

Shearings

February 2013



Let it snow, let it snow!

Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association
www.christmas-trees.org

Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association

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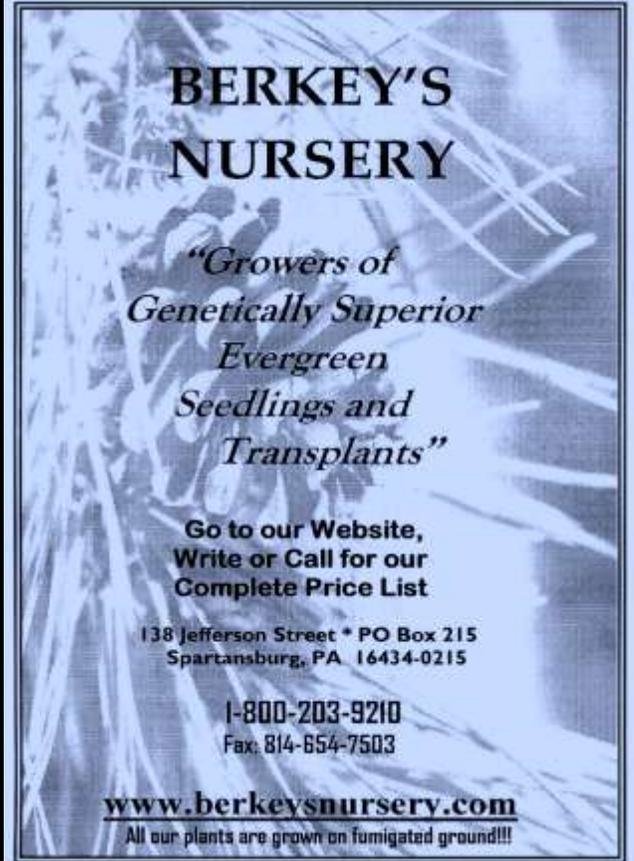
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Calendar

March	9	Conn. CTGA Meeting Middleton, CT
April	2	Ag Day at the State House, Boston, MA
April	10	MCTA Directors Meeting
June	18	Connecticut Meeting Valley Lab, Windsor CT
Meetings	TBA	MCTA Twilight
July	18-20	CT Farmers Assoc. NY Summer Meeting
August	10-11	NCTA Pre-Season



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ORGANIZATION & INDUSTRY NEWS

Christmas Tree Season 2012:

Mother Nature was very kind to wait until *after* Christmas to bless us with piles of snow and winter cold, all knowing, we needed a rest after a long season of selling. Real Christmas tree sales seemed improved from 2011. With 33 days to market, the season moved along and strained us during the peak but kept us going until the very end. In a roundtable discussion at the January MCTA board meeting, nearly attendees reported increased or about the same Christmas tree sales when compared to the prior year. Most were able to sell all that their supply allowed. According to regional wholesalers, wreaths and fresh green product sales improved greatly from 2010 and 2011. The color and quality of Balsam Fir wreaths from wholesalers this year had greatly improved from previous years. Greens look healthy from the north and east and a few early shipments of western greens showed signs of drought.

It saddens us to hear of the sudden death of John F. Ahrens on November 10, 2012. John, a long standing Weed Scientist, Emeritus, at Connecticut Experimental Station was well known for his devotion, analytical studies and enlightening presentations. As Tom Rathier put it, "John Ahrens was irreplaceable. To say we'll miss him is an understatement." Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife and family.

Thank you to Casey and Susan Vanderwalk of Vanderwalk Farm in Mendon for kicking off the holiday season on Nov. 23

with the Annual DAR Christmas tree cutting event . Greg Watson, the Commissioner of the DAR, joined local legislators, town officials and community members at the Vanderwalks' for the annual event. According to the USDA census, Massachusetts has 284 active Christmas tree farms, 3,164 acres in production, and 75,900 trees cut in a season.

Several 2012 seasonal MCTA member events include those at Smolack Farms in North

Andover. On Dec. 10th, Mike Smolack and family hosted their third annual "Trees for Troops" day. Along with BAE systems and the New England



USO, guest hosts included Senator Scott

Brown and his family; Mike Houda, the Assistant coach of the Boston Bruins; and Bruins mascot Bear "Blades". A



large number of military families were invited and attended the special day. Ayla Brown

played guitar and Christmas songs with the kids to and the many military attendees.





Master Sgt. Ryan Thane remarked that *“It goes beyond just saying “Thank you”, they really go the extra mile. For*

each family, it builds personal memories.”

