

# Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

January 2015

## Special points of interest:

### ♦ FUNNY BUT TRUE

There were quite a few local news stories about Christmas trees being recycled, burned or fed to goats. Here's a photo from England, where a few trees became toys for lions at a zoo after the holidays.



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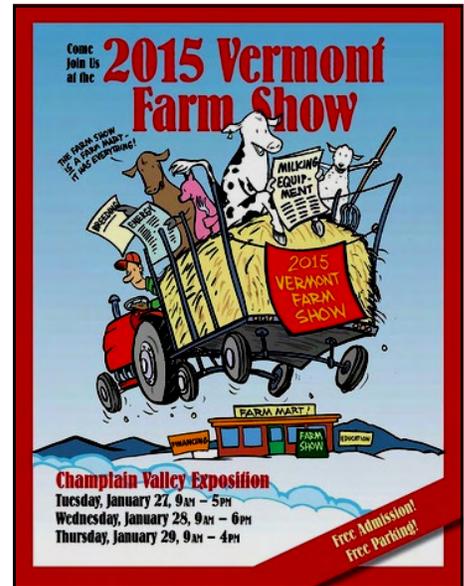
## Winter Meeting Preview

The NHVTCTA's Winter Meeting will be held Tuesday, January 27, 2015. Once again, the meeting will be held at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Jct., Vt., in conjunction with the Vermont Farm Show.

The agenda will include an association business meeting, the always popular sales and marketing round-robin discussion, information on using social media to market your farm, and a look at computerized soils mapping. A chicken lunch will also be served.

**Also, don't forget to bring a tree and/or wreath to enter in the Vermont Farm Show competition.**

Last year there were quite a few entrants. Let's do it again. It is good exposure for the industry as a whole and a good



marketing opportunity for individual farms!

If you haven't already registered for the meeting, you can do so onsite (without a guaranteed meal), or for more information contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-0660.

## Check-Off Update: No 2014 Assessments

According to the AMS division of USDA, there will be no assessments levied on Christmas trees harvested in 2014 as a part of the Christmas Tree Promotion, Research and Information Order (checkoff) and Christmas tree producers can plan accordingly.

As most in the industry

know, the "stay" placed on the order in November of 2011 was finally lifted effective April 7, 2014. That action was required by an amendment to the Farm Bill that was signed by President Obama in February. Soon after that date, the USDA

*Continued on page 7*

## President's Message

Hi all,

Another harvest season has come and gone and by all accounts it was a good one for most of us. Wholesale orders were a little slow early on but picked up around Halloween and we sold out. I hope everyone else did too!

Retail tree lots were running short all across the lower half of New Hampshire and Vermont, so prices stayed high to the end.

Many lots were closed a week before Christmas. I hope we didn't push any people into buying an artificial tree because they couldn't find the real tree they wanted.

The right inventory is always a balancing act for sure.

The Winter meeting is coming right up on January 27th at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Junction, Vermont. We had a great turnout last year and I hope to see that again this year.

Also don't forget the Christmas tree and wreath contest. Last year we had eleven trees and two wreaths that made a wonderful display for the public attending the Vermont Farm Show. Getting people and trees face to face is the best way to imprint the real tree choice for the consumer. Let's have a display that we can be proud of.

See you all there!

*Dan Beloin  
President*

## Horticulture Survey

The 2014 Census of Horticulture was mailed by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in December. That group is reminding growers to please respond.

This special study will help us do more than just count Christmas trees. It will look at the entire horticulture sector in the United States and gather a full count of this \$14.5 billion industry. The Census of Horticulture will paint a detailed picture of U.S. producers nationwide – those who grow all those cherished holiday trimmings, from fresh cut Christmas trees, to poinsettias, holly and more.



## New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



### 2015 Officers

President	Dan Beloin	belointreefarm@gmail.com
Vice President	Tom Lang	balsamacres@comcast.net
Recording Secretary	Russell Reay	russreay@vermontel.net
Exec. Sec./Treas.	Jim Horst	mtafarms@comcast.net
Past President	Mary Lou Schmidt	elysianh@sover.net

### Contact Information

Jim Horst, Executive Secretary  
 569 Pleasant Valley Road  
 Bennington, VT 05201-9637  
 Phone: (802) 447-0660  
 E-mail: info@nh-vtchristmastree.org  
 Association Web site: www.nh-vtchristmastree.org

