

VOLUME 21 | NUMBER 2

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GREAT LAKES

CHRISTMASTREE JOURNAL



Agricultural Pesticide Label Changes

Biology and Management of Needlecast Diseases for Christmas Tree Production

Non-chemical Weed Control in Christmas Tree Production

Year in Review: 2024 Christmas Tree Sales Recap

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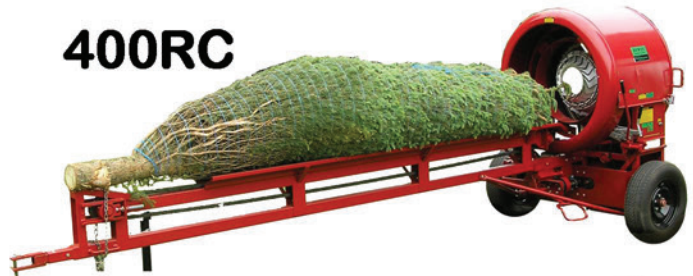
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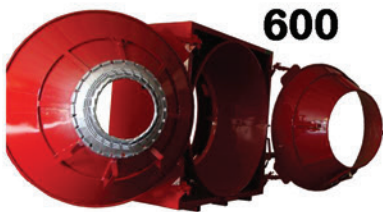
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Amy Start, Editor, Executive Director, Michigan Christmas Tree Association.
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Dr. Bert Cregg,
Michigan State University
Bill Lindberg
Michigan State University
Extension

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Erin Mendez, Marilyn Ruhala,
and Charlie Start

Many thanks to all the writers for their generous contributions, and to the advertisers as their support makes it possible to continue to provide a quality educational publication for our readers.

FEATURES

19 | Tree Diseases and Management Series for Christmas Tree Production: Biology and Management of Needlecast Diseases for Christmas Tree Production

Dr. Pratima Devkota, Research Specialist, Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences Michigan State University

Dr. Devkota's article reviews needlecast diseases in Christmas tree production along with treatment options.

25 | Year in Review: 2024 Christmas Tree Sales Recap

Bill Lindberg, Christmas Tree Educator,
Michigan State University Extension
Riley Johnson, Michigan State University,
Research Technician Tree Physiology Lab

This article shares the results of an end-of-the-season sales survey that aimed to identify key trends in Christmas tree sales across the Great Lakes region.

30 | Agricultural Pesticide Label Changes

Erin Lizotte, IPM Coordinator, Michigan State University Extension

In this article, you will learn about the agricultural pesticides that are undergoing significant label changes that growers should be aware of.

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GREAT LAKES

CHRISTMAS TREE JOURNAL

Published for members of the:

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GREAT LAKES CHRISTMAS TREE JOURNAL

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For questions about editorial or advertising, please contact
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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



Enjoying a beautiful Florida Keys sunset with my husband Craig, and sons Charlie and Riley.

AMY START

Executive Director of the Michigan Christmas Tree Association and Editor of the Great Lakes Christmas Tree Journal

info@mcta.org

Hello Spring!

As you read through the state news sections, you will see that many state associations are in the planning stages of their summer meeting events. Attending a meeting is a great learning experience. You get an opportunity to tour farms, visit with suppliers, and make farm purchases (often saving you money on shipping costs). Most importantly, it gives you a chance to network with other growers. Meetings are the best way to stay connected to what is going on in the industry in your state. In addition, I recommend that you take a road trip to another state's summer meeting. This year, Michigan is having the National Meeting hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms at their Northern Pines Nursery in Lake City, MI. This will be a huge event as we are partnering with several other associations (MACT, NCTA, Indiana Christmas Tree Growers Association, and the Illinois Christmas Tree Association) to bring you one big Christmas tree meeting. Our event theme is Cowboys and Christmas Trees, so pack your cowboy boots and hat and come to Michigan for what will be one of the most memorable Christmas tree meetings in years!

Take a minute to read the "Season Recap" article by Bill Lindberg, Michigan State University Extension, and Riley Johnson, Michigan State University. This is the second year in a row that farms were interviewed from around our Great Lakes Region and asked questions regarding their sales season. It is interesting to hear how the holiday season went for these farms, as well as what can be attributed to their sales numbers. We are grateful to the farms for their willingness to share this information.

Happy Easter!

Amy Start, Editor



UPCOMING EVENTS 2025 CALENDAR

- June 13-14** OCTA Summer Meeting will be held at Kaleidoscope Farms in northwest Ohio
- July 17-19** CTFNY Summer Meeting will be held at Springside Farm in Fabius, NY
- July 24-26** The Michigan Christmas Tree Association along with the NCTA and MACT join together for the National Summer Meeting hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms at their Northern Pines Nursery in Lake City
- August 10** Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association's Annual Meeting will be held at Cranston's Christmas Tree Farm in Ashfield, MA

- August 14-16** Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association Summer Convention will be held at Northwoods Evergreen & Wire Co. in Merrill, WI
- August 14-16** PCTGA Summer Meeting at Berkey's Nursery
- September 13-14** MNCTA Summer Convention will be held at Guggisberg Tree Farm outside of New Ulm, MN

Visit association websites for more meeting details!



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Stay connected by joining the Great Lakes Christmas Tree Growers on Facebook

Joining is easy! Simply log into your Facebook profile, search Great Lakes Christmas Tree Growers and click join. To be part of the group, you will be asked a few questions such as; what is your farm name, and where is your farm located? After that, one of our administrators will approve your request, and that's it! You will then be a part of a fantastic resource of growers around the Great Lakes region and beyond.

www.facebook.com/groups/GreatLakesChristmasTreeGrowers/

TOO GOOD NOT TO SHARE AGAIN FROM FACEBOOK



www.facebook.com/groups/GreatLakesChristmasTreeGrowers/

Please note: Consent to share photos and posts has been given to the Great Lakes Christmas Tree Journal.



Kristen Keller

3d · 🌐

Flocked Trees in the Shop today! 🇺🇸 🇩🇪

Monessen, Pa



Robin Muth Miller-Smith

3d · 🌐

Just proud! Having a record year.



[View Insights](#)

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Jake Skiba

Top contributor Dec 27, 2024 · 🌐

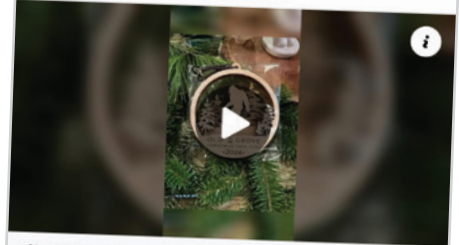
What's your go to Spray for keeping the deer from eating your Balsams?



Levi James

★ Rising contributor Nov 25 · 🌐

Use Tik Tok to promote your business it makes making videos like this easy. Enjoy this post in TikTok:



tiktok.com

TikTok · theoldgrove

[View Insights](#)

242 Post Reach

👍 1

2 comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment 📧 Send ➦ Share



Amy Marie

Top contributor 2d · 🌐

Good afternoon growers,

We received over an inch of rainfall yesterday along with warm snow melting temperatures, which have led to these trees being underwater for over 24 hours now.... [See more](#)



Erin Wagner

Top contributor Jan 25 · 🌐

Got several norways looking like this... started turning in the fall and now seem much worse. Any idea? They were all very healthy in th... [See more](#)



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Trees for Troops Final 2024 Numbers



We had another amazing year in 2024. We picked up 16,629 trees from 51 different locations and delivered them to 93 bases in the U.S. across 5 branches of service plus one National Guard Center.

Thank you to everyone for all of the hard work and dedication, especially the pick-up locations who do all the work of collecting, baling and tagging the donated trees.

Our new grand total through 20 years is 326,273 trees provided to military families!

Check out some of the photos and stories generated by folks at the bases here <https://www.facebook.com/Trees4Troops/> mentions.

To the right is the listing of tree totals for 2024 per state where we picked up donated trees.



RANK	STATE	# TREES
1	Oregon	4,101
2	New York	2,485
3	Michigan	1,398
4	Pennsylvania	1,076
5	North Carolina	954
6	Massachusetts	800
7	Wisconsin	772
8	New Jersey	727
9	Washington	627
10	Georgia	597
11	NH/VT Combined	524
12	Illinois	461
13	California	400
14	Virginia	381
15	Maine	308
16	Ohio	250
17	Tennessee	180
18	South Carolina	150
19	Indiana	130
20	Minnesota	103
21	Kansas	100
22	Texas	50
23	Nebraska	47
24	Missouri	15
TOTAL		16,636



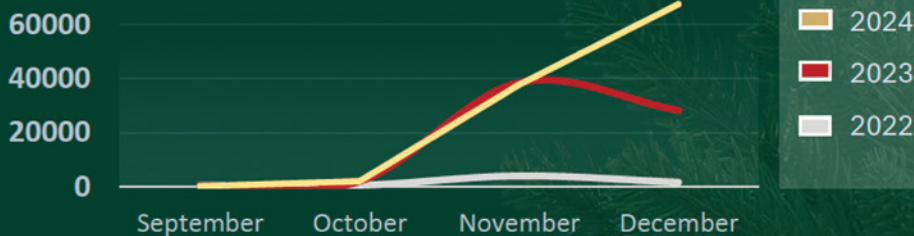


RCTB Reports 2024 Marketing Benchmarks

In partnership with FleishmanHillard, RCTB sets annual benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of its public relations and marketing campaigns, while gathering data that is used to determine consumer trends and adjust messaging accordingly. On January 16, RCTB reviewed data from the 2024 season. Highlights are as follows.

Year-over-Year (+69%)

118,162 sessions in 2024



RCTB exceeded its goal of 75,000 visits to the online retail locator and sustained (and grew) consumer interest in the locator throughout the holiday season.

RCTB's paid social placements exceeded expectations with 23 million impressions for a \$0.72 cost-per-click (coming in under the goal of \$0.75 cost-per-click)



Paid Social
(Meta & TikTok)

23M

Total Impressions

2024 Goal: 20M

2023 Actual: 14.9M

Influencer Performance



6.3M+

Total Impressions



4.5M+

Total Plays

RCTB's influencer partners garnered more than 6.3 million impressions. Videos also were popular with consumers, securing more than 4.5 million plays.

- RCTB's online retail locator secured more than 118,000 sessions, exceeding RCTB's goal of 75,000. In 2023, the retail locator secured 69,721 visits — demonstrating a marked increase (+69%) of online retail locator sessions this year.
- RCTB exceeded its goal of 20,000 visits to the online newsroom by garnering 20,758 visits, which is an 8.1% increase over the previous year's newsroom visits.
- 2,070 total RCTB media placements showcasing real Christmas trees were secured, and 16 in targeted outlets including Real Simple, USA Today, CBS News, CNBC and Good Morning America.
- RCTB also secured 6.3 million impressions via its influencer program and an additional 23 million impressions through paid social programs on Meta and TikTok.
- Survey results indicate that 36% of consumers indicated they would "probably" or "definitely" buy a real tree. After being exposed to a RCTB messaging, purchase intent increased to 43%.

New Online Reporting System Successfully Launched

"I just filed and paid my assessment and wanted to say what a nice easy process including linking my small local bank for ACH. I also liked being able to see our sales history. Job well done!" – Suzanne Stokoe, Stokoe Farm

Launched in December, RCTB's online grower portal provides growers a safe and simple means of paying assessments online using the ACH payment process. It also streamlines record-keeping and allows growers to access their farm's reporting and payment history. As of March 1, 2025, 692 producers have reported their annual harvest and 545 have filed exemptions using the online grower portal. A total of 263 producers have paid their assessments using the convenient ACH option. "We are thrilled that producers have been willing to try the new system, and it has been performing smoothly," commented RCTB Executive Director, Marsha Gray. "I hope that more growers try it in the future, and I hope to see greater use of the ACH feature."

Growers Encouraged To Suggest Species For RCTB Tree Species Guide

RCTB's online Tree Guide is a popular feature of the consumer website — helping consumers determine what tree best suits their holiday lifestyle. To assess the effectiveness of the page RCTB, in partnership with FleishmanHillard, tracks the amount of time consumers spend on the webpage. In 2024, RCTB once again exceeded its Tree Guide KPI — securing 37,461 sessions and exceeding the set goal of 25,000. In addition, this page saw more traffic than in 2023, which garnered 22,953 visits. And this year 92% of visitors spent more than 38 seconds on the page, demonstrating improved engagement. The average time spent on this page was 1 minute and 14 seconds.

To ensure the page remains relevant with consumers, RCTB is taking suggestions concerning species growers feel should be added to the guide. Growers can submit their suggestions to Marsha Gray, Executive Director for the RCTB by April 1, at marsha@realchristmastreeboard.org.

RCTB Research Topic Survey Available Online

The 2025 Research Topic Survey for Growers is now available on the realchristmastreeboard.org website Research page. Growers may complete the survey online using the link to *Research Topic Survey for Growers* Google form or print the survey and email the completed version to research@realchristmastreeboard.org.

The information collected in this survey is used by the RCTB Research Committee to help determine which research proposals to fund. Real Christmas tree growers are encouraged to complete the survey and indicate what pest or other production issues on their farm could be impacted by RCTB-funded research.

RCTB Webinars Available Online

In January, RCTB hosted two grower webinars as part of its quarterly series. The webinars listed below are now available online at: <https://www.realchristmastreeboard.org/resources/webinars/>.

The Theory and Practice of Reducing Cone Formation in Fraser Fir — Dr. Bert Cregg, Michigan State University

Fraser fir precious cone formation causes many issues for Christmas tree farmers. Cones are a photosynthetic sink and when large numbers are present can reduce vegetative growth. In addition, cones are not persistent, and after breaking down leave unappealing stalks on the tree. Hand removal of cones is expensive, due to the high amount of manual labor involved. Worker safety issues also may arise due to the use of ladders to remove cones on tall trees. Plant growth regulators have been tested to prevent the formation of reproductive buds and thereby prevent the formation of cones. Other experiments tested the use of caustic materials applied to cones to chemically eliminate them. Experimental results will be discussed, showing how these products may be able to reduce the use of labor to physically remove cones.

continued...

Tree Guide Webpage Engagement



92%

% of Visitors +38s on Page
2024 Goal: 90%
2023 Actual: 90%



1m14s

Avg Time on Page
2024 Goal: 1m13s
2023 Actual: 1m13s

RCTB measures the time consumers spend on the Tree Guide webpage to measure its effectiveness.

Photos from RCTB's online Tree Guide



Nordmann Fir Tree



Nordmann Fir Branch



Nordmann Fir Needle

UPDATES FROM THE RCTB

RCTB Webinars Available Online *continued...*

Keys to Managing Phytophthora Root Rot in Christmas Tree Plantations — Dr. Gary Chastagner, Washington State University

Phytophthora root rot can be a devastating disease for Christmas tree production resulting in high mortality rates of trees during any stage of production. This webinar will outline the mechanisms of PRR spreading, damage and signs of PRR-infected trees, and what key management steps growers can take to manage PRR in their Christmas tree fields.

Growers Welcome to Visit with RCTB at the Michigan Meeting

This summer, members of the RCTB board and committees will be available to speak with growers one-on-one at the Cowboys and Christmas Trees 2025 National Summer Meeting hosted in Michigan. RCTB will have a booth at the three-day event and strongly encourages growers to stop by. It's the perfect opportunity for RCTB to hear directly from growers across the nation about potential opportunities for our industry, the challenges they are facing and suggestions

they may have to build long-term sustainability for the real Christmas tree market.