Other farm celebrity events and sightings include:

Football player Rob Ninkovich and his wife went to Joe Lewicke’s at

Indian Rock Farm in Foxborough for a tree and



presented a wreath in early December. An unscheduled visit from Theo Epstein and family to the Ellsworth Tree

farm, turned out to be a nice surprise.

The winner of the MCTA Free Tree contest for 2012 was Jennifer Klopotoski, of Gloucester, MA. So, what lucky farm did she choose to cut

her coveted prize?



NATIONAL NEWS

The White House Christmas tree this year was a 19’ Fraser Fir grown by Rusty & Beau Estes of **Peak Farms** in Chesterfield, MO and been growing trees full time since 1993.

“I got goose bumps watching them lift the tree in place, knowing we planted it and grew it on



our farm,” said Rusty Estes. “It is always a special feeling watching a tree you grew, go into a house – especially this house”.

NCTA 2013 Pre-Season Clinic

Aug.10-11, 2013.

The clinic will take place at the Renaissance Arlington Capital View of Arlington, Va., and will feature educational and networking offerings, compressed into an affordable, information-packed weekend experience. From the Networking Center to the Learning Labs to the Experiential Learning to the Education Workshops, attendees will have lots of options – all focused on helping you grow your business. The clinic program will also include NCTA’s 2013 National Tree and Wreath Contests.



AG Census : The deadline was February 4, 2013. However, those who did not respond by the original due date will receive another copy of the form in the mail to give them another opportunity.

NCTA President Paul Battaglia steps down as President of the NCTA in mid-term. No replacement candidate has been found to date.

PLANT PATHS

Cultural and Pest Management Update for Christmas Tree Plantations About Armored Scale, Conifer thoughts and Root Disease Searches

By **Tom Rathier**

Emeritus Soil Scientist

Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
Valley Laboratory, P.O. Box 248, Windsor, CT 06095

For an efficient and economic way to use the systemic insecticide Safari (dinotefuran) to manage armored scales on infested trees approaching harvest size, Dr. Rich Cowles at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Stations' Valley Laboratory in Windsor suggests a basal trunk spray during the year when trees are roughly 4 to 5 feet tall. The logic of this practice is based on the knowledge that, at about that height, trees have reached the point where their root systems have attained enough volume and function to support exponential growth.

Exponential growth is when a plant increases in size each year not by doubling or tripling but by powers of 10. Many healthy plantation grown conifers can increase in total mass by as much as a thousand fold in the time it takes for that tree to grow from 4 to 5 feet to 7 feet. This knowledge is important for a lot of reasons but, for growers, none are more important than the economic, conservative use of a pesticide.

Safari works very well when introduced into a tree's vascular system through the basal bark and then moved upwards to woody and foliar tissue where piercing and sucking insects like scales that feed on sap ingest the active ingredient. The amount of systemic pesticide needed to achieve an effective concentration in the sap of any given tree

is proportional to that three's above ground volume. Since a 5 ft tree comprises a volume that is exponentially smaller than that of a 7 ft. tree, the amount of a systemic pesticide needed to achieve the proper concentration is considerably less and thus the application would be less expensive. If a population of armored scales is well managed at that stage, it's less likely that they can re-infest trees significantly enough to affect their quality at harvest time in 2 or 3 years.

Exponential growth timing is a sort of "coming of age" for conifers roughly marking the time when they've overcome the very significant challenge they begin facing on the day they are planted. Healthy, rapidly growing trees in their last few years before harvest are hardly safe from problems (drought, foliar diseases and armored scales, for instance) but Christmas tree growers can usually breathe easier at that point. It's roughly the time when they can stop worrying about whether a tree will survive those first very challenging years when trees struggle to grow roots in a soil environment that can be quite hostile.

How the other side thinks

Over the years, I've frequently thought about the great differences that exist between growers' perspectives of conifers and those of consumers. Regardless of everything else we may know about tree health, we are farmers at heart, planting a crop in the ground, caring for it, worrying about it, marketing it and , just when trees have matured to the point where they can survive on their own, we cut and sell them, making room to start the process all over again.

Most consumers, regardless of how much they may know about the species we grown and post-harvest care, are still more likely to equate conifers with the larger trees they have in their
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landscapes or what they see in parks and forests, or along highways. When they plant a conifer, it is rarely as a seedling or transplant – it is usually as a larger specimen with a more substantial root system and (hopefully) it receives the amount of irrigations necessary to prosper in its' new setting. Once established, their new conifer gets to grow for many years, hopefully to maturity.