### 2015 Directors

### (Term Ends)

Andy Aldrich	aaldrich@pshift.com	(2016)
Dan Beloin	belointreefarm@gmail.com	(2015)
Mike Godzyk	sibgotree@gmail.com	(2016)
Ben Hoyt	b.hoyt@roadrunner.com	(2016)
Tom Lang	balsamacres@comcast.net	(2015)
Paul Lemire	mrrplemire@msn.com	(2015)
Nigel Manley	info@therocks.org	(2017)
Carl Szych	breezyhillacresszych@yahoo.com	(2017)
Jeff Taylor	taylortreepeople@aol.com	(2017)
Bill Tester	bill_tester@hotmail.com	(2015)
Bob White	whitechristmasvt@googlemail.com	(2017)
Patrick White	pwhitevt@aol.com	(2016)

### For matters related to Tree Line only:

Patrick White, Editor  
 NHVTCTA Tree Line  
 18 Merritt Road  
 Middlesex, VT 05602  
 Phone: (802) 223-3880  
 E-mail: pwhitevt@aol.com

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

2015 Tree Line Publication Schedule	
Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	—
June	June 5
September	Sept. 4

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## Research: Impact of Warmer Temps on Fraser Fir

BOONE, N.C.—Christmas tree farms are providing a backyard laboratory for Dr. Howard Neufeld, an Appalachian State University biology professor who is interested in how a warming climate might affect the tree industry's future.

The information he hopes to glean is important because it can help tree farmers make decisions regarding future plantings and farm locations.

About 50 million Fraser firs grow in North Carolina, primarily in the northwestern counties and in western counties with elevations above 3,000 feet, which is outside the tree's native range of 5,000 feet and above.

The region's cooler temperatures and precipitation contribute to the Christmas tree industry's success.

"One of the goals of this project is to get an idea of what will happen to the Christmas tree industry if the Southern Appalachians get warmer," Neufeld said.

Since the cost of heating



**Graduate student Lauren Wood measures tree shoot length to gauge differences in growth patterns of Fraser firs at tree farms at different elevations.**

trees in the field to simulate their growth in a warming climate can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, Neufeld is using the region's varied elevation to track growth patterns in warm versus cooler terrains.

"We have millions of Fraser firs planted in this area that are nearly identical genetically. The

tree farmers have similar growing practices, tree density and ages, and trees that are grown in farms over a range of elevations," Neufeld said. "Because of that, we can use elevation as a surrogate for warming."

Neufeld and student research assistants are monitoring tree growth, water use, photosynthesis and carbon output at six tree farms ranging from lower elevations in eastern Tennessee to mid-elevation farms off Hwy. 105 in Watauga County and higher-elevation farms off Hwy. 194 in the Watauga County's Meat Camp community.

"Even though we are saying elevation is a surrogate for warming, warming is more than just an increase in temperature," Neufeld said. "It's a change in the whole climate, water balance, temperatures, length of growing season and soil differences. We realize there are a number of factors changing simultaneously."

Neufeld hypothesizes that Fraser firs planted at lower, warmer elevations grow more slowly than their higher-elevation counterparts because of stress associated with heat-related water loss and differing rates of photosynthesis, among other factors.

The study, which began last spring, includes taking growth measurements and recording phenology data, such as when the trees bud, when needles grow and when branches extend and stop growing, and the rate

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## Impact of Warmer Temps on Fraser Fir (continued)

*Continued from page 4*

at which trees lose water through transpiration or evaporation.

Neufeld will work with the university's tree ring experts to analyze discs taken from tree trunks to determine tree growth during the last decade at the different elevations.

"Trees growing in hotter and dryer locations have greater loss of water because of the higher temperatures and lower humidity. They also release more carbon dioxide that otherwise might be available for growth," he said.

"Although, we have heard from the growers that their trees grow to marketable size sooner at the lower elevations, our preliminary measurements at least of diameter growth suggests that trees at lower elevation this year seem to be growing substantially less than those at the higher elevations, but maybe they grow less in diameter but faster in height," Neufeld said.

"We will measure that later

in the study."

Trees grown at higher elevations experience less stress related to water loss, Neufeld explained. "A lot of times the trees at the highest elevation farms (4,200 feet) are in clouds or fog 35-40 percent of the time and get 35-45 percent of their water from the fog. They also have lower evaporation rates," he said. "If trees are hotter and dryer, they have to deal with greater loss of water because of the higher temperatures and lower humidity."

Future climate warming could mean that growers at the lower elevations find themselves in an area that is no longer favorable for growing Fraser firs. Will they have to move their farms to a higher elevation as a result? Will the trees at the higher elevations, which also will experience warming, grow more or less?

"We don't know the answers but those are some of the things to consider," Neufeld said.