COWBOYS AND CHRISTMAS TREES

2025 NATIONAL SUMMER MEETING
JULY 24-26

Hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms at Northern Pines Nursery

All exhibitors, educational sessions, and tours will take place at Northern Pines Nursery • 2458 S. Green Rd. • Lake City, Michigan 49651

For Meeting and Hotel Information Visit
www.mcta.org

SUMMER MEETING SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:

THURSDAY JULY 24

10 to 7 pm Vendor Set-up
1 to 4:30 pm New Grower Session
2 pm Golf Outing 9-hole at Evergreen Resort
Board Meetings
5:30 – 6:30 Happy Hour at Evergreen Resort

FRIDAY JULY 25

8:00 Registration/Vendor time (Donuts and Coffee)
9:00 Welcome to Dutchman
9:00 to 11:30 Programming and Tours
12:00 Lunch/Vendor time
2:00 to 4:30 Programming and Tours
4:30 Happy Hour/Vendor time
6:00 6:00 Hall of Fame and Tree Contest Winners Announced
6:30 Dinner and Rodeo Event

SATURDAY JULY 26

8:00 Vendor time (Donuts and Coffee)
9:00 10:00 Programming and Tours
12:00 Lunch/Vendor time
2:00 to 4:30 Programming and Tours
Conclude program

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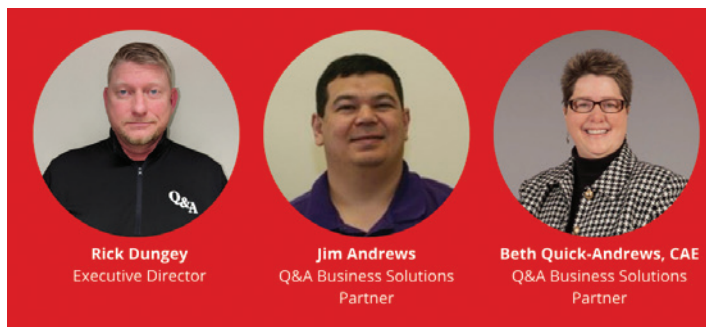
NCTA Announces Q&A Business Solutions as New Management Team

New Year, New Beginnings!

The National Christmas Tree Board of Directors is pleased to announce they have named Q&A Business Solutions as their new management firm effective January 1, 2025. The team at Q&A will work hand-in-hand with Board members and will oversee day-to-day association operations. NCTA President, John Wykoff, noted "Q&A brings robust association management, digital marketing and strategic planning experience. The Q&A staff team is creative and will provide out of the box thinking to ensure NCTA achieves its mission to protect and advocate for the farm-grown Christmas tree industry. While maintain our core activities, we are excited about the future possibilities for NCTA members and the industry."

Q&A Business Solutions is located in the heart of the country in St. Louis, MO. Their team of dedicated professionals brings a combined 150 years of non-profit management experience with both charitable and association entities.

Meet your New Team



Not everyone is "new-new". Rick Dungey will serve as NCTA's Executive Director. Rick previously worked on the NCTA staff from 1998 until 2016. Since joining Q&A in 2020, he has led the Christmas Spirit Foundation and Trees for Troops program. Rick brings a wealth of experience and expertise in the Christmas Tree industry and association management to this role.

Beth Quick-Andrews and Jim Andrews, Principals of Q&A Business Solutions, are part of the staff team. Q&A Business Solutions is an accredited management company through the AMC Institute (the trade association for management companies). You can review their overall client profile here <https://qabs.com/>.

Beth has 35 years of practical experience working with organizations that cover a spectrum of disciplines and industries. Whether it is Board of Directors facilitation, membership management, meeting planning, financial

management, communications or general administration, Beth's skills and expertise are as diverse as her clients. Beth's mission is to work with organizations that want to streamline operations and maximize member return on investment. As a managing partner, Beth is responsible for operations management that effectively serves the client. Beth holds a Bachelor of Science in Management and Political Science from Maryville University. She is a Certified Association Executive through the American Society of Association Executives.

Jim Andrews has over 30 years of practical system development, programming, and training experience in both the public and private sectors. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Management and Information Systems from Maryville University. In addition, he has continually updated and expanded his knowledge on product advancements (hardware and software) through hundreds of hours of continuing education classes on new developments in the industry.

The NCTA Executive Committee approved an operating budget for FY 25 and a key word kept coming up as projects and programs were discussed. And that word was "revitalize." That will be the mantra going into 2025 and will include membership, working committees, the tree contest, data gathering, working with partner organizations such as state/regional associations and the Real Christmas Tree Board.

Revitalized Working Committees already going include **Public Information** – work areas – consumer polling options, polling data reporting, public facing web pages, talking points for any NCTA members. **Fire Safety** – work areas – guidance on content of approved video production, correspondence with

NFPA and other fire/code professional groups, code change proposals. **Contests** – work areas – advise staff regarding recruitment of contestants, review feedback from contestants, recruit judges. **Legislative/Advocacy** – work areas – review possible sign-on requests (letters, legislation support), keep current on policy issues prioritized by AmericanHORT, review communications about issues to members

We look forward to your participation in revitalizing NCTA!

Contact us:

The office phone number remains the same: 800-975-5920

The new mailing address:

The National Christmas Tree Association

2650 S. Hanley Rd, Suite 100

St. Louis, MO 63144

Feel free to contact the new staff any time by phone or email
info@realchristmastrees.org.

Got Big Tree(s)?

NCTA was recently contacted by an event designer at a popular theme park in Branson, MO looking to source a large cut Christmas tree for this year. If you have tree inventory like that and are interested, you are welcome to contact her directly. See info below:

My name is Kelly Eutsler, and I am the Visual Design Manager at Silver Dollar City Theme Park down here in Branson. You may be familiar with us, and/or our Old Time Christmas Festival that we have each year. For 2025, we are adding an area to our park and want to feature a 40-45' cut Christmas Tree. I have been doing some research online and am finding that many tree farms don't market themselves for anything over 15-16'. Please feel free to give out my email info to interested folks; you can give them my cell number as well, with encouragement to leave a voicemail.

Kelly Eutsler | Visual Design Manager

Silver Dollar City

c: 417.830.3132

e: keutsler@silverdollarcity.com



National Tree and Wreath Contests in 2025



Continuing a 59-year tradition, the NCTA 2024 Grand Champion Growers Cartner's Christmas Tree Farm from Newland, North Carolina, presented First Lady Dr. Jill Biden with the official White House Christmas tree on November 25, 2024. The spectacular Fraser fir was hand selected by Robert Downing, White House Chief Usher, and Dale Haney, White House Superintendent of Grounds at Cartner's farm in North Carolina on October 28th.



The 2024 Reserve Grand Champion grower was Bustard's Christmas Trees in Lansdale, PA, and in that role they provided a tree from their farm to the residence of the Vice President. Bustard's did something cool with this role in 2024, they turned the selection day of that tree into a local community event, inviting high school science students to participate, as well as guest speakers. 🌲



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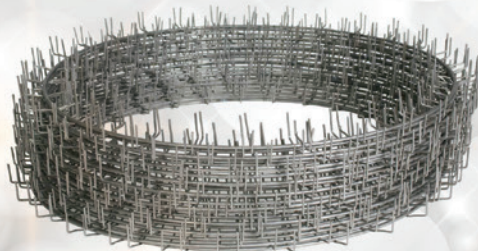
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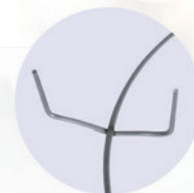
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Tree Diseases and Management Series for Christmas Tree Production:



Biology and Management of Needlecast Diseases for Christmas Tree Production

DR. PRATIMA DEVKOTA
RESEARCH SPECIALIST,
DEPARTMENT OF PLANT, SOIL AND
MICROBIAL SCIENCES
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Needlecast diseases present a major challenge for Christmas tree growers, threatening the health, appearance, and marketability of the trees. Caused by various fungal pathogens, needlecasts typically lead to older needles turning brown and falling off, resulting in a sparse and unattractive canopy. Repeated infections can cause branch dieback, further compromising tree health. Trees that appear perfect when tagged for sale in the summer may experience significant defoliation by fall, making them unsellable.

Spread by wind and moisture, needlecast diseases primarily affect evergreen species like spruce, fir, and pine (Kimberley et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2016). Dense plantings in nurseries, plantations, and landscapes provide ideal conditions for these pathogens to thrive. Unlike needle blights, which affect both needles and shoots within the same year, needlecasts result in the gradual loss of needles over time. For needlecast diseases to develop, three key factors must be present: a susceptible host, a virulent pathogen, and favorable environmental conditions, including high humidity and prolonged leaf wetness as shown in the disease triangle (Figure 1).

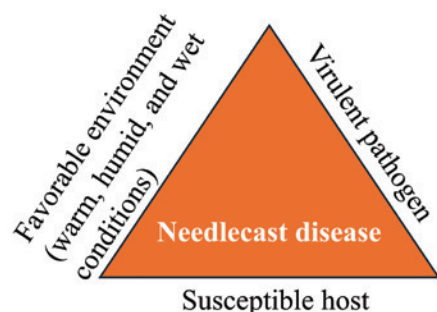


Figure 1 – Disease triangle showing three factors are important for disease to occur, favorable environment, virulent pathogen, and susceptible host.

Disease cycle

Needlecast diseases follow a cyclic pattern where fungal pathogens overwinter in infected needles. In the spring, fungi infect young, growing needles. Symptoms typically appear the following spring, and spores are produced later in the season. As the season progresses, these spores are released, continuing the cycle (Figure 2). Infected needles usually shed the year after infection, although some fungi may persist and continue to produce spores even after the needles have dropped (Bergdahl & Hill, 2016).

Not all needlecast diseases follow this exact pattern. Some infect current-year needles, while others affect needles from the previous two years. In certain cases, the fungi spread into stems and branches, leading to dieback or even tree death if defoliation occurs over multiple seasons.

Accurate diagnosis is crucial for managing needle cast diseases. Because spores appear at different times, multiple samples may be needed for lab testing.

Some of the common needlecast diseases in Christmas trees plantations are:

Rhizosphaera needlecast, caused by *Rhizosphaera kalkhoffii*, primarily affects Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), though other conifers like Norway (*P. abies*) and white spruce (*P. glauca*) and

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) can also be susceptible. Early symptoms include purpling or browning of the innermost needles on lower branches, while the youngest needles at the branch tips often remain unaffected. A key sign of infection is the presence of small black spheres, the fungal fruiting bodies, which appear in rows along the underside of affected needles (Figure 2A; Bergdahl & Alison, 2016).

Stigmina needlecast is caused by *Stigmina lautii* and primarily affects blue and white spruce, though it has also been reported on black (*P. mariana*) and Norway spruce. Its symptoms, including needle browning and premature drop, closely resemble those of *Rhizosphaera* needlecast, often leading to misdiagnosis. A key sign for identification is the appearance of fungal fruiting bodies. *Stigmina lautii* produces irregular, fuzzy structures, while *Rhizosphaera kalkhoffii* forms smooth, neatly aligned rows on the underside of needles. Microscopic examination is often necessary for accurate diagnosis (Bergdahl & Alison, 2016).

Swiss needlecast (SNC), caused by fungus *Nothophaeocryptopus gaeumannii*, affects Douglas-fir. Infected trees develop yellowing and browning needles, with black fruiting bodies forming in stomatal rows on the undersides of needles. These fruiting bodies appear as two tiny bands of structures on chlorotic or brown needles (Figure 3). Unlike other needlecast diseases, SNC often causes trees to retain infected needles for several years before they drop. Symptoms typically become noticeable 2 to 3 years after infection (Mulvey et al., 2013; Ritóková et al. 2021).

Rhabdocone needlecast, caused by *Rhabdocone pseudotsugae*, primarily affects Douglas-fir trees. Symptoms appear in late summer or fall as yellow or reddish-brown spots on both the upper and lower surfaces of the current season's growth (Figure 4). Affected needles may develop multiple spots that enlarge over time, potentially covering the entire needle. By late spring, the lesions swell and split lengthwise on the

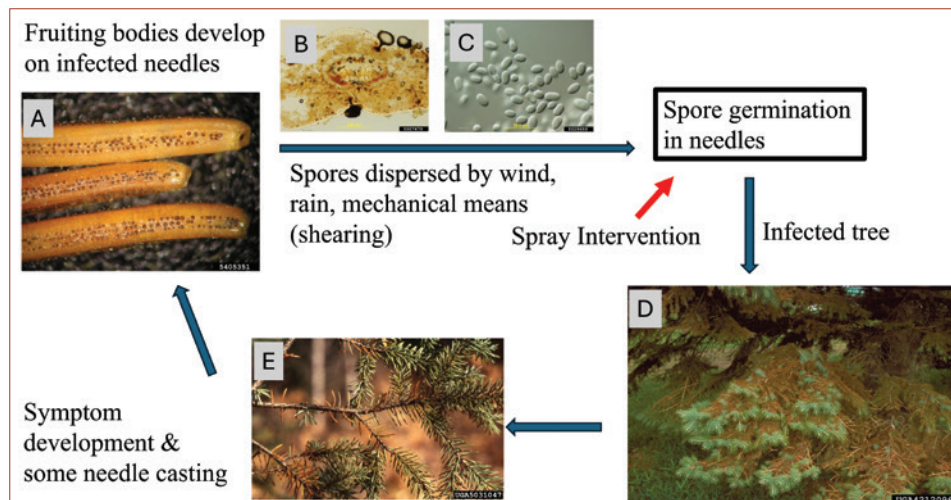


Figure 2 – Disease-cycle of *Rhizosphaera* needlecast on Spruce: A: Brown, infected needle with fruiting body of the fungus, Picture source (PC): Paul Bachi, University of Kentucky Research and Education Center, Bugwood.org; B: Cross section of needle showing fungal fruiting body, PC: Bruce Watt, University of Maine, Bugwood.org; C: Asexual Spore, PC: Bruce Watt, University of Maine, Bugwood.org; D: *Rhizosphaera* needlecast symptoms on Spruce, PC: USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org; E: Infected foliage, PC: Joseph OBrien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

needle undersides, releasing fungal spores that spread via wind and rain. The fungus infects young needles in the spring, with fruiting bodies producing spores the following year, continuing the infection cycle. In severe cases, trees may lose a significant portion of their needles by early summer.

Lophodermium needlecast caused by pathogenic species of *Lophodermium* is commonly prevalent in forest nurseries, Christmas tree farms, and landscaped areas. Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), red pine (*P. resinosa*), Austrian pine (*P. nigra*) and Eastern white pine (*P. strobus*) are susceptible to the disease. Infected Scotch pines develop irregular brown spots with yellow borders on their needles (Figure 5). In severe cases, the infection can cause entire trees to turn brown before bud break.

Managing Needlecast Diseases

To effectively manage needlecast diseases, it is essential to disrupt at least one component of the disease triangle. By doing so, growers can implement proactive strategies to prevent and control infections.

Plant disease tolerant tree species:

Selecting tree species that are more resistant to needlecast diseases can help minimize the risk of infection. For example, needlecasts are less common on true firs (*Abies spp.*), so concolor fir (*Abies concolor*) may be a good alternative for growers that are struggling to control needlecasts in Colorado blue spruce or Douglas-fir.

Site selection and establishment:

Choose locations with acidic, moist, well-drained soil and full sun exposure. Consider the spacing and number of trees planted per acre. A less dense tree planting will improve air circulation. Basal pruning and good weed control will also improve air circulation. Good air circulation helps reduce moisture and prevent fungal growth. Avoid overhead watering to minimize needle wetness, which contributes to disease development.

Monitoring and removing infected needles and trees: Regular monitoring and early intervention are crucial for preventing widespread infections. Since infections occur at least a year before symptoms appear, promptly removing and destroying infected needles reduces the spread of spores. Avoid leaving live branches on stumps after harvesting, and do not shear trees during wet

weather. Always shear healthy trees first and disinfect tools frequently.