As tree growers, we often worry so much about whether or not our trees grow fast enough or if we can get them to look great that we start believing that they are forever tender plants that need our help every step of the way. It is important that we continue to make every effort to inform our customers about the difficulties we have getting our trees to harvestable sizes and shapes, hopefully enhancing their appreciation of our efforts. It may be just as important that we understand what consumers think about conifers and reacquaint ourselves from time to time about the lives of older conifers. Over the years, I've become familiar with the details of Christmas tree growing but I started out as a consumer. I think I know a little about both sides.

While in Guilford not long ago, I drove by the house I grew up in as I do every few years. It is always interesting to see what has changed and what has stayed the same. The house is painted a different color now and an addition has been made, no doubt increasing the size of the kitchen and dining area. The simple rectangular deck I helped my Dad built in the late 1960's has been replaced with a more stylistic (and no doubt a more building code legal) one. Through all the changes over the years, it's still the same basic shape and is still recognizable from way down the street. Even so, at first glance my reaction was always the same – “what happened to the giant spruces and the not so giant Douglas fir gracing the landscape.?”

The truth about those trees is that they didn't exactly grace the landscape so much as they

occupied it. The spruces (2 Norway's by my best recollection) were planted barely 4 ft. away from the house and were likely the only survivors of a foundation planting begun long before we moved in. They were already taller than the two story house when we got there in 1960 and towered over it until 1976 when my folks sold the place. The Douglas fir was hand dug by me sometime around 1972 as a live Christmas tree and planted into a yard dominated by Black walnuts.

I understand why the spruces were taken down. Most of their limbs were gone, creating unappealing sight lines and their roots were threatening the house's stone foundation. It was more bothersome to see the Douglas fir go. It was perhaps the first sizeable landscape planting I ever made. It had plenty of room to grown but was taken down sometime in the late 1980s. It just didn't fit with one of the subsequent owner's landscape ideals. In either case, but for the constraints imposed by humans, those mature conifers would likely still be there.

Large conifers, including all of the species we grow as Christmas trees and many more, both old and not so old, are everywhere we look and yet we almost don't see them. Many of us have some in our plantations, never chosen by our customers, outliving their salability but thriving (though sometimes these “erratic” to borrow a geological terms, serve as host trees for insect and disease pests). Some are native trees in forest settings, and others are in older or mature landscapes as ornamentals and screen plants. They are widely found in parklands and similar municipal landscapes. Some are old and scraggly but most are pretty healthy. Some are even champion trees. (Check out the Connecticut Notable Tree website maintained by The Connecticut Botanical Society, The Connecticut College Arboretum and the Connecticut Urban Forest Council (notable-trees.conncoll.edu/). To look at any one of those trees, it's easy for any non-grower to think that,

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since that tree has done so well, it must be easy for us to grow lots of them, each as perfect as all the others.

Thanks to the number of trees we grow, maybe the odds Christmas tree growers face aren't so bad. In Connecticut, our principal native species – white pines and hemlocks – start on their own as young seedlings in a forest floor environment. While millions of seeds may fall to the forest floor some years, the numbers of surviving seedlings in these settings is miniscule. The odds get tougher after that because of shade and competitions for moisture. Landscape or parkland conifers usually have better survival odds because they are nursery grown and are more meticulously cared for with timely attention to their needs, especially water but their per tree costs of establishment and upkeep would never work for us. Many of Connecticut's soils and climates can support a variety of conifers, including the Christmas tree species, once the trees can get established. The difference between those settings and our farms is that, to be profitable we need to have all or most of our young trees get through the establishment and survival stage not just a few. Not every soil or climate is a great match for every species and we often have to make tough decisions about which to grown or, possibly, to change the soil/root environment.

Changing the physical environment

CCTGA members attending the Fall Field Meeting at Maple Row Tree Farm in Easton in October 2012, were able to see interesting efforts being made to improve growing conditions. Once a dairy farm, Maple Row had open fields that were used for pasture and silage crops and almost equal amount of acreage that was in very stony forests. When they a Started growing conifers, they naturally planted the land that was already open. Over the years, they discovered that certain species (mostly true firs, especially Frasers) were not

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compatible with the soils. Consequently, most of the species grown for years were spruces (mostly blue) and their dominant species, Douglas fir.