"Growers may ask themselves if they want to invest



**Above: Dendrometer bands are used to measure tree trunk growth. Below: A conifer chamber is used to measure a Fraser fir's photosynthesis, the process by which a tree makes sugars, and transpiration, which is the tree's water loss.**



\$100,000 by planting trees at 2,200 feet knowing that in 10 years they might not recoup their investment. We won't be able to attribute differences to any one specific factor, but by looking at what the trees are doing at the lower elevation, we can say that if it gets warmer and the temperature becomes similar to what it is at the lower elevation farms, growers will know what to expect and perhaps adjust their management practices."

To view a video about Neufeld's research, visit <http://science.unctv.org/content/oh-christmas-tree>.

*Source: Appalachian State University News*

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# Check-Off (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

called for nominations to the Christmas Tree Promotion, Research and Information Board.

Fifty-seven producers and/or importers submitted their applications for the board and the names of those selected were released on January 15 (see sidebar at right).

Christmas Tree Promotion Now, an organization of industry members who advocated for the checkoff, worked tirelessly in an effort to have the board named before the end of September.

The effort would have allowed the board to get up and running, allow assessments to be collected on the 2014 harvest and begin promotional activities for the 2015 holiday season.

Because the board has not been named and the harvest process has begun in some growing regions, the USDA has confirmed there will be no assessments levied in 2014.

Assessment collection will begin with the 2015 harvest. By law, checkoff revenue can be used only for research or promotion. The Christmas tree marketing program, like other similar agriculture marketing programs (such as “Got Milk?” and “Beef, It’s What’s for Dinner”), was created at the request of the industry’s farmers and will be funded by the industry—no taxpayer funds will be used and no tax revenue will be collected.

Programs such as this allow producers within a particular agriculture sector to come together to fund research and jointly market their products.

CHRISTMAS TREE PROMOTION BOARD			
Name	State	District	Term of Office
Paul F. Battaglia	California	West	3 years ends 12/31/2017
Mark B. Arkills	Oregon	West	3 years ends 12/31/2017
James M. Heater	Oregon	West	4 years ends 12/31/2018
Betty Malone	Oregon	West	4 years ends 12/31/2018
Mark A. Steelhammer	Washington	West	2 years ends 12/31/2016
Rex A. Korson	Michigan	Central	2 years ends 12/31/2016
Beth Walterscheidt	Texas	Central	3 years ends 12/31/2017
Conrad Steinhart	Florida	Eastern	3 years ends 12/31/2017
Bentley Curry	Louisiana	Eastern	4 years ends 12/31/2018
Della Jean Deal	North Carolina	Eastern	3 years ends 12/31/2017
James E. Rockis	West Virginia	Eastern	2 years ends 12/31/2016
Christopher Maciborski	Importer		3 years ends 12/31/2017

## NCTA: Save the Dates

Mark your calendars and clear your schedules to be a part of this important event! NCTA will host a one-day seminar in conjunction with the regional conference taking place at Richardson’s Farm in Spring Grove, Ill. Plan to be there, and stay tuned to [www.realchristmastrees.org](http://www.realchristmastrees.org) for more information!

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# Bugs in the News

*Just before Christmas, The Wall Street Journal ran a piece on bugs "hitch-hiking" on trees. (An excerpt appears below.) Predictably, there were a few horror stories cited, but there was also industry input on the issue, and a look at one farm's innovative approach to the issue:*

Officials of the NCTA say the public shouldn't be overly concerned about bugs.

"Out of 33 million trees, the number of noticeable bugs is extremely small," said Rick Dungey, executive director of the group. "If it happened more often, I would hear about it." Still, Mr. Dungey recommends tree owners "give it a vigorous shake yourself, and thump it up and

down on a hard surface" to rid any pests and dead needles before bringing it inside.

Growers are going to greater lengths to remove critters from their trees—even though they say they are perfectly natural. "Having more bugs means you have healthy trees," said Gary Snyder, co-owner of Kirk Co., a tree farm in Oregon and Washington, among other places.

But that isn't what many customers want to hear. In the past five years, important export markets like Hawaii and Mexico have begun clamping down more on certain pests they consider invasive species. As a result, Mr. Snyder's farm now gives the trees it ships to Hawaii a hot

bath to kill slugs, which are banned there. Its trees are placed in stands on an assembly line and run through spray jets like in a carwash, using water heated as high as 120 degrees.

Mr. Snyder said his son, Daniel, built the wash two years ago at the company's biggest loading yard in Oregon City, Ore., after Hawaiian inspectors rejected half the company's shipment of about 30,000 trees after finding slugs and other pests. Now, he said, the rejection rate has dropped to about 15%, which may be as good as things can get.

"We can't heat the water anymore because it would scald the trees," he said.