Chemical control: Monitoring needlecast levels in your plantings is essential before beginning a spray program. To determine if chemical management is necessary, inspect needles for fungal fruiting bodies, which produce spores that infect new growth as buds break. Fungicide



Figure 3 – A: Douglas-fir showing symptoms of Swiss needlecast disease, PC: USDA Forest Service - North Central Research Station, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org; B: Fungal fruiting bodies on Douglas-fir needles, PC: Petr Kapitola, Central Institute for Supervising and Testing in Agriculture, Bugwood.org

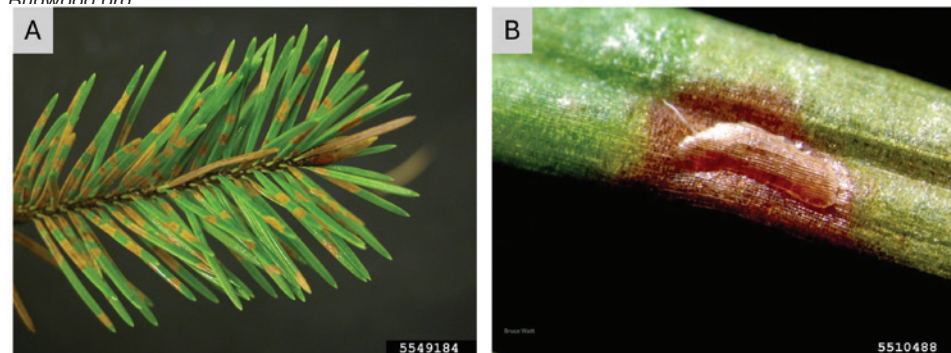


Figure 4 – Rhabdochloa Needlecast in Douglas-fir; A: Symptoms of infection, PC: Penn State Department of Plant Pathology & Environmental Microbiology Archives, Penn State University, Bugwood.org; B: Infected needles with apothecia splitting open needle tissue, PC: Bruce Watt, University of Maine, Bugwood.org

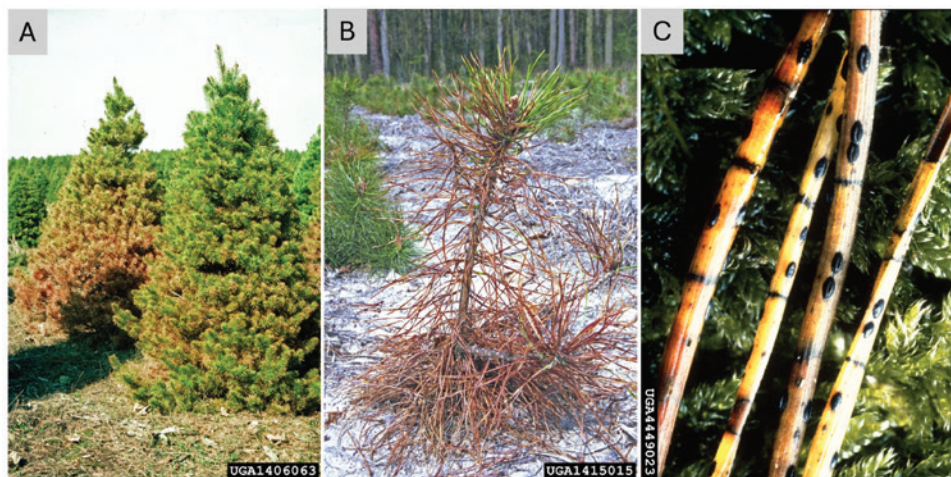


Figure 5 – Lophodermium needlecast in Scotch pine; A: Symptoms of infection, PC: USDA Forest Service - North Central Research Station, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org; B: Symptoms of fungal infection in young tree, Andrej Kunca, National Forest Centre - Slovakia, Bugwood.org; C: Signs of infection on Scotch pine needles, PC: Petr Kapitola, Central Institute for Supervising and Testing in Agriculture, Bugwood.org

applications in late spring and early summer can help protect new growth, but they are not effective at curing needles that are already infected. To protect new needles from infection, use fungicides containing active ingredients like chlorothalonil, copper hydroxide, copper sulfate, or mancozeb. Start fungicide applications when the new growth is 1/2 to 2 inches long in the spring. Depending on the amount of disease pressure, subsequent fungicide applications may be required at about 3 to 4 weeks intervals (Linderberg et al., 2023). Successful control may require 2-3 years of consistent yearly fungicide treatments. Note that some chlorothalonil-based fungicides can cause needle discoloration on spruces, as phytotoxicity may occur when spraying at higher rates or using air-blast sprayers.

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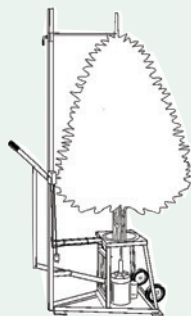
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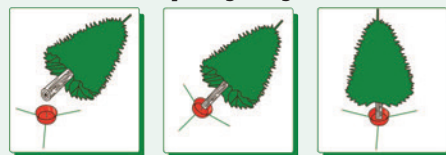


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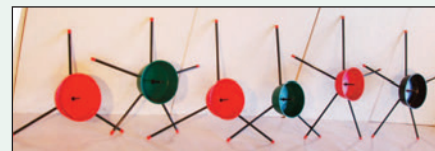
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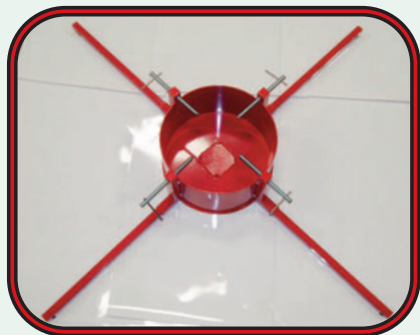
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*Scott Powell, President-Elect, NCTA
Dutchman Tree Farms, Manton, MI*

(Pictured with daughter Elisabeth at the Impact Washington Summit)

NCTA is highly focused on the things the industry has said matter most—**public policy/governmental affairs, voice of the industry, White House tree, fire issues and fire codes.**

It is imperative that NCTA successfully represents Christmas tree growers before the federal government on important matters including:

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Christmas Tree Sales Recap

BILL LINDBERG, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
CHRISTMAS TREE EDUCATOR

RILEY JOHNSON, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH TECHNICIAN TREE PHYSIOLOGY LAB

The 2024 Christmas tree sales season is completed. With that in mind, many growers may wonder how their sales season stacked up to other farms or previous years. Were tree sales up or down compared to 2023? Were there enough trees to match demand, or was there an excess at the end of the year? Anecdotally some growers in Michigan have reported decreased year over year tree sales and a softening market in 2024. Overall economic downturns, poor weather, and a very late Thanksgiving date all could have contributed to a decreased sales year. Other market forces of inflationary pressures and high customer debt may also have reduced demand. To better determine if this is an industry-wide trend or isolated situations, a grower survey was created to gather feedback from Christmas tree growers in the Great Lakes region. Subsequent grower phone interviews were also conducted.

The grower survey consisted of 26 questions and was initially distributed in mid-January through the Michigan Christmas Tree Association member list. Soon after, the survey was posted on the Great Lakes Christmas Tree Facebook group and asked for grower participation comparing the 2024 and 2023 Christmas tree sales season. In total, 39 growers from 12 states and one grower from Canada responded to the survey comparing their Christmas tree sales from 2024 to 2023. The survey was divided into categories for wholesale, choose and cut, and retail lot sales to determine if different avenues of tree sales have differing experiences.

Combined results from the survey (Figure 1) comparing Christmas tree sales from 2024 to 2023 show a mostly positive report, with about 75% of respondents indicating sales either increased or stayed the same year over year. Parsing the results into different sales channels, begins to show a more nuanced story. For choose and cut sales (Figure 2), the vast majority (80%) sold the same or more trees in 2024. Focusing on specific changes in 2024, 60% of respondents sold at least 50 more trees, while 20% sold an additional 200 or more trees. Those with increased tree sales noted increase in supply of trees available to sell, improved advertising, and other nearby tree farms closing as reasons for selling

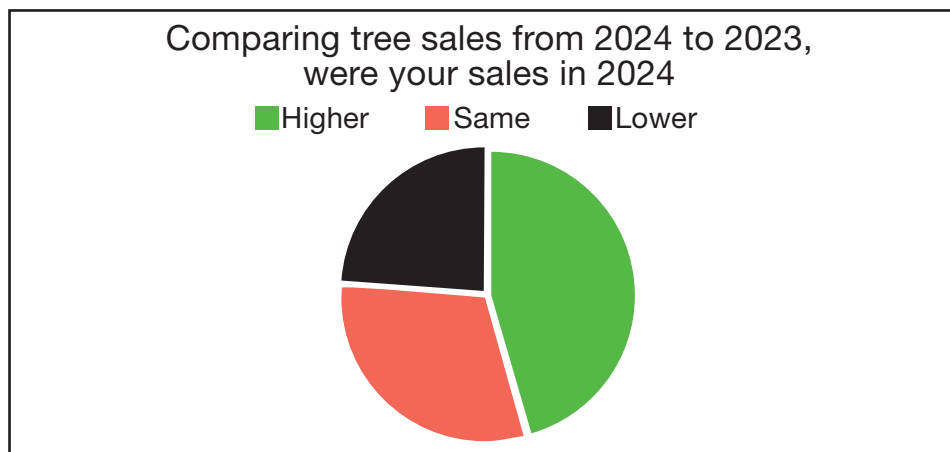


Figure 1 – Grower response comparing Christmas tree sales from 2024 to 2023.



Figure 2 – Choose and Cut grower response comparing tree sales from 2024 to 2023.

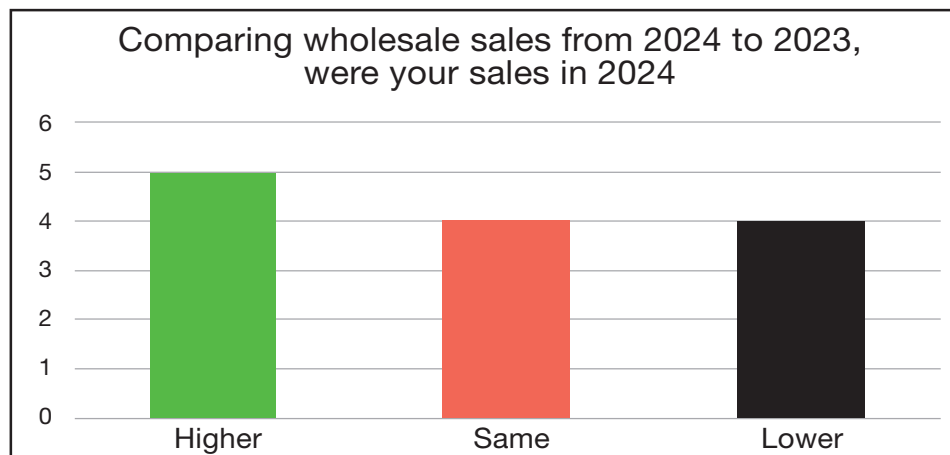
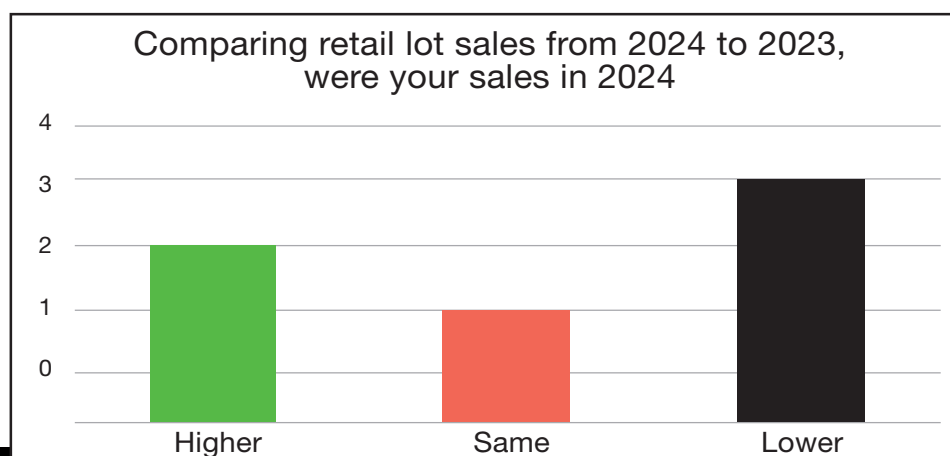


Figure 3 – Wholesale grower response comparing tree sales from 2024 to 2023.



more trees. For wholesale tree sales (Figure 3), results were split nearly equal between sales being the same, higher, or lower during 2024. Growers indicated that these results were directly tied to the available tree supply. Those that sold more had more trees available to sell, while those that sold fewer trees had a smaller 2024 supply. Reports from lot sales were very limited, with only 6 responses. With that said, a majority of respondents said tree lot sales had decreased in 2024 compared to 2023 (Figure 4). Lack of trees to sell and poor economic conditions were cited as reasons for the decline. With relatively few responses from this category, it is difficult to make a strong connection to the actual market.

To expand the information about the sales season beyond the grower survey, growers from around the region were interviewed. A summary of their responses about their 2024 sales season are listed below:

Ohio: Jane Neubauer from Sugar Pines Farm sells choose and cut as well as pre-cut trees. Jane reported 2024 as a great sales year and one of their best ever (Photo 1). They were able to sell out of trees quicker than any year before. Jane also reports other growers in northeast Ohio as having very high demand for trees. She mentioned it seems like lots of younger generations are coming to farms in the area to get the farm-experiences and fun activities (Photo 2), whether they purchase a pre-cut or cut their own tree in the end.

Indiana: Sarah and Justin James from Jolly Pines Tree Farm (Photo 3). Currently they exclusively sell trees via a tree lot as their choose and cut trees are not yet large enough to harvest. Sarah reported the number of trees sold was about the same from 2024 to 2023. However, they had to remain open several weeks longer to reach that same volume. She notes the general consensus from other Indiana growers is sales were moderately weaker in 2024.

Michigan: Dan Wahmhoff from Wahmhoff Farms sells trees through wholesale, choose and cut, and retail lots. He reports sales were down slightly from the choose and cut and retail lots, and attribute this to the very late Thanksgiving date, which essentially cost them a weekend of sales. Their wholesale sales were consistent year over year.

Pennsylvania: Beth Bossio from Quarter Pine Tree Farm (Photo 4). Their farm focuses mostly on choose and cut and precuts, but they have a few wholesale customers as well. Their choose and cut season was generally positive, overall numbers were down slightly compared to 2023 (Photo 5). A lack of trees, specifically tall trees, in their fields likely held back additional sales. In addition, the late Thanksgiving date greatly compacted the number of prime sale days. Beth also reported some customers requesting a more open, natural looking tree and they will make changes on some of their shearing



Photo 1 – Sugar Pines Farm Choose and Cut. Credit: Jane Neubauer



Photo 2 – Sugar Pines Farm Agri-Tourism Activities, Credit: Jane Neubauer

strategies in the year of sale to match those customer requests. Beth reported that some retail lots in the area ended the season with a large number of pre-cut trees left unsold.

Wisconsin: Andrea Barry from Cooks' Woods, which focuses primarily on choose and cut with a smaller portion in wholesale production. Choose and cut sales were down slightly from 2023, with around a couple hundred fewer sold. Interestingly, customer traffic was increased on the weekdays, but slower on weekends. Some customers may have wanted to avoid large crowds and came on less popular days.

Taken as a whole, the grower survey results indicate a relatively strong Christmas tree market. A key component of tree sales, whether up or down, was the availability of trees. For those farms that had more inventory to sell, they reported greater tree sales. Conversely, when tree inventory was reduced, tree sales followed. Choose and cut respondents had higher response rates of more tree sales, while retail lots were on the opposite side with a reduction in sales. From the grower survey, the market appears to be more limited by supply than demand. Grower phone interviews paint a more neutral

sales environment, indicating some softening in sales compared to 2023. A common theme was the very late Thanksgiving date reduced the number of prime sales days. Overall, the 2024 season may be viewed as somewhat unremarkable, with the post-COVID boom of tree demand waning, but moderately strong tree sales remain.