In recent years, they have been clear cutting some of the forest land, excavating the sites, burying stumps and the largest stones and reestablishing the soils on top. The “repaired soils” have proven especially useful for Douglas firs. New stands grow more uniformly and the improved surface allows for better access by tractors and other power equipment. Another prepared area has been planted to true firs – Balsam and Canaan – with good results for the most part. It's likely that Maple Row will eventually extend this practice to some of the originally cleared areas they've been planting for many years. Practices like these require lots of thought and real dedication and don't fit well with every farm.

Continued on page 12

“Trees for Troops”® 2012

along with FedEx continued to bring Christmas cheer to our troops at home and around the world. This year Trees for Troops provided 18,994, farm grown Christmas trees to military families, bringing the grand total of 122,000 trees since the inception of the program in 2005.



Greg U.L.T, CHC, USN NMCB 5. From Rota Spain writes:“ Thank you, thank you, ! The trees you sent to us were fantastic!!! It was a

huge blessing to pass the trees out to the Seabees here. We tried to forward some to Africa but, I pushed out on a DET Swing shortly after the trees arrived, so I am sorry that you haven't heard from me before this as I am just getting settled. A few of the comments I heard before leaving "I've never had a real tree before"



"They are artificial right? (wrong!)" "Amazing, where did they come from?"



Trees for Troops is an amazing organization to do this. How well the trees were packed, the ornaments and notes enclosed, it was all sooo "awesome-ing-ly"

beautiful . Again, thank you so much . It is folks like Trees for Troops and the tree farm in Indianapolis that helps us remember



what a great nation and a great people we get to serve through the U.S. Navy.

The trees were a huge hit and a monster morale boost!”



Wreaths Across America 21st Year

Nearly 200,000 volunteers across the country and overseas at 825 locations, placed 420,000 remembrance wreaths on the headstones of our nation's fallen military in celebration of National Wreaths Across America Day. At Arlington National Cemetery, 110,662 wreaths were placed by more than 20,000



volunteers, making it the largest wreath delivery to date at our nation's cemetery. This year marked the laying of the one-millionth wreath since the start of the program in 1992 by Maine businessman and wreath-maker Morrill Worcester.



Mary Byers, president of The American Gold Star Mothers, and her husband Lloyd and wounded veteran Army Sgt. Justin Lansford to



place the millionth wreath in section 60 — the newest section of the cemetery — where soldiers from the country's most recent conflicts are laid to rest.



“I am so grateful to Wreaths Across America and Morrill Worcester for giving me this great honor,” said Mary Byers, president, American Gold Star Mothers. “I lay this wreath in honor of my son, Josh, and all the soldiers who won't make it home.”



In Memoriam: John F. Ahrens



November 10, 2012

John F. Ahrens, PhD, 82, of Simsbury and formerly of Bloomfield, beloved husband of Phyllis (Carle) Ahrens, passed away shortly after

suffering a stroke, surrounded by his family.

Born in Bellmore, NY, son of the late William & Martha (Schneider) Ahrens, he was raised on Long Island and graduated from Mepham High School. He was a graduate of the Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute (Farmingdale) where he enlisted in the US Marine Corps inactive reserve.

After graduation, he worked two years in the Soil Conservation Service in Millbrook, NY where he met and dated Phyllis Carle. He was called to active duty and served a one year tour in Korea during the war, where he earned the rank of Sergeant, USMC. After returning in May of '52, he married Phyllis and they moved to Athens, GA where he received a BSA from the Univ. of Georgia.

He then earned both an MS & PhD in Plant Physiology from Iowa State University, after which he began his long career in Weed Science at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Valley Laboratory in Windsor. After retirement, he continued as a Weed Scientist, Emeritus, at the Experiment Station, as well as performing research and consulting throughout the Northeast and Canada until shortly before his death. He was a member and past president of both the National & Northeastern Weed Science Societies of America.

In addition, he owned and operated the Ahrens Tree Farm of Bloomfield, CT & West Woodbury, VT. He was an active member of the National, CT, NH/VT, & NY Christmas Tree

Growers Associations and worked vigorously to assist in the registration of new, effective protocols for weed control in Christmas trees and ornamentals. John was extremely active his whole life; he was a Cub Scout Master, a frequent blood donor, and served on the Bloomfield Inland Wetlands Commission and the Land Trust.

