

Points to Discuss With Your Grower

Tree numbers by size & grade

- Height standards
- Grade standards
- Presence of handles

Other products

- Wreaths, roping
- B & B trees

Written contract

- Delivered quality
- Legal venue
- Retail tree care
- Arbitration
- Death of either party

Payment

- Certified check
- Percent down
- Schedule

Transportation

- Arranged by
- Shipping dates
- Number of deliveries

Customer Service

- Tree care literature
- Tree shaking
- NCCTA retail materials

Contingencies

- Weather
- Transportation



POINT of SALE MATERIALS Available from your NC tree supplier:

- ▲ NC Fraser Fir 3'X6' Banner "We proudly feature North Carolina Fraser Fir - the Perfect Christmas Tree"
- ▲ Tree Care Poster for Retailer (Also, available for your printer in Spanish)
- ▲ Tree Care Pads for Consumers (English & Spanish) 50 sheets per pad
- ▲ Real Tree Brochures
- ▲ Consumer Brochures
- ▲ NC Fraser Fir Attribute Sign (Available for your printer in English & Spanish)



Courtesy of Your NC Christmas Tree Supplier

www.ncchristmastrees.com

North Carolina Christmas Tree Association RETAILER NEWSLETTER

Summer 2006



Welcome!

From the Mountains of North Carolina comes a Christmas tree without equal: The North Carolina Fraser Fir. The Fraser fir is native only to the highest mountains of Western North Carolina and surrounding states, and is found nowhere else in the world. North Carolina Fraser fir have that soft deep blue-green foliage, strong yet pliable branches, delightful aroma, and incomparable needle retention that make for the perfect Christmas tree. North Carolina Fraser fir have been displayed at the White House nine times, more than any other Christmas tree! Grown on American soil by American farmers, North Carolina Fraser fir is a renewable, recyclable, environmentally friendly choice. Welcome to the 2006 edition of the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association Retailer Newsletter. We hope you find the enclosed information practical and profitable. Please feel free to contact the NCCTA office at 800-562-8789 or by email at info@ncchristmastrees.com if you have any questions or comments. Most of all we want to thank you for your interest in North Carolina Fraser Fir, the Perfect Christmas Tree!

This newsletter is published by the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association, in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Steve Troxler, Commissioner and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.



WHY North Carolina Fraser Fir?

- ▲ Agricultural Crop Grown in and Native to Western North Carolina Mountains
- ▲ Soft, Pleasant-to-touch, Dark Green Needles
- ▲ Incomparable Needle Retention
- ▲ Long Lasting Traditional Christmas Aroma
- ▲ Pliable, Yet Strong, Branches for the Heaviest of Ornaments
- ▲ Environmentally Friendly, Recyclable after Christmas
- ▲ Beautiful, Fragrant Centerpiece of a Traditional Christmas
- ▲ Nine Times Winner of National Competition and Displayed at the White House—More than any Other State
- ▲ Renewable, Farm Grown Agricultural Crop



North Carolina Fraser Fir visits the White House... Again!

NCDA&CS Truck delivers tree to White House (above)

Decorated tree in White House Blue Room (right)



Retail Lot Calendar

Winter

- Review customer demographics for target area
- Review local and state laws (Permits, right-of-ways, signage)
- Identify potential lot sites
- Identify & contact landowners
- Identify possible charity partners

Spring

- Initial contact with tree suppliers
- Sign lease with landowner
- Develop or review business plan
- Secure pre-approval for financing

Summer

- Make a deposit on tree order
- Identify sources for:
 - Freight
 - Liability insurance
 - Local bank account
 - Tent rental
 - Port-a-johns
 - Fencing if needed
 - Lodging / camper
 - Security
 - Utilities
 - Telephone

Early Fall

- Touch base with:
 - Landowner
 - Tree grower / supplier
 - Charity partner
- Advertise for employees
- Order signs, banners

October

- Finalize all contracts & permits
- Hire employees
- Order uniforms, jackets, or t-shirts
- Order point-of-sale materials

Early November

- Finalize tree delivery
- Set up retail lot, storage, & display
- Review inventory & accounting systems
- Review parking & traffic flow
- Initiate advertising

Mid / Late November

- Train & motivate employees
- Properly store & display trees
- Monitor inventory & cash
- Survey customer satisfaction
- Visit competing lots in target area

December

- Maintain quality of inventory & service
- Remove, replace, & recycle dry trees
- Conduct employee exit interviews
- Make deposit on site for next year

NC Christmas Trees Are Home to Diverse Wildlife



Christmas tree growers enjoy seeing a wide variety of wildlife on their farms. Many of the practices used by growers have increased the number of species and the amount of wildlife. Wildlife is a fringe benefit for most Christmas tree growers who raise their trees for profit.