Thank you to all the growers who participated in our survey and phone interviews! 🌲



Photo 4 – Quarter Pine Tree Farm, Credit Beth Russo



Photo 3 – Jolly Pines Tree Farm, Sarah and Justin James, Credit Sarah James



Photo 5 – Quarter Pine Tree Farm, Credit Beth Russo

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Agricultural Pesticide Label Changes

ERIN LIZOTTE, IPM COORDINATOR, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

An ever-increasing number of agriculture pesticide labels require applicators to utilize the Bulletins Live! Two system to check for additional use limitations to protect endangered species and their habitat. In an effort to address concerns related to the impact of pesticides on threatened or endangered species and in response to ongoing litigation, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed an online system called Bulletins Live! Two (BLT). Bulletins Live! Two is a map-based webpage that helps applicators determine if additional

pesticide use limitations are needed to protect listed species or habitat based on the application location, pesticide and application month. The system is intended to avoid blanket use restrictions and instead creates PULAs (pesticide use limitation areas) that targets restrictions to geographic and time-specific use patterns that should be avoided to protect endangered species and their habitat. Furthermore, even applications that fall under a PULA may allow application if mitigation strategies are implemented to avoid runoff and drift.


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Bulletins Live! Two -- View the Bulletins

For assistance in using Bulletins Live! Two, [view the tutorial](#). Also see [background notes](#) and a [quick start guide for BLT](#).

Directions

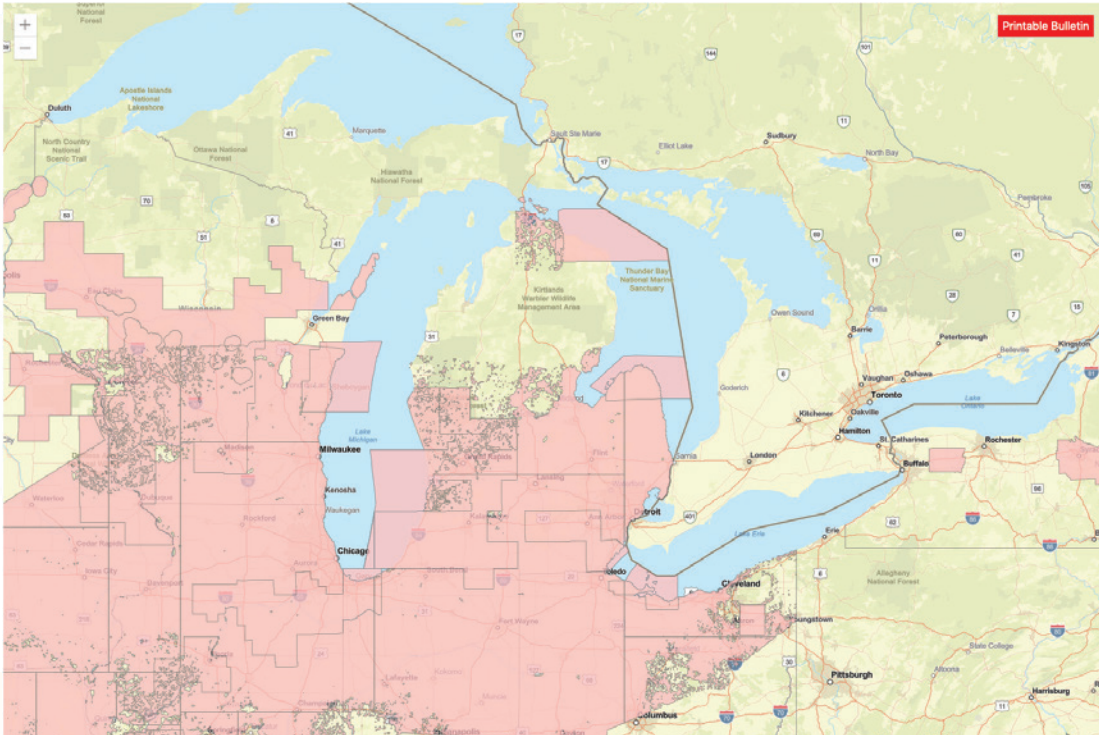
This tool displays Pesticide Use Limitation Areas (PULAs) for products with active Endangered Species Protection Bulletins. To generate a printable bulletin, please follow these steps:

1. Navigate to your intended pesticide application area by using the "Location Search" tool or panning and zooming on the map itself.
2. Select your Application Month from the Application Date dropdown.
3. Search specific pesticide product(s) by entering the EPA product registration number(s). If you need assistance finding the EPA product registration number, consult the [guide on the Bulletins Live! Two website](#). Once you have entered your

Location Search:

Application Month:

EPA Registration Number:



Bulletins Live! Two website showing Michigan areas that may be impacted by pesticide use limitation areas depending on application parameters. Web captured 2.28.25

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 provides a framework to conserve and protect endangered and threatened species and their habitats both domestically and abroad. An endangered species is an organism threatened by extinction, threatened species are likely to soon be endangered. Together, threatened and endangered species are commonly referred to as 'listed' species. The ESA requires that listing determinations consider only scientific and commercial information; economic factors are not allowed to be considered as part of the listing process. Species may also be removed from the list if they no longer need protection or have a change in status. Michigan currently has 26 known endangered or threatened species.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plays an important role in implementing the Endangered Species

Act. This includes ensuring that the use of pesticides does not jeopardize listed species or adversely impact their designated critical habitat. If EPA determines that use of a pesticide may impact listed species, it initiates consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service to identify potential negative impacts. These agencies also develop and propose measures to mitigate these negative impacts. Based on the outcomes of this process, EPA may require additional pesticide use limitations, these limitations are often included in the environmental hazards section of the pesticide label. However, if it is determined that pesticide use limitations are only needed in specific geographic areas or at a specific application timing, EPA implements these changes through Endangered Species Protection Bulletins that define pesticide use limitation areas

(PULAs) based on the site location, pesticide product and application month. These 'bulletins' are made available via the Bulletins Live! Two system which allows applicators to check their planned application parameters to determine if any additional pesticide use limitations are required to protect listed species or their habitat. Applicators are only required to consult the BLT system if the label that came with the pesticide container in their possession directs them to under the 'Directions for use' portion of the label. The BLT system may be checked up to 6 months prior to an application.

Applicators are only required to consult the BLT system if the label that came with the pesticide container in their possession directs them to. Pesticide manufacturers may be adding the BLT directive to products as they go through registration or registration review.

Currently, most of the impacted labels with additional pesticide use limitations are agricultural herbicides and insecticides, but additional products are added regularly with the inclusion of fungicides and other pesticides anticipated in the future. There are currently 15 products with pesticide use limitations in Michigan, however, there are many labels that require applicators to check the BLT system before use. If a pesticide label directs you to the BLT system, you are required to follow the pesticide use limitation(s) found on both the label and on the bulletin generated by the BLT system.

To generate a bulletin, you will need the following information: (1) location which you can navigate to manually or enter as an address or coordinates; (2) application month and year; and (3) the product EPA registration number (found on the pesticide label). The bulletins themselves are simply a document that describes any additional pesticide use limitations based on the proposed

application site and includes a map of the location, the application timing and product. It is important to note that there may not be any additional specific use limitations based on the application parameters. This could be because EPA has not yet identified if additional pesticide use limitations are needed or there are no additional geographically specific use limitations based on the use pattern. Though not required, applicators are encouraged to print or save the 'bulletin' along with their pesticide records even if no additional pesticide use limitations apply.

It is important to note that compliance with all label directives including use of the BLT system is mandatory and the applicator's responsibility. Applicators can generate bulletins up to 6 months before an application and should do so as far in advance as possible to check for any additional pesticide use limitations that might impact their ability to utilize the pesticide as intended. Ideally, applicators will carefully check the labels of products

they are considering before purchase to fully understand any use limitations on their site. Because the Bulletins Live! Two system will continue to add new pesticides continuously, applicators need to continue to check all product labels carefully for this new directive.

For more information on navigating Bulletins Live! Two, view the EPA tutorial. For more information on the changes related to the BLT system, visit the MSU Extension Bulletins Live! Two webpage. For more information on how MSU is supporting efforts to conserve Michigan biodiversity including listed species and critical habitat, visit the Michigan Natural Feature Inventory webpage.

This work is supported by the Crop Protection and Pest Management Program [grant no 2021-70006-35450] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. 🌲



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How to get the most out of your weed management program in Christmas tree production?

Non-chemical Weed Control in Christmas Tree Production



DEBALINA SAHA
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HORTICULTURE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

To produce high-quality, marketable Christmas trees, a good weed management plan is essential. Effective weed control is extremely important for initial conifer seedling survival and in the first three years after transplanting (during the establishment period) in the field (Figure 1). The establishment phase of Christmas trees is critical as weed competition, particularly for water, can lead to suppression of tree growth and can even cause death of the trees. In the second and third year of the establishment phase, the rate of tree growth is directly related to the amount of weed competition. In later stages of rotation, when trees are larger, weeds interfere with production practices such as pruning and spraying pesticides and can even shade lower branches of trees. Hence, this new article series “How to get the most out of your weed management program in Christmas tree production?” will be focusing on understanding both non-chemical and chemical weed control strategies including aspects of herbicide modes of action, herbicide resistance, new(er) herbicide products, adjuvants and surfactants, etc.

Christmas tree growers mostly rely on mechanical mowing and applications of chemical herbicides to control the weeds in their production fields. However, repeated applications of the same herbicides have resulted in the development of herbicide-resistant weed species. In Michigan there are recent reports on common ragweed resistance to clopyralid (Stinger), a synthetic auxin herbicide, by some Michigan Christmas tree growers, especially in Montcalm County (Hill, 2012). Many postemergence herbicides can even cause severe phytotoxic injuries to different species of Christmas trees including stunted growth, burning and dropping of needles, chlorosis, and even complete death of the tree. During the establishment phase in particular, young Christmas trees are sensitive to these chemical herbicides. In addition, there can be negative

environmental issues such as herbicide leaching, drift, and run-off. Due to the issues surrounding herbicide use and increasing concern among some consumers related to pesticide applications, many growers are interested in strategies to reduce or even eliminate chemical weed control. The purpose of this very first article in this new series is to provide an overview of nonchemical weed control strategies in Christmas tree production.

Prevention: Prevention of weed seed introduction to the Christmas tree field is the first step to effective non-chemical weed control. Although natural dispersing agents including wind, water, birds, mice, etc. can move weed seeds into fields, weed seeds, rhizomes, parts of roots and stems can be also moved from site to site on equipment or clothing. Preventing the introduction of weed seeds requires controlling weeds along

farm roads, maintaining clean equipment and equipment yards, and eliminating new weed species before they start seeding or becoming established. If topsoil is introduced to a site, it should be clean and free of roots, rhizomes, seeds, and other weed propagules. Regular scouting for weed species needs to be undertaken by growers in their fields and immediate hand removal is encouraged as later mowing in between the Christmas tree rows can spread the seeds and rhizomes.

Mechanical Control: Mechanical control, which includes cultivation and mowing, can help in preventing development of herbicide-tolerant resistant weed species.

a. Cultivation: Weeds around the bases of the Christmas trees can be controlled by hand or mechanical cultivation. Cultivation can be helpful in controlling the small seedlings of many weeds for the first 2 or 3 years after transplanting the Christmas trees. Cultivation requires more frequent application than other methods for effective control and is not feasible on sloped land due to possible erosion and can damage tree roots. Moreover, overuse of cultivation can spread perennial weed species such as field bindweed or Canada thistle [*Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.] throughout the field, can increase cultivation-resistant species such as common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea* L.), or can damage soil structure in later years (Peachey et al., 2017). As Christmas trees grow and fill in spaces between rows, it can become more difficult to get cultivation equipment through the plantation and cultivation becomes less effective for controlling weeds.

b. Mowing: Mowing at the right time prior to weed seed development helps to reduce the number of seeds produced by the weeds and can significantly reduce the weed competition with the trees. With large mowing equipment, the potential for damaging the trees



Figure 1 – An example of poorly managed weeds in a Christmas tree production during the establishment phase. Photo credits: Debalina Saha, MSU Horticulture.



Figure 2. Organic mulching can suppress weed growth and improve Christmas tree transplant survival rate. Photo credits: Debalina Saha, MSU Horticulture.

increases. Hence the use of deflection shields often becomes necessary to minimize damage to larger trees. Growers need to prevent trunk damage to reduce entry ports for disease and insect organisms. Where weeds immediately around trees and within rows are not controlled by mowing, weed or mechanical trimmers are often used. These weed trimmers can serve dual functions and can be used in the shearing operation by adding of a cutting blade. These trimmers are available in a variety of styles with different power sources, some trimming with a monofilament line, some with metal or plastic blades (Appleton and Hill, 1997).

Mulching:

a. Organic mulching: Vegetation can be controlled around Christmas trees by one or more varieties of organic mulch which may include grass clippings, nut hulls, wood chips, compost, bark, sawdust, and other organic materials. Organic mulch (Figure 2) can improve soil moisture, reduce soil erosion and compaction, maintain optimal soil temperatures, increase soil nutrition, enhance root establishment, transplant survival, and improve plant establishment and overall tree growth. Weeds can increase daily evapotranspiration of soil moisture by 25% in summer (Harris

continued on page 38...



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et al., 2004). In contrast, organic mulches can increase soil moisture content by increasing percolation and retention, reducing evaporation, and reducing weeds. An appropriate mulch layer will significantly reduce the amount of irrigation needed, and in certain cases can eliminate it altogether. Coarse and large particle size organic mulch such as pine bark and pine straw have shown better weed control than fine particle-sized hardwood mulch (Saha et al., 2020). Coarse organic mulches can hold water much like a sponge, thereby capturing rainfall and irrigation water for later release and preventing runoff. In addition to drought stress, mulch can also protect trees from other environmental stresses such as cold injury. Organic mulches help to maintain optimal soil temperatures in that soil can be kept cooler in hot conditions and warmer in cold conditions. Temperature modification is extremely important near the soil surface as hot or cold surface soils can kill new transplants that have not had time to generate a large root mass and establish into deeper, more moderate, surrounding soils. Numerous studies have demonstrated that improved water retention and reduced weed growth are correlated with increased root growth and exploration by desirable plants. Hence, mulches allow roots of trees to extend and establish far beyond the trunk compared to bare soil and thus become increasingly stabilized. Choosing the right type of organic mulch is important in determining how well the roots of Christmas trees will expand in the underlying soil. It was observed that root development and density was greatest under organic mulches compared to plastic mulch, bare soil or living mulches. Organic mulches have an additional advantage of releasing nutrients as they decay. It is recommended to use old (>6 months) sawdust, bark, or chip mulch so that the initial decay has started, and the time required for

early nitrogen demand has already passed (Appleton and Hill, 1997).

b. Inorganic mulching: Inorganic mulch materials act as physical barriers that limit or exclude weeds and regulate soil temperature and moisture, which aids seedling establishment and survival. True physical barriers, which do not allow water percolation into the soil but restrict the amount of evaporation away from the soil, include asphalt shingles or plastic sheets of various kinds (Appleton and Hill, 1997). Porous inorganic mulch material such as ground rubber does allow rainwater percolation (Appleton and Hill, 1997). Solid inorganic surfaces such as concrete and synthetic mulches including asphalt, fabrics and plastics are poor at controlling soil temperatures. However, chunky inorganic mulches such as gravel and lava rock are more effective temperature moderators. Soil temperatures may be raised or lowered by black plastic mulch, depending on how much light is absorbed by the plastic and whether heat is retained or reflected.

Cover Crops and Vegetated Strips:

Cover crops can directly compete with weed species and can suppress weed emergence. In addition to weed suppression, cover crops can reduce soil erosion, improve soil physical properties and nutrient content. Incorporating cover crops into Christmas tree plantations may improve tree growth and quality, soil fertility and can be an alternative to commercial nitrogen fertilizers. Cover cropping is widely recognized and promoted as a practical method to enhance soil productivity and environmental quality. Groundcover management involves the use of mowed, tilled, or killed cover crops to add organic matter to soil, conserve soil humus, reduce soil erosion, increase soil organic matter levels, and steadily release available nutrients for associated or succeeding Christmas tree uptake as the organic matter breaks down. Planting either

legume cover crops [e.g., alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) and white clover (*Trifolium repens* L.)] or grasses [e.g., perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne* L.)] in the interspaces of Christmas tree can increase plant residue inputs to soils and, therefore, may stimulate soil microbial activity (Dinesh et al., 2004; Mendes et al., 1999). Because cover crops can produce significant amounts of biomass, thrive when repeatedly mowed, fix atmospheric nitrogen through symbiotic association with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, and/or scavenge excess nitrogen left in the soil that would otherwise be lost by leaching, they are considered as ideal candidates for “living mulch”. Agricultural management practices that leave plant residues on the soil surface, such as cover cropping and no tillage, often result in higher concentrations of soluble organic carbon compounds, which may greatly influence soil microbial populations and activities.