He loved the outdoors, and enjoyed cutting and splitting wood, deer hunting and riding his various BMW motorcycles on many trips throughout North America. He was a member of Old St. Andrew's Episcopal Church for 49 years and served as a Sunday School Teacher and a Vestryman and took an active part in their many fairs. He leaves Phyllis, his beloved wife of 60 years, four sons: nine grandchildren: Besides his parents, he was predeceased by his brother, William (Bill). He was buried at Old St. Andrew's Cemetery with military honors. Contributions may be made to either Old St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 59 Tariffville Rd., Bloomfield, CT 06002 or the American Heart Association, 1 Union St., Suite 301, Robbinsville, NJ 08691.

A rectangular advertisement for Farm Family Life Insurance Company. The logo features a stylized 'FF' symbol to the left of the text 'Farm Family'. Below the logo, it reads 'Life Insurance Company' and 'Casualty Insurance Company' with 'Simsbury, VT' in smaller text. The name 'Martin West' is prominently displayed in a large, bold font, followed by the phone number '(508) 365-8819' and the email address 'martin_west@farm-family.com'. At the bottom, it lists services: 'Life & Annuities | Ag & Commercial | Property & Casualty'. The entire advertisement is enclosed in a double-line border.

Succession & Transition Management

Part I: How do you pass on your business and land resources to your heirs without creating a war zone?

Today, 95% of small landowners are 65 or older making family succession planning all the more critical. "Based on the average age of farmers and ranchers right now, the next decade is going to see a huge transfer of land resources to the next generation," says project coordinator, Cheryl Williams-Cosner. "Passing property from one generation to the next can be an emotional experience."

There is something that happens as you work with a piece of ground over time. You get emotionally attached to it. You invest part of your hopes and dreams for the future in it. It becomes more than just numbers on paper.

Do you wonder if your children are interested in keeping your Tree Farm? Do they share your love for your property? Do they get along and communicate with each other? These questions are not new, but they take on a special urgency as we look to the future of higher estate taxes, an expansion of laws and regulations that will affect the next generation.

Non-monetary values associated with the property are very real, and if they are not discussed and recognized by the family, the family will not be successful keeping the property in the family.

The issue of family business generational transition is a major topic of discussion as farm businesses position themselves for success. Growth is the primary reason why businesses fail,



and this is because of under-capitalization, inadequate preparation in human relations and communications, and insufficient income

generation. Sixty percent of all farm and small businesses that enter bankruptcy were profitable

in previous years. The following ten rules are generally used in successful business transitions.



Ten Rules of Transition Management

Rule 1: Revenue/Net Income

Bringing in a new partner takes an estimated \$150,000 to \$250,000 in gross revenue, or \$40,000 to \$70,000 of net profit for a successful business transition. Violate this rule and you set yourself up for guerilla warfare, where family members or partners fight over scarce resources (including net income) to meet their standard of living.

Rule 2: Three-to-Five-Year Rule

Agricultural business transitions are twice as likely to be successful when the family member or potential business partner works for someone else for three to five years. Allow them to make mistakes with someone else's money! A recent study found that the farm businesses that allowed entering partners to work for others for three to five years found their business to be four times more profitable. A college education is not part of this experience; however, military and summer work experiences are part of the experience base.

Rule 3: Six-Year Rule

If a new partner is brought into the business, make sure you allow him/her to move into management and decision-making within six years. Farms and businesses that fail to do so are twice as likely to have an unsuccessful business transition and are less profitable. This past winter in a seminar in Wytheville, an 85-year-old gentleman, after the seminar, indicated that he needed to turn the books over to his boy.

Continued on page 11

Well, his boy was 65 years old! The old adage is you either teach or share with the younger generation, or you destroy the business.

Rule 4: Ripple Effect:

When making changes to a growing business, you should over-estimate capital needs by at least 25 percent to avoid being short on working capital due to unexpected costs. For example, if you need \$200,000 to expand the business, then \$250,000 should be estimated and used to determine whether or not the growth is financially feasible. It is also wise to over-estimate the time needed to complete the change by 25 percent.

Rule 5: Don Shula Rule

Many managers and owners stay too long before turning over the business. The optimal time for ownership and management of a business is 30 to 35 years. Owners and managers who fail to heed this rule run into the trap of continuing to do "business as usual" without changing for the times. In order for managers to maintain the cutting edge, they must either follow this rule or surround themselves with new members who will bring renewed energy and new resources into the business.