Each Christmas tree grown represents 25 square feet of green space for wildlife that includes mice, other small rodents, rabbits, songbirds, foxes, bobcats and even bear. Game birds, such as wild turkey and quail, bring their

broods into tree fields to feed on grasshoppers and other insects in the understorey. The trees themselves provide shelter from predators and the elements, especially during the winter.

Many growers work to increase certain wildlife species such as turkey, quail, or even songbirds. These growers sow ground cover crops, mow field roads, allow stream borders to grow up into brush, and plant wildlife food plots. Wildlife is so plentiful on many farms that growers lease hunting and fishing rights to sportsmen. In fact, deer are now so numerous in some areas that they have become destructive pests that eat tree foliage or thrash Christmas trees with antlers.

Though Christmas trees may be viewed as a monoculture, the fields in which they grow represent a diverse habitat for wildlife. In the mountains of Western North Carolina, Christmas tree growers strive to keep perennial ground covers in their fields to conserve soil and protect tree roots. As a result, the earth surrounding Fraser fir Christmas trees is covered with wild flowers, weeds, and grasses. These plants and the insects that live on them provide food for natural insect predators as well as food for birds and small mammals. As an immature forest, Christmas trees provide a bounty of woods-to-field edges – a habitat that supports abundant wildlife.

So, when you think of where your Christmas tree grew, do not conjure up an image of trees surrounded by bare soil. Instead, imagine your tree surrounded by wildflowers and grasses with birds nesting in the branches and mice and voles burrowing through the duff. In the North Carolina Mountains, this is the image that mirrors reality. As you decorate your own Fraser fir Christmas tree, you might be lucky enough to find the remains of last spring's songbird nest deep inside the canopy.



Recycling Christmas Trees

Direct your customers to these web sites to find a recycling center near them.

<http://www.earth911.org/master.asp>

<http://www.christmastree.org/environment.cfm>

<http://www.local.com>

The Environmental Choice

The Real Christmas Tree

vs.

The Fake Christmas Tree



Real Christmas Trees

- Real Christmas trees are plantation grown on American family farms, making an important economic contribution to many rural communities in the United States.
- Real Christmas trees absorb carbon dioxide and other harmful “greenhouse” gases and release fresh oxygen into the air. A Real Christmas tree has a fragrance beyond compare.
- One acre of mature Christmas trees can provide the daily oxygen requirement for up to 18 people. Young, fast-growing trees like Christmas trees release more oxygen than mature forest trees.
- For every Real Christmas tree harvested, another one is planted in its place to ensure a steady supply year after year. Christmas tree fields support turkey, quail, songbirds, rabbits and deer.
- When planted outside after the Holidays, balled and burlaped Real Christmas Trees temper winds, suppress loud sounds, filter dust, moderate temperature, and dissipate odors.
- Real Christmas trees are an all-American renewable, recyclable resource. After the holidays, Real trees are chipped into biodegradable mulch, which replenishes soil in landscapes, parks, and schools. Most communities offer recycling programs.
- Recycled Real Christmas trees are also used as wind and water barriers at beaches and river beds to fight sand and soil erosion. They protect our water supplies, and provide refuge for wildlife. When sunk in ponds, they provide excellent refuge and feeding areas for fish.
- Real Christmas trees can be used as a feeding station and winter shelter for songbirds in your yard.
- Some consumers are allergic to dust that accumulates on surfaces of Real trees grown outside. You can wash most allergens off by spraying the tree with water before bringing it inside.
- The safest Christmas tree is a fresh, well-watered tree. A Real tree has never started a fire. Faulty Christmas lights, candles, and fireplaces can start tree fires.

Fake Christmas Trees

- Fake Christmas trees are made in Korea, Taiwan, or China. Importing artificial trees contributes to the US trade deficit.
- Fake Christmas trees are made from non-renewable plastics. The manufacture of petroleum-based plastics use up natural resources. Once used, they are gone forever.
- Furthermore, the manufacture of both plastic and metal components in the tree consume energy and create pollution.
- The average use of a Fake Christmas tree is only 6 or 7 years. Eventually, they all go to the landfill as garbage.
- Fake Christmas trees are not biodegradable. The plastics and metals that they contain, including lead, will remain in our landfills for centuries.
- Three Asian wood-boring beetle species have been imported to America on the wooden trunks of Fake trees. Undetected, these insects could attack native forest trees and lumber.
- Some consumers have suffered an allergic reaction to materials in their Fake tree.
- When a Fake Christmas tree catches fire, it releases dangerous toxic fumes into the home.