However, there are potential drawbacks of cover crops which include heavy consumption of moisture from the soil, increased pest populations and diseases, competition with Christmas trees and reduced tree growth. White clover as ground cover decreased the height of *Abies nordmanniana* and *Abies lasiocarpa* by 30% compared to thorough weed control (Sæbø et al., 2009). Both grasses and clover sown as living mulch damaged the Christmas trees more than the natural weed vegetation (Sæbø et al., 2009). Christmas tree growers may incur additional costs for planting and killing cover crops.

Vegetated strips may include permanent grass strips which may take 3 to 4 years to establish and can be planted between tree rows before or after Christmas trees are planted. This permanent grass strip can significantly reduce the number of perennial and annual weeds and can also provide a stable soil surface in the winter for harvest.

Thermal weed Control: Thermal weed control methods include flame, hot water, steam and infrared heater.

Flaming can cause the suppression of many different annual weed species, but it is less effective on larger weeds, perennials, and grasses. Flame weeding is occasionally used in Christmas tree production but needs to be applied with caution. The major challenge to flame weeding in Christmas trees is that there are many weeds at different growth stages and this method is most effective when weeds are very small (usually at the two- to three- leaf stage). This method of open flame weeding in summer can be extremely dangerous when senescing weeds and tree trimmings may provide enough fuel to ignite the entire Christmas tree field. Flame weeding in spring is more energy intensive because humidity and soil moisture are relatively high, and air temperatures are low. However, an advantage of flame weeding is that the soil remains undisturbed, and the chances of weed germination and emergence are reduced. Alternatives to open flame weeders are steam weeders and infrared heaters that use propane to generate heat which is applied indirectly to the weeds (Peachey et al., 2017).

Solarization is another form of thermal weed control which involves heating the soil surface using plastic sheets on moist soil to trap solar radiation. This method of solarization has been shown to provide effective control of many different weed species such as pigweeds (*Amaranthus* spp. L.), common purslane, and henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule* L.) (Horowitz et al., 1983). However, solarization requires several weeks and warm, sunny weather to be effective. Thermal weed control strategies may be useful in seedling or transplant production but are not common in Christmas tree production systems.

Biological Weed Control: True biological control agents are host-specific and only attack a single species. These biological control agents contrast with generalist herbivores (or pathogens) that consume (or infect) a number of species and are not host-specific. Several insects have been used as biological agents to selectively control certain weed species. Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae* Linnaeus,

1758) can be used to control tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea* L.) (Bucher and Harris, 1961). The chrysomelid beetle (*Chrysolina quadrigemina* Suffrian, 1851) is used for controlling Klamath weed (*Hypericum perforatum* L.) (Andres, 1985). *Tyta lactuosa* Denis and Schiffermuller, 1775, the field bindweed moth, two species of puncturevine weevils and another two species of mite can attack bindweed (Peachey et al., 2017). Selection of these biological control agents is extremely important as there are instances of damage to non-target plants. These different species of biological agents need to be released carefully, and their populations should be monitored in order to achieve successful weed suppression in the Christmas tree production. Research is still continuing on many potential bioherbicides/ biological control agents, but problems with mass-production, formulation, and commercialization continue to prevent their use.

Conclusion: Although there are several non-chemical methods to control weeds in Christmas tree production, proper planning and integration of different methods are required for a successful weed control program. Solely depending on non-chemical methods for controlling weeds can be labor intensive, expensive, and time consuming as constant scouting is required to reduce the weed germination and growth in the field. In most instances, integrated management is required for effective weed control. While various studies have been conducted on non-chemical methods of weed control, more research is required as it relates to Christmas tree production. The next articles of this series will be discussing various aspects of the chemical control strategies helping the growers to plan for their effective weed management and herbicide program.

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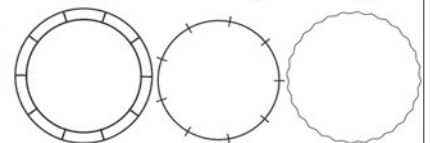


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ICTA SPRING NEWS

It's mid-February, and this is one of my favorite times of the year (Of course, every season is my favorite time of the year.); but right now, we've gotten past the holiday rush; there are eight inches of snow, and it's twenty degrees outside with a twenty mile an hour wind, so there's not much to do. It's time to catch up on those doctor and dentist visits you may have been putting off. Next week, I renew my pesticide applicator's license, and in a couple of weeks, we go to the Bahamas for a vacation to warm up, refresh, and get ready for another year.

At the end of January, we joined Indiana for our annual Winter Meeting, and it's always nice to meet new friends and to catch up with old ones. At our state meeting, we voted to install Cathy Stahl as our new Treasurer; many thanks to Robert Grady for doing that job for so many years. Dave Daniken agreed to host a farm field day around June 28th, and the exact details will be coming later. We also welcomed new ICTA members, Nate and Kate Chattic, from Farmer City, Illinois. It's nice to get some younger folks in our organization.

We received very sad news in February about the sudden loss of Keeley Hoover due to a brain aneurysm and Jan Blank who was diagnosed with Influenza A, Covid, and pneumonia. We extend our thoughts and prayers to both families. They have been long-time members of the ICTA.

Robert Richardson, ICTA President

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Round table discussions.



2025 Winter Meeting:



Robert Richardson giving a talk about seasonal activities at Richardson Farm.

REGIONAL NEWS INDIANA

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The joint Indiana / Illinois Winter Meeting drew 40 farms with over 75 attendees to the Boone County Fairgrounds.

A LOOK BACK & SPRING AHEAD - INDIANA, ILLINOIS, & MACT

The combined Indiana/Illinois Winter Meeting was a packed house! Over 100 attendees from the Indiana Christmas Tree Growers Association (ICTGA) and the Illinois Christmas Tree Association (ICTA) gathered at the Boone County Fairgrounds in Lebanon, Indiana from January 31 - February 1, 2025.

On Friday and Saturday speakers presented on a myriad of topics and members led numerous smaller, interactive roundtable discussions, which were all well-received. Members also enjoyed dinner together at Arni's in Lebanon on Friday night.

Special thanks to Sarah James, of Jolly Pines Tree Farm, for coordinating the Winter Meeting!

Meeting Highlights, Updates, and What's Next:

Government Farm Loans and Programs

Summer Ray and Michaela Stiver, loan officers and agents with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), gave an outstanding lecture on financing land acquisition, financing operations, and various other programs, such as crop insurance, available from the USDA. FSA is the financial lending branch of the USDA. Growers are encouraged to learn more at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/> or reach out to their county FSA representative.

Indiana Farm Bureau

Ben Shull, Premier Agent with Indiana Farm Bureau, provided the members in attendance with a course on the core essentials of insurance for a Christmas Tree Farm. He presented his view on what is required insurance for a farm in their beginning stages of set up and establishment, through what is recommended for a mature farm at full operating capacity. If you are interested in more information, contact Ben at 260-704-7062.

Weed Management

Debalina Saha, Ph.D, presented an exceptional lecture on managing weeds through integrated strategies in Christmas Tree Production. She covered important topics, including various herbicides and their applications, the synergy of the combined use of mulch and herbicide, and mechanical weed management. Dr. Saha is an assistant professor in the Department of Horticulture from Michigan State University. Growers interested in more information should contact Debalina at sahadeb2@msu.edu.

Showcase - Richardson Farm

A big thank you to Rob Richardson, of Richardson Farm in Spring Grove, Illinois, for stepping up and showcasing his farm. By sharing his farm's journey and experiences, he provided a wealth of information and lessons learned. Topics covered include: retail Christmas season operations, a spring Tulip Festival, a summer Sunflower Field, and their Adventure Farm.

ICTGA Board of Directors Update

The ICTGA Board of Directors have turned over.

Thank you to our outgoing Directors for three years of service: Dana Dull, Dull's Tree Farm; Sarah James, Jolly Pines Tree Farm; and Milt Yakey, Yakey Tree Farm. Thank you to Dana Dull for serving as the President and to Sarah James for serving as the Vice President.

Newly elected Directors are Erin Wagner, Genth Tree Farm; Tom McClure, McClure Christmas Tree Farm; and Judy Maley, Coesse Christmas Tree Farm.



The experienced growers panel fielded various questions and shared a wealth of information

Mid-America Christmas Tree Association (MACT) 2025 Summer Meeting Update

Dutchman Tree Farms and Northern Pines Nursery are thrilled to host the Michigan Christmas Tree Association 2025 National Summer Meeting. This year, they are excited to partner with the Bi-Annual National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) and Mid America Christmas Tree Association (MACT) meetings for a comprehensive industry event. Sessions and meals will be held

in Northern Pines Nursery's brand new greenhouse from July 24 - 26, 2025.

Attendees will enjoy a tour of three separate tree farms and their operations: Dutchman Tree Farms, Northern Pines Nursery, and Getty Tree Farm. Sessions include: irrigation management, pest control, greenhouse and nursery management, tree genetics, nutrient management, planting stock quality, drone technology, retail operation and customer experience, weed control, high-volume tree farming, and much more.

The MACT Summer meeting is a fantastic opportunity for tree farmers, industry experts, and newcomers to connect, learn, and explore the latest industry practices! When you attend the meeting, be sure to pre-order supplies from vendors and save on shipping!

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this summer - the whole family is welcome! Find meeting updates at <https://www.midamericachristmastree.com>.

We hope to see you in Michigan this summer!

Mike & Liz Walsh, ICTGA Secretary-Treasurer

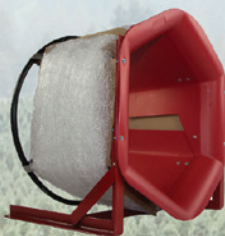


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REGIONAL NEWS IOWA

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NEWS FROM IOWA

Christmas Tree Farm Nightmare

On April 12, 2024, Steve Hoogestraat and his wife, Joann, were working on their Christmas trees. It was a pleasant spring day with north wind gusts up to 28 mph. Farmers were preparing to plant, which included spraying their fields.

Farmers typically inject anhydrous ammonia and spray herbicides in the spring. On this day, a farmer hired the local co-op to spray his fields. The co-op employs staff certified in chemical application and spraying. A certified sprayer (license 51643) applied Surestart 2, containing Stinger herbicide, along with 28% nitrogen at 56 gallons per acre on that windy spring day, directly north of the Hoogestraats' Christmas tree farm. Steve and Joann, working outside, witnessed the visible drift of the Stinger and nitrogen spray and were also sprayed themselves. The distance from the chemical application point at the north edge of the tree farm to the south end is about 140 feet. With 28 mph winds, the trees were defenseless.

The spring of 2024 had unusually warm temperatures, causing trees to bud and develop new growth earlier. Trees are most susceptible to chemical damage during this time. Steve knew this would cause significant damage to his trees. He immediately contacted the landowner, who directed him to the renter, who, in turn, directed him to the Arcadia Co-op. Within a few days, Larry Christenson, the Arcadia Co-op agronomy manager, inspected and documented the damage at the tree farm. Larry confirmed the damage was from chemical spray drift. Steve was informed that the co-op had a \$10,000 deductible, and if the damage was less than that amount, they could issue an immediate check.

During May 2024, Steve and Joann spent days researching and contacting potential sources of assistance, documenting the damage to the trees, and estimating the loss. The summer months were spent exploring recourse options and attempting to salvage as much as possible.





On September 13, 2024, Pete Mikkelsen from Triangle Insurance Company in Oklahoma and Larry Christensen instructed Steve to determine the damage himself. Steve requested assistance from someone at the co-op who understood the scope of the damage, but the co-op denied this request.

Pete Mikkelsen, unfamiliar with Christmas tree farming, asked Steve to list the price of each damaged tree for reimbursement. As Christmas tree growers know, it's not that simple. A 3-foot tree requires far less labor over the years than a 10-foot tree. It's not just the cost of the tree; it's years of mowing, staking, trimming, shearing, spraying, mulching, and watering. The insurance adjuster stated that labor could not be included in the loss assessment.

In most insurance situations, the adjuster determines the cost of damage, and the insurance company pays that cost. Since Christmas trees are not crops easily insured by typical crop insurance, the insurance adjuster lacked understanding of the complexities of Christmas tree farming or how to estimate the loss. The insurance adjuster asked Steve, a Christmas tree grower of 48 years, for his expertise.

Steve also hired an agronomist and arborist to inspect the trees and document that the damage was not caused by insects or disease. He contacted Christmas tree growers' associations in several nearby states to see if others had experienced similar problems and to seek advice. He also contacted various local extension offices for guidance.

Steve and his wife spent three days examining each tree and determining the loss amount on their 4.5-acre tree farm. This estimate, totaling approximately \$45,000, with detailed explanations and costs, was presented to the co-op on October 12, 2024. Steve's lawyer, whom he had retained, advised him to add 10% to the cost for each month of non-payment from the date of the incident, as a standard practice. The \$45,000 did not yet include this additional amount.

Steve and Joann have spent countless hours seeking help and providing information requested by the co-op and the insurance adjuster. They have maintained detailed notes, photos, research, and correspondence.

On November 8, 2024, Pete Mikkelsen responded, offering \$25,000. There was no explanation of how that amount was

determined. Again, in most insurance situations, the cost of loss is established, not negotiated.

Steve lost years of work and struggled to have enough Christmas trees for the 2024 season. He could only sell 55% of his usual seasonal volume. He will face this problem for several years, as it takes time to recover and grow more trees.

In addition, on April 12, 2024, the spray impacted not only the Christmas trees but also their nearby fruit trees and the soil. Steve and Joann have a large garden with numerous pumpkins and gourds. There were also areas with flowers that took years to cultivate, where locals come with photographers for pictures. Due to the drift, chemicals were also in the soil. Steve and Joann had to remove 1 ½ inches of topsoil, totaling 67 gallons, dispose of it, and replace it with fresh soil. A small area is tedious to do; a large area requires significant manual labor and time. There is hope that the produce will grow again, but it is uncertain at this time. If they choose to continue growing organically, as they have, it will take three years without chemicals.

Steve has a copy of the form the certified sprayer completed on the day in question, which lists the chemicals used and conditions. On this form, the sprayer documented 12 mph winds at the time of spraying (times are documented). All other documentation from that time of day indicates much higher wind speeds. It was observable that the wind speed was not 12 mph. If the winds had been 12 mph, as documented, the drift would not have impacted the Christmas tree farm to the south as it did.

On December 12, 2024, Steve went to the Carroll County Extension Office, which provided him with contact information for the state forester, Aaron Wright, and the state fruit tree specialist, Aaron Spiel. In speaking with both of them, neither had heard of herbicide drift in Iowa causing such extensive damage. Steve was referred to the state Department of Natural Resources, who provided the same response.

As of this date, there has been no progress, and the reports remain unresolved. Steve and Joann would welcome any assistance or experience from other Christmas tree growers or associations.

You can reach Steve Hoogestraat at jmartin123@westianet.net

REGIONAL NEWS KENTUCKY

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GREETINGS FROM KENTUCKY!

The 2025 Kentucky Christmas Tree Association spring meeting is set for Saturday, April 12 at the Fayette County Extension Office. The plant auction begins at 10 am EST with lunch and meeting scheduled to follow. The plant auction is the only fundraiser that KCTA conducts for the year with funds used to support college scholarships. We provided two scholarships to University of Kentucky forestry students this year with Makaslyn Dunham and Janson Ison being the recipients. We need KCTA members to assist at the auction with registration, bid documentation, receiving payment and assisting with load out. Members are welcome and encouraged to purchase plant material as well.