Rule 6: You Can't Treat All Children Equally, But You Can Treat Them Fairly and Equitably

One of the most profound challenges in estate planning and transition management for farm businesses today is what to do with children who move away from the business. Usually, they have little interest in the operation. When the parents die, the business interests of the children who have moved intensify because proceeds from the estate can be used to pay off mortgages or fund their children's college educations. The most successful transition plans have the business assets transferred to the child managing the business, and insurance policies to cover estate settlement costs and cash settlements for children who are not interested in the business. This strategy allows the children involved with



the farm to continue to function without requiring them to buy out the non-farm children's shares, and also have sufficient cash to pay estate settlement taxes. This strategy is simple and objective.

Rule 7: Non-Business Spouse

An increasing challenge in businesses is incorporating the non-business spouse into the family and business management process. Many more families are finding this incorporation a challenge because there are more non-business or non-agricultural spouses, and that these spouses frequently do not understand erratic business schedules, time management, and prioritization problems that can occur. An operations agreement including time expectations, goals, responsibilities, and accountably can resolve many of these issues.

Rule 8: Getting Out of Business

A plan that covers dissolution of the business is critical in establishing a family business transition. Included in such a plan is an operations agreement, a buy/sell agreement, and a time line for an orderly transition. Partners who are not willing to discuss these issues often find that getting out of business is more difficult than getting into business.

Rule 9: Transition Team

All businesses need to have a list of advisors or a transition team. This team includes a lender, a lawyer, an accountant, a financial planner, both spouses, and all partners. Annual team meetings with all members present are critical. Outside professionals need to be placed on retainer rather than on an hourly fee structure.

Rule 10: The Nike Principle

Just do it! The biggest concern with family business transition plans is procrastination. Day-to-day matters frequently take priority over the planning process. A transition plan often takes two to three years to formulate, and must be updated at least twice a decade.

Part II Succession & Transition page 14

Cultural and Pest Management continued

They can be expensive and time consuming. But Maple Row is in Fairfield County where the choose and cut market is exceptionally strong and competitive. Finding ways to produce large quantities of uniformly quality trees is a way to really stand out and their success has justified their effort.

The alternatives to making large scale site alterations aren't terrible they are just more limiting with regard to what species can or can't be grown in the soil environment at hand. Each grower can assess all of the physical details of their farm (soils, terrain, directional exposure, and logistical accessibilities) along with their personal capabilities (available time and resources, knowledge of conifer growth) to decide on the level of investment best fits their situation.

Spray strategies that maximize coverage

Another vital production strategy we saw at Maple Row Farm was their method for achieving

uniform, effective spray coverage to trees of all sizes.

Since Maple Row grows large number of Douglas firs (mostly Lincoln cultivars) it is necessary that they stay ahead of foliar diseases, especially the needle casts. In recent years, they have acquired a hydraulic spray rig with a boom extends out over the several rows with weighted hoses that extend down between rows, each with a spray nozzle (drop nozzles is the standard term used for this equipment).

With a nozzle between each row, hydraulic sprays can be applied efficiently and uniformly, regardless of tree height. They have had great results using this spray technique to manage Rhizosphaera needle cast. They also report that starting their first spray earlier than they have done in the past has allowed for better management in the early going. Drs Sharon Douglas and Yonghao Li have been telling us for many years, that the key to managing foliar diseases in conifers is to start early and maximize spray coverage. *continued on page 13*

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It looks like Maple Row Farm has found the right combination of both.

Back to scale insect management

At Maple Row, we also saw a spray rig they have modified to slide under the lowest branches and guided by a sensor switch, apply a directed spray only to the basal area of each trunk as the rig passes up a row. Thanks to the sensor, the loss of pesticide product to non-target areas is minimized, greatly improving efficiency and keeping costs down.

Searching for root diseases

As the CCTGA/CAES tree improvement project readies for the next phase of new cultivar evaluations, the search for root diseases that play a role in tree health continues. Over the past 2 years, Dr. Yonghoa and I have visited numerous farms evaluating trees, looking especially for those that are in early stages of decline and digging them up to bring them back to the lab to identify and possible culture disease organisms. Our plan is to eventually have enough cultures to inoculate some trees in each of the evaluated cultivars but, as yet, we have not isolated very much from the hundreds of samples we've obtained. It's possible that because they are intolerant of our climate or/soil environments and that would be a good thing to find out. For the time being, we will continue to look for diseases. If you have trees on your plantation that are still alive but have declined somewhat (usually a moderate color change in their overall appearance or a change in their ordinary look from "shiny to dull") please let me know and we'll set up a visit to get some samples.



Tibits

Labor Troubles

Reprinted from NH-VT CTA "TreeLine" Sept. 2012

An article in the *Bangor Daily News*, Aug. 13 2012, caught attention because it involves a longtime friend and supporter of the Christmas tree industry in the Northeast and an issue facing many farms these days: finding good workers.