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# Bilingual Tree Conference in Quebec



Quebec Christmas Tree Growers Association president Joëlle Cardonne has invited Christmas tree growers from the U.S. to the group's bilingual 2015 Christmas Tree Convention. The event will take place February 20-21 at Estrimont Suites & Spa in Orford, Quebec.

Presenters from Canada, Michigan and Pennsylvania will address a variety of topics important to the Christmas tree industry.

Friday's agenda includes a look at the latest industry sales statistics, as well as an examination of the U.S. check-off pro-



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gram; a discussion on interpreting soils tests and planning a tree fertilization program; Fraser fir nutrient uptake and fertility management with cover crops; and vegetation management. There will be lunch, breaks throughout the day to visit exhibitors, and a cocktail/banquet in the evening.

On Saturday, the agenda includes a look at sprayer design

in order to limit drift; detection on fungi causing foliar disease; the impact of climate change on Christmas tree pests; the outlook for wholesale and retail markets; an in-depth examination of needles; and guidance on how to deliver fresh trees to customers. There will be breaks to visit exhibitors and lunch.

An English language Web page is available with full details of the event and accommodations, as well as a registration form: <http://apanq.qc.ca/en/>

For more information, call (819) 564-3031 or email: [information@apanq.qc.ca](mailto:information@apanq.qc.ca)

## If Your Farm Accepts Credit Cards, Read This!

*Editor's Note: The following news report should be of interest to any farm that accepts credit cards. While technology can be great, it can also create unintended problems!*

The Whitehouse Christmas Tree Farm (in Toledo, Ohio) is asking for help from its customers.

According to the Farm's Facebook page, the business accidentally refunded over 300 customers who paid for their trees

by credit card.

The program that was used to process credit card transactions doesn't have the capability to process those transactions again.

Customers are asked to check their credit card statements for a refund from the business, and to send their repayment via check to the Whitehouse Christmas Tree Farm office.

The owner, Duke Wheeler,



says in the Facebook post that he is confident that customers will be receptive to the request.

Source: [13abc.com](http://13abc.com)

## Next Generation Tree Tools: Software and Drones

Often called the “Cadillac of Christmas trees,” the Fraser Fir has everything a good Christmas tree should have: an even triangular shape, a sweet piney fragrance, and soft needles that (mostly) stay attached and won’t leave tiny stabs in your fingers. But even Frasers eventually turn, and by the New Year, what was once a beautiful sapling has started to smell like decomposing wood and litter its needles across your living room floor. So scientists who refine the breeding of these and other practically perfect crops are always looking for new ways to understand how trees grow best. Now, a federally funded initiative at UConn and partner universities will make it easy for plant scientists and other researchers to do just this using “big data.”

By developing software that will connect genetic, physical, and environmental data housed in more than 15 major plant databases, assistant research professor Jill Wegrzyn of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and her colleagues will create tools not only to benefit crop science, but to help address important ecological issues like reforestation and climate change.

“It’s one of the ongoing hurdles of data analysis. As a scientist, I might be aware of these important data sources, but they are in different formats and locations, and are often much too large for a single desktop machine to analyze,” says Wegrzyn. “So the question becomes: How do we enable access so that more



**UConn researcher Jill Wegrzyn is using drones and advanced software to collect and analyze data about tree health and genetics.**

scientists can start finding meaning in these massive amounts of data? My job as a bioinformaticist is to help biologists achieve this in the era of next-generation sequencing and high-throughput phenotyping.”

Wegrzyn and her colleagues, including project principal investigator Stephen Ficklin at Washington State University, recently received \$1.5 million from the National Science Foundation to develop a cyber infrastructure, called Tripal Gateway, that will allow scientists to access, visualize, and analyze data anywhere in the world.

The infrastructure will serve thousands of scientists from industries, universities, and nonprofits worldwide, and is part of a \$31 million program of the NSF Data Infrastructure

Building Blocks program.

Many people think of big data in the life sciences as solely genetic information, but Wegrzyn points out that many scientific databases also contain large amounts of phenotypic data, or information about the physical attributes of organisms, as well as environmental data.

For example, researchers now use drone technology to survey and monitor forests and orchards. Combining this information with environmental data such as soil and climatic conditions, as well as genetic information, says Wegrzyn, can help scientists understand big questions, like how a forest’s biodiversity is changing under climate change, or what individuals within a given species will survive in a reforested landscape.

Wegrzyn serves as curator of TreeGenes, which is hosted jointly at UConn and the University of California, Davis, serves more than 2,000 researchers worldwide and has information on 1,200 tree species, including Christmas tree species like the famed Fraser Fir.