Just a reminder how the auction works. KCTA members bring plant material (trees, shrubs, flowers, hanging baskets, etc) to the auction. 50% of the proceeds goes to the donor and 50% is donated to KCTA. The auction is open to the public and promoted to enhance the attendance. This is a great opportunity to promote some of our local growers such as FFA greenhouses. We invite all KCTA members to come and be a part of this event and participate in the meeting to follow.

The address for the Fayette County Extension Office is 1140 Harry Sykes Way, Lexington KY 40504.

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New KCTA Rack Card

The Kentucky Horticulture Council has a new rack card they will be distributing to promote KCTA at various events across the state with prospective farms. 🌲



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REGIONAL NEWS MARYLAND

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Fair Chance Tree Farm

GREETINGS FROM MARYLAND!

Growing Greetings to all from Maryland. It is an honor to have been recently elected as President of the Maryland Christmas Tree Association.

As a brief introduction I will say that my family has been farming for generations and moved from the Midwest in 1915 to Maryland. We currently grow grain and 12 acres of choose and cut Christmas trees. Because we cannot raise trees fast enough in our hot, sandy climate, we supplement sales with pre-cut Fraser firs from North Carolina.

In regards to the 2024 tree season, it seems as if most of the members reported flat sales across the state. Those of us who sold out of our pre-cuts were definitely thankful. The weekend weather was certainly more in our favor in 2024 than in previous years.

Personally, I was honored to have our farm featured on the cover of our cooperative electric winter publication that was mailed to members across Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. Free advertising is always appreciated. Last season was very hot and dry and we lost mature Canaan Firs for the first time as a result. We all know that the news loves covering bad news and the local CBS station did a story on the drought. They flew the helicopter to show arial footage that we still had a good supply of trees for sale. News coverage can provide a chance for educating the public on the challenges growing Christmas trees so we welcomed the opportunity.

This year's summer MCTA meeting will be held at Ryan Fair's farm which is located North of Baltimore. Ryan is an energetic young Christmas tree farmer who began planting about 8 years

ago and has been selling for the last two. We are all looking forward to learning about his business approach and listening to the speakers that come to provide education. Ryan brings a wealth of IT experience and is assisting the MCTA board in updating its website and logo. We are seeking bids from web developers in completing these tasks.

Speaking of summer, we hope that Mother Nature is not as harsh as years past in the temperatures and moisture she provides. This is a time of year for optimism. New planting will begin in March.

I look forward to my term as President and again thank the board and members for my election.

Thank you,

Charles Cawley, MCTA President

Cawley Family Farm

Cawley Family Farm is a Christmas tree operation in Denton, Md., and a staple on the Eastern Shore. Tradition and farming run deep for Charles (Charlie) Cawley, who manages the farm with his wife Jane and his daughter Amy. The farm's slogan "Experience a Family Tradition" stems from Cawley's fond memories of cutting Christmas trees with his family growing up — one he hopes to share with other families who visit his farm for the holiday season each year. "Growing up, dad couldn't afford a tree, so we had to go out to the woods and cut one down," he remembers fondly. "I can still smell those trees."



Charles and Jane Cawley

The farm was purchased by the Cawley family in the early 1900s as a dairy farm. Charlie and Jane purchased the adjoining farm in 1988 and started planting Christmas trees in 1996.

Charlie was a state and local community leader for many years before operating Cawley Family Farm. He served as an administrator for Caroline County, Md., worked for the Maryland Department of Agriculture, and was the Finance Director for Maryland Broadband Cooperative.

Cawley Family Farm grows Douglas fir, white pine, Concolor fir, Canaan fir, Colorado blue spruce, and Norway spruce. The farm also sells pre-cut Fraser firs that are hand-selected from North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Exciting Summer Meeting at Fair Chance Farm!

Mark your calendars for June 21st, 2025, as Fair Chance Farm (www.fairchance.farm) hosts a day-long meeting that promises to be a tremendous opportunity for growers and industry professionals. Located at 16776 Gorsuch Mill Road, Upperco, MD, this event will bring together experts from across the country to discuss a variety of crucial topics.

The day will kick off with a warm welcome and an overview of the farm, setting the stage for a series of insightful sessions. Chuck Schuster from the MD Extension Service will delve into chemicals and nutrient management, providing valuable information for optimizing crop health.

The highlight of the day will be the keynote address by Tony Stefani of Hillside Christmas Tree Farm. Tony will share his expertise on optimal growth in Christmas trees, followed by an in-field shearing demonstration and discussion. This session is not to be missed for anyone looking to enhance their tree farming practices.

Bob Trumbule will then take the stage to discuss integrated pest management, offering strategies to keep crops healthy and pest-free. Attendees will also have the chance to tour Fair Chance Farm and gain insights into its business operations.

After a lunch break featuring vendors, the afternoon sessions will cover marketing and technology. Tony Stefani will return to discuss moving into the digital era, highlighting how technology can revolutionize farming and marketing practices.

Andrew Bosserman, the industry's tax and accounting expert, will provide essential strategies on tax management, capital gains, and bookkeeping. His session will be invaluable for those looking to optimize their financial practices.

The day will conclude with a growers' roundtable discussion, offering a platform for attendees to share experiences and insights. Following the meeting, a reception will be held featuring farm-brewed beverages, providing a perfect opportunity for networking and relaxation.

Growers from adjoining regions are welcome to attend. Don't miss this chance to learn from the best in the industry and connect with fellow growers.

We look forward to seeing you at Fair Chance Farm for a day of learning, networking, and growth! 🌲

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REGIONAL NEWS MASSACHUSETTS

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Cranston's Christmas Tree Farm, Ashfield, MA

MASSACHUSETTS SPRING 2025 UPDATE

We hope everyone has enjoyed some well-deserved rest following the busy holiday season. After a brief break, the Board returned to regularly scheduled meetings to begin planning our summer meeting series. We're pleased to have secured dates and locations for our annual meeting in August, as well as two farm tours – one in June and one in September. Below is some information about our upcoming meetings and host farms – please save the dates!

2025 Annual Meeting

Date: Sunday, August 10, 2025

Location: Cranston's Christmas Tree Farm, Ashfield, MA

This year's annual meeting will be held at **Cranston's Christmas Tree Farm** in Ashfield, MA on Sunday, August 10th. The farm was started by **Thomas & Cynthia Cranston** in the early 1980's and is now managed in partnership by **Seth & Jonathan Cranston**. The farm has over 28,000 trees planted which supply the wholesale market as well as their own choose & cut operation. Varieties include Balsam, Concolor, Fraser, and Blue Spruce. Cranston's Tree Farm has consistently produced award winning trees, and had the honor of placing one in the Vice President's residence in Washington, D.C.



Cranston's Christmas Tree Farm Transplant Bed, Ashfield, MA

Our 2025 meeting will feature guest speakers such as **Dr. Richard Cowles** from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station as well as representatives from the **Massachusetts Department of Agriculture** and the **Real Christmas Tree Board**. Many vendors who support our industry will also be in attendance, including **Fraser Knoll**, who will once again be fulfilling pre-orders and delivering them to the meeting, which helps our members save on shipping costs. The field tour will include a focus on various plant diseases the farm has experienced as well as fertilization and liming techniques. Emerging trends will also be discussed from both a wholesale and retail perspective. The farm tour will feature the many trees that are grown on the farm as well as the maple sugaring operation which complements the tree business.

The annual meeting is a full-day event requiring pre-registration to attend. Watch for registration information (and Fraser Knoll pre-order instructions) to be emailed out in the coming weeks. If you haven't yet attended an in-person meeting, we encourage you to try to join us this summer. While Zoom meetings and webinars have their place and can be very educational, they're not a replacement for networking and socializing in person with fellow growers!

2025 Farm Tours

Farm tours are half-day, informal gatherings to network, share ideas and see other members' operations, equipment and growing/selling practices. We have two farm tours planned for the 2025 season – one in June and one in September.

Date: Saturday, June 21, 2025

Location: Ioka Valley Farm, Hancock, MA

Ioka Valley Farm will host our first farm tour on June 21st. This 500-acre farm is located in Hancock, MA, nestled in the beautiful Berkshires, just minutes from Pittsfield, MA and Albany, NY. The farm was established in 1936 and gets its name from a Native American word meaning "beautiful". This farm has been run by the **Leab family** for 4 generations. The operation



Ioka Valley Farm, Hancock, MA

began as a dairy farm but has diversified over the years and the farm now grows Christmas trees, pumpkins, strawberries and raises beef cattle. They also produce maple syrup and during sugaring season they serve pancake meals in their “Calf-A” (a calf barn converted into a café) featuring their very own syrup.

The Leab family has always been dedicated to innovative and sustainable farming practices, soil and water conservation, and to providing high quality locally grown products to their community. Ioka Valley Farm offers educational experiences for families and they strive to ensure visitors of all ages enjoy their experience on the farm. The retail sale of Christmas trees began in the early 90’s with both fresh cut and U-cut trees available. They also run a small gift shop with Christmas ornaments, gifts, and of course their own maple products



Deane Family Christmas Tree Farm, Bernardston, MA



Deane Family Christmas Tree Farm, Bernardston, MA

Date: Saturday, September 27, 2025

Location: Deane Family Christmas Tree Farm, Bernardston, MA

Deane Family Christmas Trees started in 1980 when **Bob Deane** purchased evergreen seedlings that were left over from his daughter **Sherry Deane’s** 4-H fundraiser. The trees were planted too close together, and the farm didn’t attempt to market their trees until they were over 5 feet tall. Those initial trees sold for about \$7! Over the years, the family learned how to space trees, market them, and have grown from a large

garden plot to approximately 5 acres of Christmas trees, with significant expansion happening in recent years. For many years, they planted approximately 300 trees per year, but in the past 5 years they’ve put in between 500-600 trees. In 2024, they planted 1,300 seedlings and have now reached the capacity of their space and expect to plant only 500 this year.

The farm grows a wide variety of trees. Fraser & Canaan Firs comprise roughly 60% of the inventory, but they also grow Black Hills Spruce, White Spruce, Concolor & Balsam Firs, with a few additional varieties scattered throughout. For the most part, trees are planted to replace those cut the previous year. They do not have an irrigation system, which means they hand water the first year and hope for the best thereafter. All pruning is done with hand shears and they recently started de-coning trees. They believe the extra effort produces fuller trees.

The farm operates as a tag and cut operation and their customers have learned they need to come early for the best selection. The Deanes saw a boost in sales after a Kringle Candle retail shop opened less than a mile away in 2010 which brought a lot of traffic to their vicinity. Sales jumped again in 2020 during Covid when more consumers were interested in the experience of getting a real tree. 2023 was the first year they had to close early due to reduced inventory, and in 2024 they sold out after just one weekend! Challenges that will be discussed during this farm tour include disease issues, vegetation control, deer damage, and drought concerns.

We hope to see you at a meeting this summer! 🌲

REGIONAL NEWS MICHIGAN

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SPRING NEWS IN MICHIGAN!

2025 MCTA Winter Meeting

We were thrilled with the fantastic attendance at the MCTA Winter Meeting in Grand Rapids on February 28, 2025. Thank you to all our attendees for making it such a successful event. We extend our sincere appreciation to our vendors and sponsors for their continued support of grower education. A special thank you to Michigan State University and MSU Extension for their partnership in developing the meeting content and bringing exceptional speakers to our program. We look forward to seeing you at our next event, Cowboys and Christmas Trees, a National Summer Meeting hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms at their Northern Pines Nursery in Lake City, MI, from July 24-26, 2025. Don't miss this unique learning opportunity from a top producer in the nation, and a chance to network with growers from across the U.S. So, dust off your cowboy boots and hat, and plan on joining us.



The lucky winner of the Lottery Wreath to benefit the MCTA Research Fund was Kate Dodde of Dutchman Tree Farms (above). Kate Dodde along with Rico and Beth from Arlene Resource Management, working on the scratching process (pictured right).



MCTA President Tony Stefani presented Ken and Dan Wahmhoff with the Grand Champion award for the 2024 MCTA Tree Contest. Congratulations to Wahmhoff Farms Nursery!



COWBOYS AND CHRISTMAS TREES



2025 NATIONAL SUMMER MEETING JULY 24-26

Hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms at
Northern Pines Nursery

All exhibitors, educational sessions, and tours will take place at
Northern Pines Nursery • 2458 S. Green Rd. • Lake City, Michigan 49651



For Meeting and Hotel Information Visit

 **www.mcta.org**

SUMMER MEETING SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:

THURSDAY JULY 24

10 to 7 pm Vendor Set-up
1 to 4:30 pm New Grower Session
2 pm Golf Outing 9-hole at
Evergreen Resort
Board Meetings
5:30 – 6:30 Happy Hour at
Evergreen Resort sponsored
by Jutek

FRIDAY JULY 25

8:00 Registration/Vendor time
(Donuts and Coffee)
9:00 Welcome to Dutchman
9:00 to 11:30 Programing and Tours
12:00 Lunch/Vendor time
2:00 to 4:30 Programing and Tours
4:30 Happy Hour/Vendor time
6:00 6:00 Hall of Fame and Tree
Contest Winners Announced
6:30 Dinner and Rodeo Event

SATURDAY JULY 26

8:00 Vendor time (Donuts and
Coffee)
9:00 to 11:30 Programing and Tours
12:00 Lunch/Vendor time
2:00 to 4:30 Programing and Tours
Conclude program



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231-862-3000

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6001 East M-115,
Cadillac, MI 49601
231-7754414

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7642 US-131, Cadillac, MI 49601
231-779-4656

Lake Cadillac Resort

6319 M 11, Cadillac, MI 49601
231-577-0773

National Summer Meeting 2025 VENDOR REGISTRATION FORM

July 24-26 • Dutchman Tree Farms & Northern Pines Nursery • 2458 S Green Rd, Lake City, Michigan 49651

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS JUNE 15 to be included in meeting program.

(Please print or type)

Company/Organization _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____ Website: _____

Name(s) of Attendees _____

Are you a member of any of the following Christmas tree associations? Please check all that apply:

Michigan _____ MACT _____ NCTA _____ Illinois _____ Indiana _____

MCTA 9-HOLE GOLF OUTING (Pay at course)

Thursday, July 24 at 2 p.m. at Evergreen Resort, 7880 Mackinaw Trail, Cadillac, MI 49601

Names of those golfing _____

BOOTH COST (includes full convention registration and meals for two people)

_____ **MEMBERS** — 1st booth — **\$325** for MCTA, NCTA, MACT, ICTA, and ICTGA

_____ **MEMBERS** — Additional Booths — **\$175** for MCTA, NCTA, MACT, ICTA, and ICTGA (same company)

_____ Non-Member 1st booth — \$375

_____ Non-Member Additional Booths (same company) — \$225

_____ Additional registrants — \$125 each (includes meals)

T-SHIRT — \$20 Specify S-XXL _____

Vendors reserving four or more tables will get premium placement in the exhibitor area.

Products and service to be exhibited: _____

Competitors from whom booth separation is desired: _____

I will donate an item to the silent auction to benefit the MCTA Research Fund. _____

Booth Costs _____

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

_____ **Event Sponsor** includes: Special meeting time allotted for equipment demonstration or product promotion, full page premium program ad and business name & logo shared in all summer meeting event promotional emails — \$750

_____ Thursday Welcome Reception — \$250

_____ Friday Morning Coffee and Donuts — \$300

_____ Friday Lunch — \$500

_____ Friday Dinner — \$500

_____ Friday Refreshments — \$300

_____ Saturday Morning Coffee and Donuts — \$300

_____ Saturday Lunch — \$500

_____ Registration Sponsor — \$150

Sponsor Costs _____

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National Summer Meeting 2025 ATTENDEE REGISTRATION FORM

July 24-26 • Dutchman Tree Farms & Northern Pines Nursery • 2458 S Green Rd, Lake City, Michigan 49651



The two-day conference registration fee admits you to all sessions, exhibit area, tours and all meals. New grower session is an additional fee. One day registration admits you to all sessions and meals on that day.