The article describes the crusade of a Maine state senator to investigate Kelco Industries for employing legally documented workers from Jamaica.

"Kelco Industries owner Doug Kell Sr. freely admits to hiring four Jamaican workers at his farm in St. Francis and said he was forced to do so after local employees proved consistently unreliable," the article explains, quoting Kell as stating: "Last year, I had 20 workers up there and they did not begin to put in the hours that 10 workers are doing now, What we have are young people that really do not want to work." In the article, Kell praises the work of many of his longtime employees but said that for years now he's had problems finding enough motivated workers from the local community.

The article reports that the state senator began investigating "after receiving calls from several constituents reporting they had been laid off from Kelco and replaced by foreign workers." Kell said he welcomes a meeting with the Dept. of Labor, stating: "I have all the paperwork for them to look at. This is the first time I'd ever really sat down and compared employee performance year to year and I'll show them that.

Succession & Transition Management

Part II: Consider the “Family Issues” in Farm Ownership Succession

Unless carefully planned, the transfer of family farm ownership to the next generation, especially if the farm has been in the family for several generations, can result in considerable emotional stress among the family members involved. There are many “family issues” which confront farm families in working through this transition. Nevertheless, they must be addressed to prevent disturbing the farm’s operation with legal fights. These ownership issues must be discussed by all family members involved and resolved to everyone’s agreement for a successful transfer of ownership to the next generation as well as avoiding the personal conflicts and family feuds that often arise.

Role of the Dad Issue:

One issue is the fact that Dad is wearing two hats in the farm operation, Boss Hat and Father Hat. When wearing the Boss Hat, Dad is in charge by use of authoritative power. In this role he supervises the adult children as farm employees. When wearing the Father Hat, Dad tends to listen and have a better understanding his adult children’s concerns. This presents a difficult task since Dad must know when and how long to be wearing which hat. The adult children must also make the distinction between the Boss and Father roles that Dad plays in the farm business. Dad needs to compliment that farming adult child and give praise when he or she does a good job. If he criticizes by continuously pointing out mistakes, a negative family working environment soon develops. Dad must treat a farming son/

daughter as an adult person capable of making decisions and providing worthwhile ideas. If Dad only wears his Boss Hat, the adult child may feel that he or she is only hired help with no opportunity for any management input and soon lose interest in the farm and leave.

The Issue of Mom Outliving Dad:

Another related issue is that fact that Mom may outlive Dad. What if Dad dies unexpectedly before retirement? Will Mom operate the farm as if Dad were still living or will she start making the changes she always wanted but Dad would not allow? Some moms might rent out the farm to a neighbor while other moms would probably sell the farm within a relatively short period of time. How does the farming son or daughter fit into this situation? Will Mom turn over full control to them and let them make the farming decisions? Things can become very complicated if Mom remarries and there is a step-father to contend with. Also consider the fact that some mothers rather than fathers wear the Boss Hat in the family.

The “Who is Family” Issue:

Who are considered the “real family members” in the farm family business? Are only the “blood related” family members included in financial business decisions? Do they alone have management authority? Do in-laws even have the chance for farm ownership? Are the in-laws treated or even considered as “family” in the farm business? Do the in-laws involved in the farming operation actually have a voice in business matters? Are they allowed to make management decisions? If the in-laws are kept in the dark about the farm and are excluded from business discussions, relationships of trust between family members quickly fail. This can lead to suspicions and a lack of respect for others.

The Issue of Controlling Parents:

Many parents actually raise their children to be followers. Children are often expected to do what the parents expect and want. “Work hard and do exactly what you are told, but DO NOT ask any questions” is often the standard rule in some *Succession continued on page 15*

families. Now parents cannot understand why their adult children have no drive or ambition.

What is the behavior expected by the parents for the adult children working in the farming business? Do the parents want these children to be puppets or independent thinking adults with their own ideas? Is it the parents' dream for the children to return back home to the family farm or is it the children's dream to farm with Mom and Dad?

Children should never feel obligated to return back to the farm when their career interests or dreams lie elsewhere. The other side of this issue concerns parents who want to help their adult children have a better standard of living. These parents may help their adult children buy their first home or pay for a needed vacation. This may be done with "strings attached," with Mom and Dad expecting something in return for the favor or gift they have provided.

