were planted back in the 2008-09 recession years, while the lack of taller trees is partly due to practical reasons. 'In the time that it takes me to have two rotations of those [regular size] trees, I have one of these,' said Coan, pointing to a 15-foot tree behind him on one of his lots. 'It sits there in the same plot of land longer – triple the years sometimes. When you prune those, you do it with a stepladder. It's so labor intensive that more and more farmers just don't want to mess with those big trees.'"

The tree supply issue was covered differently north of the border, with the *Globe and Mail*



# Christmas Trees in the News

reporting that the “shortage of Christmas trees in the United States is turning into an **exporting boon for growers in Eastern and Central Canada**.... for Canadian growers, who suffered through a dark period seven years ago, when they faced a glut of trees from U.S. producers, things have rebounded. This fall’s orders were exceptional, said Jimmy Downey, whose family farm, Sapinière Downey, is located in Hatley, in Quebec’s Eastern Townships, an area southeast of Montreal that exports 85 percent of its fir trees to the U.S.”

.....  
 Have you ever had a customer like this? *Fortune* magazine reports that “A woman in Santa

Clara, California, was spotted **returning a Christmas tree to Costco on Jan. 4**. She returned the tree ‘because it [was] dead,’ a shopper waiting in line behind her said. ‘I can’t make this stuff up,’ Scott Bentley, who took a photo in the refund line, wrote on Facebook, Costco gave the woman her refund after questioning her, verifying the purchase on her Costco account and shaming her ‘to a small degree,’ the other shopper said. The refund attempt riled up people online who couldn’t believe someone would try to return their Christmas tree well into the new year. ‘People like this are miserable. How cheap can you be?’” one commenter said.

*The Wall Street Journal* reported on efforts to **mulch or otherwise recycle Christmas trees**. “Only about half the respondents to the most recent Christmas Tree Association poll said they had access to or knew of recycling programs, according to Douglas Hundley, a spokesman for the group. Nonetheless, the U.S. Composting Council estimates that around 90% of the trees are ground up and re-used. ‘Christmas trees are low hanging fruit,’ said Frank Franciosi, executive director of the council. ‘It’s once a year. It’s not wet, slimy gravy with banana peels and apple cores and last night’s stew. It’s easy to chip, easy to get rid of and easy to re-use.’”

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## NHVTCTA News Roundup (continued from p. 3)

### In Remembrance

We were saddened to hear the news that longtime NHVTCTA member David Parody passed away late last year.

David's obituary revealed that, of his many endeavors, "Perhaps his greatest accomplishment and immense pride centered on his entrepreneurship, and fulfillment of his greatest dream, that of being a "weekend forester" and that of planting Christmas trees on his property (Monadnock View Farm in Keene, N.H.) where generations of area families have enjoyed the age old tradition of selecting and cutting their own Christmas Trees for over forty



years. It took the Parody family many years to clear the overgrown pasturelands and neglected woodlands. It was lots of hard work however the satisfaction of turning the property that he and his wife, Marcia bought in 1970

into 125 acres of nature's marvels, made it all worthwhile. Not only did this project produce over 10,000 Christmas trees planted for families to enjoy, it also, as a result of selective cuttings, has generated well over 30,000 board feet of sawlogs and hundreds of cords of firewood."

NHVTCTA sends its condolences to Marcia and the rest of David's family.

## Trading Post

**WANTED:** Tree netter needed for small sales lot. Likely a medium size (22/23-inch, maybe) would work best, but interested in what you might have available—just the cone, or a table system, etc. Call Len Angelli, (603) 398-4025.

**WANTED:** This will be my first year for choose and cut sales. I would be interested in any equipment or supplies you might have available for a choose and cut operation. If you're going out of business or have any extra equipment, let me know. Andy Aldrich, email [aaldrich@pshift.com](mailto:aaldrich@pshift.com) or call (802) 434-6370.



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