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Welcome

Dutchman Tree Farms and Northern Pines Nursery are thrilled to host the Michigan Christmas Tree Association 2025 National Summer Meeting. This year, we're excited to partner with the Bi-Annual National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) and Mid America Christmas Tree (MACT) meetings for a comprehensive industry event. Sessions and meals will be held in Northern Pines Nursery's brand-new greenhouse from July 24-26, 2025. Attendees will have the opportunity to tour Dutchman Tree Farms' loading yard, palletizing systems, expansive fields, and our family-run Choose & Cut operation. This event is a fantastic opportunity for tree farmers, industry experts, and newcomers to connect, learn, and explore the latest industry practices. Dutchman Tree Farms is a fifth-generation family farm that has grown from humble beginnings into one of the nation's leading suppliers of Christmas trees and related products. Our family is proud to uphold a tradition of quality, hard work, and innovation. Visitors to the Summer Meeting will see firsthand how our family's dedication and love for tree farming have shaped our farm into a model for growth and excellence.

THURSDAY, JULY 24 – NEW GROWER PROGRAM

For those new to the industry, the Day 1 New Grower Track is an excellent starting point to learn the basics of Christmas tree farming. This specialized program for those new to the industry can experience a full afternoon of sessions led by industry leaders, designed to cover fundamental practices, including Site Preparation, Tree Planting, and Dealing with Weeds, offering practical advice for creating a thriving farm. Participants will also gain insight into Retail How-To's and marketing strategies for engaging customers and building a successful business. The program concludes with Nutrient Management and a discussion on Pest Control, giving attendees a comprehensive understanding of tree health and care. This track is an invaluable resource for anyone starting their journey in Christmas tree farming.

FRIDAY, JULY 25 & SATURDAY, JULY 26 – TOURS/SESSIONS

Attendees will be placed in groups. Each group has two tour rotations per day, one morning/one afternoon. Over the two days, each attendee would have the opportunity to see all tour stops.

Track 1: Field Tour of Dutchman Tree Farms

Gain valuable insights into irrigation management and pest control while touring the fields of Dutchman Tree Farms. The team at Dutchman Tree Farms will take you on a guided field tour that features presentations by Michigan State University experts. Dr. Younsuk Dong will be presenting on irrigation management and systems. Deb McCullough will provide an update on insect activity and pest-related issues.

Track 2: Northern Pines Nursery/Greenhouse

For those interested in greenhouse and nursery management, the Northern Pines Nursery tour is not to be missed. Our sophisticated nursery systems ensure we grow high-quality stock that meets the demands of the modern market. Scott Powell will guide attendees through the nursery and greenhouse, explaining everything from seedling care to transplanting. Presentations by experts like Bert Clegg from Michigan State University will cover topics such as Nutrient Management and Planting Stock Quality. Additionally, Jim Rockis will share his expertise on tree genetics, highlighting advancements that help growers produce resilient, high-quality trees. This track is perfect for growers looking to deepen their knowledge of growing practices and investing in strong planting stock.

Track 3: Getty Tree Farm

We're also excited to include our neighbors and friends at Getty Tree Farms. Visitors to Getty Tree Farms will tour three distinct areas

showcasing a variety of growing practices. At the Home Farm, participants will learn about the farm's history while viewing mature Fraser and Korean X Balsam trees. At the next field, the focus shifts to Fralsam, Concolor, and white pine trees, with discussions on seed sourcing, deer fencing, and the appearance of Fraser trees. Finally, Kyle Getty will demonstrate advanced techniques like drip irrigation and weed control, comparing products such as Matrix and Sureguard. This track offers a fantastic opportunity to see a range of approaches and innovations in action, all while connecting with fellow growers in the region.

Track 4a: Dutchman Main Location/Wholesale

For large-scale growers, our production and distribution track will offer a behind-the-scenes look at the logistics of high-volume tree farming. At Dutchman Tree Farms, efficiency is key, and our loading yard and palletizing operations are designed to ship large quantities of trees while maintaining top-notch quality. Visitors will see our pot-in-pot production system, which optimizes water usage and soil temperature management. We'll also demonstrate how we use drone technology for inventory and operations management, ensuring accurate counts and streamlined processes. Whether you're looking to scale up your operation or refine your logistics, this track offers invaluable insights.

Track 4b: Dutchman Main Location/Choose and Cut

One of the most popular tracks at the event will highlight our Choose & Cut operation, which exemplifies how tree farms can create unforgettable retail experiences. Choose & Cut has become much more than selling trees – it's about offering families a festive outing that builds lasting memories. During the tour, we'll show how we've created a welcoming and immersive experience through careful planning, thoughtful decor, and engaging customer service. Sarah Maciborski will be sharing tips on customer engagement, creating family-friendly experiences, and using branding to turn first-time visitors into lifelong customers. Whether you're new to Choose & Cut or looking to enhance your existing operation, this track will provide valuable takeaways.

For Track 4, attendees will need to choose between 4a and 4b options.

AUXILIARY SESSIONS

This two-day (Friday-Saturday) auxiliary program will provide attendees with valuable insights into various aspects of running a successful Christmas tree farm. Sessions will include marketing strategies, creating farm merchandise, the basics of operating a Choose and Cut farm, effective customer service techniques, and strategies for stocking and managing a gift shop.



Hosted by Dutchman Tree Farms

All exhibitors, educational sessions,
and tours will take place at

Northern Pines Nursery

2458 S. Green Rd. • Lake City, Michigan 49651



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MICHIGAN
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HOTEL INFORMATION

Evergreen Resort

7880 Mackinaw Trail

Cadillac, MI 49601

231-775-9947

Booking Code: 29310

Room rates start at \$150 plus tax per night. This rate would also
includes breakfast for each registered guest.

The group booking block date ends June 20, 2025

Caberfae Peaks

1 Caberfae Ln, Cadillac, MI 49601

231-862-3000

Booking Code: b307380

\$99 per night for a non-balcony room

\$119 per night for a balcony room

\$149 per night for a first floor king room

The group booking block date ends May 31, 2025

Holiday Inn Express

7642 US-131

Cadillac, MI 49601

231-779-4656

Rate of \$214.00 plus tax per room per night. Free breakfast included.

Booking Code: NCC.

The group booking block date ends on July 2, 2025

Days Inn by Wyndham Cadillac

6001 East M-115

Cadillac, MI 49601

Group Name: Michigan Christmas Tree Assoc.

Double bed rate: \$155.55

Free full breakfast

The group booking block date ends July 9, 2025

Lake Cadillac Resort

6319 M 115

Cadillac, MI 49601 231-577-0773

Booking Code: MI Christmas Tree

Room rates range from \$159 to \$179

Continental breakfast included

The group booking block ends May 24, 2025

Any changes or cancellations to reservations must be completed by
June 23, 2025 to avoid penalty.

If any reservation is canceled in part or in whole after June 23, 2025, a
\$50.00 penalty cancellation fee, along with the greater of a one night
stay along with any taxes, fees along with any add-ons will be charged
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REGIONAL NEWS MINNESOTA

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Guggisberg Family from L-R Matt, Megan, Marie, Jacob, Tony, Emily, Liz, and Rachel.

GREETINGS FROM MINNESOTA!

As February is coming to an end, the snow continues to rapidly melt, and I'm confident it will all be gone by the time you are all reading this. I guess March is coming in like a lamb. I hope that doesn't mean it will go out like a lion!

This Christmas season saw a leveling or even a slight downturn in real tree sales across much of the Midwest and here in Minnesota as well. Some are referring to it as a return to pre-covid numbers. There were a number of factors at play including the economy, the late Thanksgiving, the coldest Thanksgiving weekend I can remember, and the increased travel. My wife and kids took a five-night cruise over Christmas for the first time ever, so I can testify that the airports were packed!

New Website

In January, the MNCTA leadership was thrilled to roll-out our brand-new website! Our association saw an influx of funds from 2020-2023, and our website hadn't been revamped in 10-12 years, so we decided it was time to invest some money into a

website to benefit our members. The new website was created by Courtney Remes along with direction from Ann Marie and our new Vice President Paul Saunders. The goal was to make it more user friendly, interactive, and give it a beautiful fresh look. In addition to the public advertising and real tree education, there is an exclusive member only area where members will create a login to access. Members can add a listing for wholesale, choose n cut or a retail lot in addition to providing a link to their own business website. The new website will also save our Executive Secretary time each year as the member registrations and conventions registrations can all be done online with the click of a button. We understand that some people will continue to register via mail, but we want to encourage everyone to try registering via the website if at all possible. If you haven't gone on and created a member account, please do so ASAP. I think you'll find that it's an extremely smooth process. We all hope you enjoy your beautiful site and you all reap the benefits of it for years to come!



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Winter Convention-February 28-March 1st

Our Winter Convention starts tomorrow, and we are back at the Holiday Inn in St. Cloud for the second consecutive year. Highlights include a couple of guest speakers this year in Dr. Richard Cowles of Connecticut, and Lienna Hoeg of Nova Scotia. It will be over by the time you are reading this, so I hope you all enjoyed it! If you missed it, stay tuned for a brief recap in the next GLCTJ issue.

Summer Convention-September 13th-14th

Our Summer Convention has turned into more of a fall convention in recent years, and that will continue this year. September seems to be less chaotic than the summer months for our growers, and the weather is definitely cooler, so there is less concern about watering trees to keep them alive. This year we will be headed down to the Southern part of the state for the first time in many years to Guggisberg Tree Farm outside of New Ulm. Guggisberg Tree Farm is a family run business in South Central Minnesota where you typically see fields of corn

and soybeans growing. Tony and his family of eight started planting Christmas tree seedlings in 1996. They opened their cut your own to the public for the first time in 2006, and they've been busy ever since. They grow eight varieties of Christmas trees including Balsam Fir, Fraser Fir, Canaan Fir, Korean Fir, White Pine, Scotch Pine, Blue Spruce, and Black Hills Spruce. They are proud members of the MNCTA where they've gained so much knowledge over the years. After years of learning at other farms, they are happy to give back by hosting at their farm. There is also discussion of a Thursday night tour of August Schell's Brewery, which is the second oldest family-owned brewery in America. I hope you all can join us this September outside of one of Minnesota's most historic cities!

Ben Wolcyn, MNCTA President ▲



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Age	Size	100 - 499	500 - 1000
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Abies balsamea ~ Balsam Fir

* Limited crop

2-1 / P+1	8 - 14"	1.75	1.25
2-2 / P+2	10 - 18"	2.50	1.95

Abies balsamea phanerolepis ~ Canaan Fir

* Limited crop

2-1 / P+1	10 - 15"	1.85	1.65
P+2	10 - 18"	2.50	2.00

(1000+ Inquire)

Abies concolor ~ Concolor Fir

* Limited crop

2-0 / 3-0	12 - 18"	1.25	0.95
3-1 / P+1	8 - 14"	2.00	1.75
2-2	12 - 18"	2.25	1.95

Abies fraseri ~ Fraser Fir

* Limited crop

3-0	9 - 12"	0.95	0.75
3-1 / P+1	8 - 14"	1.65	1.45
3-2 / P+2	10 - 18"	2.25	1.95

(1000+ Inquire)

Age	Size	100 - 499	500 - 1000
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Picea abies ~ Norway Spruce

3-0	10 - 15"	0.85	0.65
2-1	10 - 16"	1.65	1.45
2-2	15 - 24"	2.25	1.75

(1000+ Inquire)

Picea glauca ~ White Spruce

3-0	9 - 15"	0.95	0.70
2-1 / 2-2	15 - 24"	1.95	1.75

Picea pungens "Glauc" ~ Colorado Blue Spruce

3-0	9 - 15"	0.95	0.70
2-1 / P+1	8 - 14"	1.65	1.45
2-2	16 - 22"	1.85	1.65

(1000+ Inquire)

Picea omorika ~ Serbian Spruce

2-2	12 - 16"	1.65	1.45
2-2	16 - 22"	1.95	1.75

Picea glauca "Densata" ~ Black Hills Spruce

2-2	9-12"	1.65	1.25
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Age	Size	100 - 499	500 - 1000
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Pinus resinosa ~ Red Pine

2-0 / 3-0	8 - 14"	0.95	0.75
2-2	8 - 14"	1.75	1.45
2-2	14 - 22"	1.95	1.65

Pinus strobus ~ Eastern White Pine

3-0	6 - 12"	0.95	0.75
2-1 / 3-1	10 - 16"	1.95	1.75
2-2	14 - 20"	2.25	1.95

Pseudotsuga menziesii ~ Douglas Fir

3-0	9 - 15"	0.95	0.75
2-2	12 - 16"	1.95	1.75
2-2	15 - 24"	2.25	1.95

Thuja occidentalis ~ American Arborvitae [Eastern White Cedar]

2-0 / 3-0	18 - 24"	1.25	0.95
2-1 / 3-1	10 - 16"	2.25	1.95

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The Governor's Christmas Tree

MISSOURI REGIONAL NEWS WINTER 2024

The Governor's Christmas Tree

As mentioned in the last edition of the GLCTJ, there was a tie for first place between Lloyd's Family Farm and Pea Ridge Forest for the best Christmas tree. Both organizations were able to present a Christmas tree to the Governor in December. Flloyd's Family Farm is located in Ashand, Missouri, and Pea Ridge Forest in Hermann.



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Winter Meeting

The MCTA winter meeting was held on January 18th at the Missouri Conservation Credit Union in Jefferson City. Roughly 35 growers braved the cold weather to attend. A presentation was delivered by Taylor Tuttle of Missouri Grown, an outreach program through the Missouri Department of Agriculture that promotes Missouri grown and Missouri-made items. They represent retailers, farmers' markets, agritourism, and agricultural experience destinations. There was a member presentation on deer fencing options and further discussion on deer control. Proper pruning techniques were also discussed in detail for the benefit of our newer growers

Finally, the group approved proposed changes to the by-laws which were necessary to make operations more efficient. 🌲



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GREETINGS FROM THE GREAT STATE OF NEW YORK!

Real winter has made its return here again this year, bringing heavy seasonal snowfalls. For example, Boonville has received 221.2 inches, Utica 97.5 inches, along with very cold temperatures.

Our Board of Directors has been hard at work since the sales season, meeting weekly via Zoom to address many important initiatives for our association this year. Some of the key projects we are focusing on include our website, Spring and Fall Farm Visits, and our Annual Summer Meeting.

Spring & Fall Farm Visits

The Spring & Fall Farm Visits program was emailed to all members in February. If you would like to host a visit, please contact us to discuss and schedule.

- **First Visit:** Saturday, April 5, 9 AM – 12 PM at Naccarato's Trees and Wreaths, 815 County Route 41, Hudson Falls, NY (845-332-3977). They will showcase and discuss the equipment used on the farm, with demonstrations (weather permitting). RSVP to Michael.
- **Second Visit:** Saturday, August 2, 12 PM – 4 PM, hosted by the Zywczyński family at Country Pine Farm in Holland, NY. More details will be included in the next issue.

Annual Summer Meeting

Our **Annual Summer Meeting** will be held **Thursday, July 17 – Saturday, July 19** at Springside Farm, 1850 Route 91, Fabius, NY 13063.

The meeting will feature a wide range of topics and sessions led by industry experts, including **Dr. Richard Cowles, Dr. Betsy Lamb, Tracy Harpster, Don Nelson, Sue Bostik, Sam Tischler, Marsha Gray, Kate Dodde, Duane Berkey, and more.**

- **Thursday:** Vendor setup
- **Friday:** Registration and sessions begin at 8 AM

For vendor registration information, please contact: Peter Sweet Jr. at 518-567-7655 or petersweetjr@yahoo.com.

Interested in advertising in the
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OR
info@mcta.org

About Springside Farm

Nestled in the scenic town of Pompey, NY, **Springside Farm LLC** is a family-owned and operated agritourism destination! Owned by the Drexler family—Paulie & Ed and Travis & Allie—the farm is a hub of seasonal festivities and family fun.