For additional copies of this flyer go to: www.ncchristmastrees.com

Choose a Real Christmas Tree — The Environmental & Traditional Choice

Get With the Program

Some Christmas tree retailers have gone all out to keep their trees fresh – investing in tents, irrigation equipment, mulch, and display stands with water bowls. Research has proved that trees hold up better when protected from drying conditions and when kept in water. Good retailers can measure the impact of their efforts in the number of repeat customers that return for another fresh tree.

Other retailers make excuses for not taking extra measures to keep their trees fresh. "It never gets hot enough at that time of year..." or "Its too expensive..." or "my trees don't stay on the lot long enough..." Well, these myths hurt tree quality. It can get hot enough some days almost every year. Temperatures in the 80's have been measured in November as far north as Boston. A tree can be seriously degraded in just 1 day of poor care if it is hot or windy.

And too expensive? If chain stores can have adequate tree care for the prices they get, surely others can invest in tree care too! Here are two low-cost techniques used by different chain stores:



Storage pool made from landscape timbers and plastic sheeting.



This low-cost tree stand consists of a milk box lined with a trash bag filled with water.

Expanding Your Customer Base

Whether you have been selling Christmas trees for years or have a brand new lot in town, there are new ways you can reach out to your customer base and generate more sales. Advertising may be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider ways to expand sales but it is really only one strategy. Attracting new customers might include increasing product quality to strengthen your reputation, adding new products to provide a more diverse and enjoyable shopping experience, using signage and point-of-sale materials to bring customers in, or even hiring additional help to improve the quality of customer service. In a sense, everything you do to set up a professional lot will provide a direct return in attracting more customers and increasing the money they spend on your retail Christmas tree lot.

Here are some key areas and specific activities that can lead to an increase in your customer base:

Reputation:

Most customers make purchases based on either previous experience or recommendations from friends. Repeat customers are your best market. Satisfied customers are your most effective advertising. Customer satisfaction depends on the experience they had selecting your product, their interaction with your employees, and even the condition of their Christmas tree when they remove it from the house after Christmas. Your reputation will hinge on their overall experience.

While the quality of tree that you sell could be the core of your reputation, it doesn't have to be. You could also build reputation on price, convenience, availability of bilingual employees, or the availability of fun activities for children. Part of your reputation could even be the brightly colored T-shirts worn by your staff. Just be sure that the reputation you receive is also the one that you sought. It might be helpful to write a mission statement that focuses your and your employees' efforts toward establishing your signature reputation.

Customer Service:

In most communities, customers have plenty of choices of where to buy their trees. Customer service can either set you head and shoulders above your competition or make the competition look good in comparison. Do you cover the basics? Do your employees go out of their way to be helpful? Do you provide extra amenities?

Most retail businesses train their employees to follow certain routines with customers to create a standard of customer service. Retail lots are an informal setting, yet customer service is just as important on the lot as in a store if not more so – Christmas trees are a crucial holiday purchase and perceived as an expensive item. Good service will support customers in their effort to find the perfect tree.

Adding Experience:

For many customers, their reasons for visiting your business may not extend beyond their purchase. Others consider their visit to your lot to be an important Christmas holiday tradition. The whole family may be involved. Their visit is as much about the experience as it is about the purchase. For them, your retail lot is as close to a northern alpine forest as they are going to get.

So how can you add to the experiences your customers already enjoy? Many retailers have added a "visit" by Santa Claus on key sales days or an old fashioned sleigh to climb on. Others have added educational displays about how Christmas trees are grown, the farm where they come from, and how to recycle them. One retailer far from Fraser fir country bought balled & burlaped trees that he set in holes and covered with mulch so that consumers could pay a premium to cut their own Fraser fir from his "farm." Many retailers make their own wreaths on site where customers can watch. Some experiences may seem inconsequential to you but bring certain customers back year after year.

Visibility:

Many Christmas tree retailers depend on their location to provide adequate visibility for customers. Good signs, lights, banners or flags, and especially the trees themselves provide a clear "We're open-for-business!" message at most sites. In congested areas these may not be enough to separate your lot from visual clutter or your competitors. Some retailers have invested in off-site signage to attract and slow down customers before they come up to the lot. Some retailers rent large inflatable Santas or snowmen to attract attention. While retailers may invest in tents primarily as a means of protecting their trees from sun and wind, the tents also provide a large eye-catching display that communicates both a statement of purpose (selling Christmas trees) and a statement of quality (protecting fresh trees).