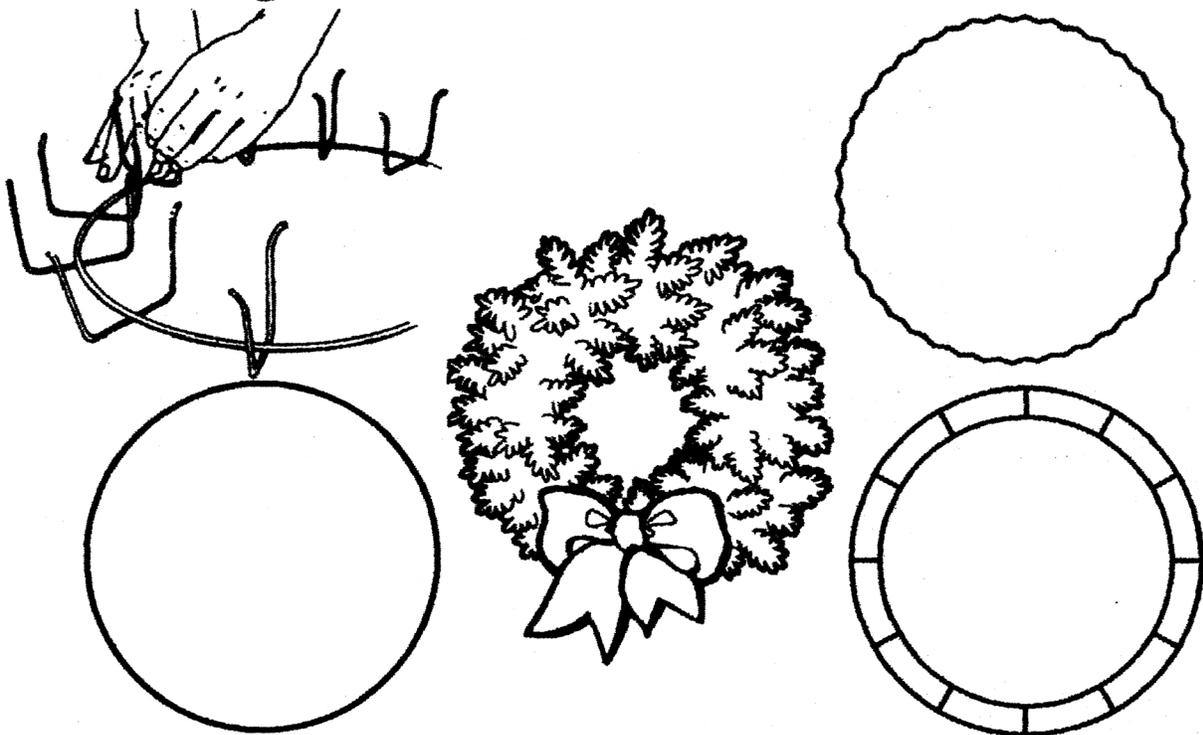
In another current project under the USDA Specialty Crop Initiative, she and lead investigator John Frampton of North Carolina State University will mine TreeGenes for associations of genes with traits like needle retention and disease resistance. “Trees live a long time and provide a great genetic record,” she says. “These tools can help us understand what genes contribute to specific traits.”

*Source: UConn Today*

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## 2014 Trees for Troops Wrap-Up

This past season, Trees for Troops provided 18,032 free, real Christmas Trees to military families and troops, bringing our total since the inception of the program to more than 157,000 trees. The trees were delivered by FedEx to 63 military bases in the U.S. and overseas, covering every branch of the armed services.

The Christmas Spirit Foundation, which runs Trees for Troops has received many thank you notes, emails and photos from those who received trees. Check out some of the photos and thank you messages online at <http://treesfortroops.org>, or on the organization's Facebook page.

The 2014 program kicked off in a big way November 18 at Dull's Tree Farm in Thorntown,



Indiana. Members of the National Christmas Tree Association and many state and regional Christmas tree associations began donating trees by the thousands—several hundred came from NHVTCTA members.

Consumers supported Trees for Troops by donating funds or

by visiting the 30 farms and retail locations across the country that hosted FedEx trailers during Trees for Troops Weekend (Dec. 5-7, 2014), when consumers purchased and donated 6,406 trees that were placed in the trailers and delivered to U.S. military bases.

Deliveries to stateside military bases all over the country started in late November and ended in mid-December with a grand total of 18,032 trees, provided through the generosity of the Real Christmas Tree industry, consumers and FedEx.

Trees for Troops counts on donations to make this program succeed. The Christmas SPIRIT Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Your tax-deductible charitable contribution will help those in service to our country.



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