- Summer: Families can pick fresh blueberries, raspberries, and junberries. The farm's blueberry pancake breakfasts in July and August have become a local favorite. This year, a new laser tag activity in the Christmas tree maze will be introduced! The farm also offers a picturesque event space from May until Labor Day, perfect for weddings and special celebrations.
- Autumn: A celebration of harvest and play, featuring specialty pumpkins, gourds, mazes, a low ropes course, jump pad, zip lines, laser tag, and more.
- Winter: Specializing in Christmas trees (Fraser and Canaan firs), Springside Farm offers u-cut and pre-cut trees, along with a gift shop filled with locally sourced goods, alpaca apparel, ornaments, maple syrup, jams, and Paulie's homemade fudge. Holiday events include:
 - The Night Market, inspired by European Christkindl markets, where local crafters and artisans showcase their creations.

- The Santa Expedition, a magical wagon ride through beautifully lit trees, leading to Santa and Mrs. Claus at their charming outpost.

At Springside Farm, every visit is an opportunity to harvest lasting memories!

Looking Ahead

Hopefully, everyone has had a chance to enjoy a little break—maybe even a sunny warm getaway! This winter has been a great time to catch up on industry meetings and online educational seminars that are readily available.

As we prepare for spring:

- Equipment is serviced and ready to go.
- Fertilizer and supplies are stocked.
- Spring transplants, ordered last year, will be arriving soon.

Since New York is such a large state, planting will begin earlier in southern regions and slightly later in northern and western regions.

Good luck to all for a successful spring season!

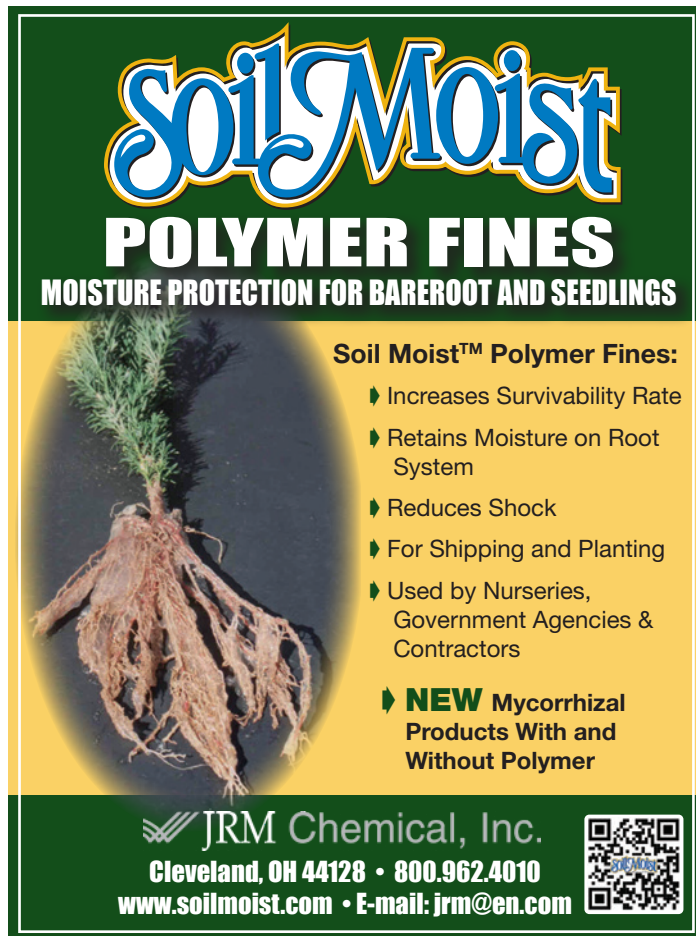
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OSU's Mimi Rose talked to the group about common chemical applicator mistakes.



We have found that roundtable discussions are a popular event at annual gatherings. This format allows everyone to get involved and hear from a variety of growers.



GREETINGS FROM OHIO CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION

2025 is off to a great start. OCTA just wrapped up our Winter Meeting on March 1st at the Quest Center in Columbus Ohio. This year's program offered something for everyone. Marsha Gray was on hand to provide an update from the REAL Christmas Tree Board. Other sessions included label laws, succession planning, soil sampling and understanding your insurance policy. Thanks to all that attended and helped to make the meeting a success.

During the business portion of the meeting, we recognized two board members that have stepped off of the board. The two individuals recognized were Bill Cackler with Cackler Family Farms and Matt Mongin with Spring Valley Tree Farm. Thanks to the two of them for their many years of service to the OCTA and the industry.

The officers for the upcoming year include Gary Hite of Scioto Prairie Farms as President, Jeff Greig of Greig Tree Farm serving as the Vice President, Alan Binger of Hidden Pines Christmas Tree Farm serving as the Treasurer and Bev Keener with Timbuk Farms serving as the Secretary.

OCTA is now turning its attention to the summer months with the Ohio State Fair and OCTA's Summer Meeting. Kaleidoscope Farms in northwest Ohio will be hosting the summer meeting June 13-14, 2025. The agenda for the two-day event is going to be jammed packed and offer some awesome programs. Check out our website for updated information as it becomes

available. (www.ohiochristmastree.org)

We would also welcome Ohio's growers to participate in the Ohio State Fair Christmas tree contest. This event will take place on Monday July 21st. Following the contest, the trees will be on display during the 10-day event.

OCTA will also be hosting a new growers session later in the year and are already working to obtain funds for our annual Operation Evergreen.

Have a great Spring season...

Valerie Graham, Executive Director



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REGIONAL NEWS ONTARIO

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AROUND ONTARIO REGION

Ontario leads the way with New Agritourism Act, which supports farmers and rural growth. The Growing Agritourism Act, 2024, is legislation designed to support and protect agritourism operators across the province. The CTFO will work together to help all members have a cohesive plan of action. Agritourism activities are defined as agriculture-related educational, entertainment, historical, cultural, limited accommodations or recreational activities, including you-pick operations or farm markets, conducted on a farm. This bill was passed in the middle of our harvest season in December and the CTFO is working hard with members, media, and

agricultural associations to fully understand what is needed and how this will benefit members of the CTFO.

The CTFO and the Christmas Tree Lab at the University of Waterloo are continuing their partnership. This year we are hoping to present the data collected in the last two years to our members at our annual field day in August. The Executive members of the Board have seen some of the information and are excited for our members to see what the data is showing. We are also working on the next areas of concern or research we would like to see this partnership flourish.



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The Board of Directors and the planning committee are working to put together a vision of where the members want to see our growth. We have incorporated some of the feedback we have received and will be expanding our new grower program and our education in the classroom program. Other ideas are around marketing and sustainability, and our members' input is always encouraged.

The CTFO is working on a proposal to join the Ontario Federation of Agriculture as a commodity. This process is time consuming however, the benefits for the CTFO will be a rewarding one with added support and leverage when dealing with government, grants, programs and awareness.

In 2025, the CTFO is committed to continuing our partnership with AGScapes. AGScapes brings agriculture to the classroom and we have various options to do this with. We have members who host virtual farm tours and the CTFO Executive Director attends one- and two-day career day events for grades 7-12.

will attend the Canadian Christmas Trees Association's Annual General Meeting in Quebec in the early fall.

Submitted by
Shirley Brennan, Christmas Tree Farmers of Ontario 🌲



CTFO calendar of events –

Annual General Meeting – March 20, 2025 at Somerville Nurseries

Annual Field Day – weekend of August 16, 2025, location to be determined, and delegates and members from the CTFO



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REGIONAL NEWS PENNSYLVANIA

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PCTGA has Strong Showing at the 2025 Pennsylvania Farm Show

NEWS UPDATE FROM PENNSYLVANIA

New Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association Committee to Focus on Membership

As we all know, the Christmas tree industry is never easy, and 2024 was no exception. Although the spring season was filled with timely rains, the summer and fall were drastically different. Parts of Pennsylvania experienced extensive drought conditions, up to 8 weeks in some areas. The battle to prevent losses was stressful not only for the plants, but for the grower as well. Some growers experimented with different methods of irrigation, while others decided that added expense was not worth it and planned to plant extra in the spring of '25.

The B&B industry thrives in PA, with warehouses and other commercial businesses continuing to go up across the state. Norway Spruce continues to be the most demanded B&B species. However, Green Giant arborvitae is rapidly growing in popularity because of its hardiness and fast growth rate.

The cut tree season was interesting in PA in 2024. We could tell there was more inventory available to sell compared to the previous few years. However, it appeared that the overall demand was slightly down, and some growers were stuck with extra trees. Pennsylvania Christmas tree growers continue to learn the most innovative ways to produce high-quality trees. 2025 is shaping up to be a great year, and we look forward to whatever challenges it brings. Keep an eye out for our summer meeting at Berkey Nursery!

PCTGA's Treasurer Gary Thomas, Recently Appointed to the Real Christmas Tree Board

Gary Thomas was appointed to the Real Christmas Tree Board by Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack for the term of office ending on December 31, 2027. Gary was appointed as the Eastern Region Christmas tree producers board member, covering Maine to Florida.

The Eastern Region has four board members: two from North Carolina, one from Georgia, and now one from Pennsylvania. The full board has twelve members, an additional five from the West Region, and two more from the Central Region.

Gary Westlake, also from PCTGA, was the previous RCTB member whose term expired in December 2026 after serving two three-year terms.

Gary Thomas will be on the Industry Relations Committee, charged with undertaking all industry communications. The committee engages with growers and importers across the country through direct mail, industry publications, and electronic media.

The Board had their first in person meeting for 2025 on Feb 19 in Boone, North Carolina and then attended the North Carolina Christmas Tree Winter Meeting on February 20th and 21st. The board meets every third Thursday via video conference and the next in person meeting will be in Michigan at the National Summer Meeting at Dutchman Tree Farms on 24th-26th.

PCTGA has Strong Showing at the 2025 Pennsylvania Farm Show

The Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association set up an outstanding display of Christmas trees and greenery at the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg, Pa. January 4-11. The committee of Glenn Bustard (chair), Gary Hague, and Larry and Joanne Snyder organized and participated in the setup with the help of many other members who also staffed the 50 x 60 ft. display through the week.

Farm show attendees vote on the grand champion tree from the eight first place trees selected by an impartial judge. The judge also awards the places in the decorated and undecorated wreaths, creative unconventional, and porch pot categories.

The addition of two snow machines this year delighted both children and adults. Wreathmaking demonstrations were given

during the week. We promoted the real tree by giving out printed information, showing a video produced by Beth Bossio, and conversing with those who stopped to admire our Pennsylvania-grown trees and greenery.

Congratulations to our winners: Glenn Bustard received first place in any pine, Douglas fir, any spruce, other true fir and hybrid-cross fir classes. Rob Varner received first for his Fraser fir. Pam and Paul Shealer, Jr. received first for their concolor fir and other domestic fir. Rich and Mary McClellan received a first for their tabletop Christmas tree. Gary Hague received first place for his decorated and undecorated wreaths and his porch pot. Glenn Bustard received first place in Creative Unconventional.

Glenn Bustard also received grand and reserve champion in the Christmas tree contest and Gary Hague also received grand champion for his porch pot and reserve champion for his decorated wreath. We had an "only at the PA Farm Show" experience when Russell Redding, PA Secretary of Agriculture, and Dave McCormick, US Senator, stopped for a photo shot with the winners.



Bustard's Tree Farm Provided the U.S. Vice President's Christmas Tree

The U.S. vice president's residence displayed a Pennsylvania-grown Christmas tree this past holiday, a beautiful Turkish Fir grown by Bustard's Christmas Trees in Lansdale, PA! In a recent national tree contest, one of Bustard's trees was awarded Reserve Grand Champion status, making the farm eligible to provide the vice president's tree.



PCTGA board member Beth Bossio was proud to attend an event at the Bustard farm at which Jay and Glenn Bustard gave Souderton High School Students the honor of picking the vice-presidential Christmas tree. Not only did the students from journalism and science classes get to choose the tree, but they also spent the day learning about the Christmas tree industry and the importance of agriculture in Pennsylvania. The students learned how to take soil samples to determine use of fertilizer and heard from Penn State University's Dr. Rick Bates about how genetic research has helped grow higher-quality trees. Students learned about the value of IPM, beneficial plants, and insects and heard from local news stations covering the event about how to be a great interviewer! They all took turns interviewing Jay and Glenn Bustard, Dr. Bates, and Ms. Bossio.

They were an impressive group of students with wonderful teachers and the Bustards tree they chose (selected was from the *CofirGe* project started in 2010) stood proudly in the vice-president's home in Washington, DC! Congratulations to the students and to Bustard's Christmas Trees!

PCTGA Summer Meeting to be Held at Berkey's Nursery in Erie, PA

The Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association summer meeting will be hosted by Berkey's Nursery in Spartansburg, about 30 miles south of Erie, PA. Berkey's Nursery is a 900-acre, 3rd generation Christmas tree farm and nursery. Berkey's produces 2.5 million transplants, 22,000 cut trees, 5,000 wreaths, and 60 tons for bough/foliage material each year.

We take pride in our 60 years of genetic research in multiple species. We currently have orchards in 8 different species including Balsam Fir, Canaan Fir, Colorado Blue Spruce, Concolor Fir, Douglas Fir, Fraser Fir, Turkish Fir, and Serbian Spruce. All the plants grown here are started from seed and most of the plants are the offspring of the improved seed orchards on the farm. Improved genetics along with our use of custom designed equipment, innovative technology, and the drive to continually improve our growing practices allows us to consistently produce top quality transplants and Christmas trees.

Please Join Us August 14th-16th, 2025 for the Summer Meeting and help us **celebrate our 75th Anniversary**. Follow the link or the QR code for a brief brochure on the meeting

<https://www.flipsnack.com/berkeysseed/berkey-summer-meeting-2025/full-view.html>



save the date

For the 2025 PCTGA Summer Meeting! It will be August 14-16 at Berkey's Nursery

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REGIONAL NEWS WISCONSIN

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Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association trailer.

GREETINGS FROM WISCONSIN *Spring Brings Change*

Hello to all of you around the Midwest reading this edition of Wisconsin news.

I would expect that you all look forward to spring. I definitely do. I love to hear the birds singing every morning, and the crocus pushing their way through the cold soil in order to brighten my day when they bloom! God is good.

This spring brings changes in my life, also. I am resigning from the position of executive secretary and moving on to new things. Can you imagine how hard it is to try to pack up my office containing 24 years of preserving mementos, information, and financial records? Actually, it's 70 years of history, even though computer records and documents makes for fewer boxes. It is emotionally difficult because of my family's involvement in the Christmas tree industry for my whole life. But, I will be fine, after I get past the separation anxiety!

Last year the association purchased a trailer to store and haul our equipment and supplies. We had it wrapped with a beautiful design and printed sponsor ads on the back door. Getting the trailer was a great idea and it is very useful.

In other news, our winter convention held many educational opportunities for our members, and we had a good turnout. Our wreath contest displayed the talents of our members, and the attendees were split on which was the best decorated wreath, as we ended in a tie. We congratulate 4 Mile Tree Farm (Gary Garbelman) of Birchwood, and Ottman Tree Farms (Ken Ottman) of Junction City for their grand champion win. Ottman Tree Farms was also the grand champion in the undecorated class.

Our next summer convention host will be Northwoods Evergreen & Wire Co. in Merrill. We look forward to what they will share on

August 14-16. Check out our website for more details as they develop.

And, finally, I would like to introduce our new secretary, Sarah Glitto. She joined our association as a grower just two years ago, and we welcome her. You will hear from her in the future. Please see our new address in the membership directory; the phone and email will remain the same.

Best regards,

Cheryl Nicholson, Exec. Sec. WCTPA



Directors Dean Lemke and Dan Hansen presented a thank you plaque to Cheryl Nicholson recognizing her years of contributions to the Wisconsin Christmas tree growers.



Heidi Hansen held a seminar on how to conduct a class to make Christmas pots. She explained the details on how to bring in more income through classes you hold. Some attendees then practiced the techniques of designing a pot.



Angela Schaefer and her father, Gary Garbelman of 4 Mile Tree Farm with their decorated wreath.



Rebecca Sniegowski of Ottman Tree Farms won the grand champion undecorated class and also tied for grand champion decorated. 🌲

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