Advertising:

Visibility is an important aspect of advertising, yet there are other powerful ways to let your customers find you. Ads in newspapers can help but may not catch as many eyes as a seasonal piece about finding a fresh tree. Local media need Christmas topics and may welcome the opportunity to use your lot for a story. And this advertising is free! Many young families rely more on the internet for information than other media making a website a very powerful tool to reach certain customers.

These ideas really boil down to better communication with your customers and how you respond to what they want. Whether it is through a suggestion box or a mail-in survey, consider asking your customers how they found you and what they thought of your trees, staff, and service. Brainstorm with your employees at the end of the season to identify potential improvements. Even if this season was good, next year can always be better. Take the time to develop a marketing plan for your retail lot so that you invest in the best strategies for your targeted customer base.

How To Increase Loyalty In Seasonal Employees



Most retail lots and choose and cut locations hire high school and college students for extra help on weekends. Most weekends one or more of the students want off for a ball game, school dance, or dinner at Grandma's house. The incentive that will make them to want to work when scheduled is this simple sign, carefully worded to not offend the customer, and placed in the fresh-cut area where customers are waiting for their tree.

Don't we all tip for good service at restaurants, hotels, our barber/hairdresser, etc? Why don't people think to tip the student that carries their tree, fresh cuts the trunk, bales or bags it, carries it to their car, and ties it on?

This sign is such a great reminder to customers that the students frequently make more in tips than salary. Every year your employees will beg you for more hours to work.

A crowd of fire inspectors and reporters watch the demonstration.

Extinguishing

THE CHRISTMAS TREE FIRE MYTH

Every holiday season, the Christmas tree industry faces a barrage of “media events” where Christmas trees are lit on fire. Images of dry trees being torched on the five o’clock news (some demonstrations have been found using accelerants such as gasoline) all in the name of “fire safety.”

For years, the Christmas tree industry has battled this sensationalized type of demonstration, and in November of 2004, the Michigan Christmas Tree Association had the opportunity to work with the Farmington Hills Fire Department in metropolitan Detroit in presenting a fair and accurate demonstration of how Christmas trees react in a house fire.

Planned and coordinated by Denny Hughes and Michael O’Brien of the Farmington Hills Fire Department, the demonstration featured a structure with three rooms. Each room was set as a home may be during the holidays with carpet, upholstered chair, artwork, gifts and a Christmas tree. The only variable was the tree. In one room they placed a real, well-cared-for real tree. The second room included a real tree that was dried and the final

room featured an artificial tree that was advertised as “flame retardant.”

In the demonstration, the department set a fire in the room. Typically the furniture caught on fire first, and the flames then moved to the tree. Each of the rooms was allowed to “burn” for an equal length of time before the fires were extinguished.

The result was very telling.

The real tree that was dry burned fairly vigorously. The artificial tree did resist the flames for an amount of time, but when the room became hot enough, the entire tree was engulfed in flames and projected significant heat and toxic smoke. The well-cared-for real tree did receive some burn damage on the corner of the tree next to the burning chair, however after the demonstration, the majority of the tree was intact and looked much like it did before the demonstration started.

The demonstration was held in conjunction with a meeting of the Metropolitan Detroit Fire Inspectors Association, where MCTA Executive Director, Marsha Gray had the opportunity to address the inspectors and share Christmas tree fire research and data.

“I know that this demonstration made a real impact because the fire fighters and inspectors were surprised with the results” comments Gray. “We had the opportunity to discuss misconceptions and actually show the resilience of a well-cared-for, real Christmas tree.”

Channel 4, the NBC affiliate in Detroit, WWJ News Talk Radio 950 in Detroit, and at least four cable access stations, also covered the demonstration. The Farmington Hills Fire Department, in conjunction with the Farmington Hills cable access developed a video that featured video footage of the demonstration along with an interview of Marsha Gray by Michael O’Brien. The video will be distributed to civic and school groups and was also run on the cable station.

MCTA would like to extend a special thank you to Lou Waldock of Waldock Christmas Tree Farm in Howell for supplying the two real Christmas trees. Lou is a retired fire fighter and was a tremendous resource for this demonstration.

BEFORE



WELL-CARED FOR REALTREE



DRY REALTREE



ARTIFICIALTREE

DURING



AFTER