Transfer of Ownership Issue:

Who will end up owning the farming operation when the parents retire? Will the parents still retain total ownership after retirement while the farming children keep doing all the work? Which children will have the chance to gain actual ownership? When will this happen or do the parents plan to retain total ownership until their death? What entitlements do the farm children actually have in the business? Have parents already made promises to any of the children? Will the parents honor these promises or have the parents changed their mind without telling anyone?

Non-Farming Children Issue:

The most sensitive issue in succession planning is where non-farming children come into play when passing on farm ownership. This issue is hard to

discuss because parents often have favorites among their children.

In order to avoid the problems of sibling jealousy and resulting grudges, parents must block out their personal feelings of favoritism and devise an estate plan that is fair and equitable to all children and that allows for the farm business to continue.

This will require much thought, many hours of discussion by the parents and children together and, if needed, seeking out professional help. Farm family operations are the most difficult to handle in terms of fairness among all the children since some children worked harder than others and may have contributed more to the parents' farming operation. Also remember that some children care more about the farm while others are only interested how much money they may receive from the parents' farm estate.

How to Be Fair With Off-Farm Heirs

One of the most difficult questions many retiring farm families face is how to get a young son or daughter started farming while being fair to the off-farm, non-farming heirs. To get a young person started farming in today's economy usually takes a great deal of parental help. This help is usually provided through bargain charges for housing, machine and land rents, interest rates, gifting of assets, supplements, and various other types of help. Unless the young person starts out with a handsome nest egg, parental concessions are needed to get the young farmer successfully started.

Non-farming heirs often leave the farm in their late teens for careers elsewhere. Most parents are concerned with being fair to all of their children at estate settlement time. Fairness, however, may not mean equal treatment of heirs.

continued on page 16



Succession continued from page 15

Reasons farmers give for unequal treatment to heirs

- Off-farm children received a college education, a down payment on a house, or other compensation, so may get less at estate settlement time.
- The farming heir helped create part of the final estate of the parents by actively contributing to the parents' business over the years, so may be entitled to more.
- Parents want the farm to "stay in the family." Consequently they are willing to give more to the heir whose goal is to stay on the farm.
- Farming heirs are getting delayed compensation for work performed in years when they were underpaid.
- Farming heirs may attend to the physical and business needs of the parents in their declining years. Non-farm heirs may not be there to help.

Methods farmers have used to transfer assets unequally but, in their minds, fairly:

- They have made gifts of various items to farming heirs to get them started farming. For example, livestock, machinery, tools, buildings, house use etc.
- Some parents have sold assets at bargain prices and terms to farming heirs during their lifetime.
- Some parents have paid a fair wage to children and those wages have been used to purchase assets from parents.
- Parents have written buy/sell agreements with farming children, committing to exact sale prices, terms, and timing of payments on farm properties.



Succession continued on page 17

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Succession continued from page 16

These agreements are binding on off-farm heirs and provide the farm heirs a guarantee that they can buy property at an acceptable pace and price.

- Farming heirs can purchase life insurance for parents with funds gifted from parents. This money is then used to pay insurance premiums. This method provides money to buy out off farm heirs at the time of the parents' death.

- Life insurance can be purchased by the parents, and make the off-farm heirs the beneficiaries. In these cases, farm heirs get farm assets and off farm heirs get the cash generated by the insurance.

Some parents have established a living or testamentary trust. It establishes that the farm heirs have the right to purchase farm assets at predetermined prices, terms, and conditions from the trust over a number of years. The parents' will can be used to equalize previous

distributions to heirs. The will may make special provisions to fit the situation.

If the farming heir or any heir has received earlier compensation, they may now get less than other heirs. Off-farm heirs may be willed cash, non-farm assets or remote land holdings, while "base operation" farm assets are willed to farm heirs.

Farming heirs may be given greater consideration for contributions made to parents over the years.

Ironically, most parents try to avoid this very issue. There are just too many personal emotions involved. Some parents just assume that their children will work it out later by themselves. This only results bitterness and feuding that can split a family apart for future generations.

Succession & Transition continued page 20

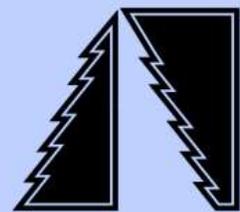


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M.C.T.A MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

January 9, 2013

Chicopee, MA: President Rob Leab, V.P. Dan Pierce, Joe Meichelbeck, Tom Cranston, Seth Cranston, Greg Davagian, Scott Dwinell, Larry Flaccus, Joyce Leidl, Susan Lopes, Dave Morin, Dave Radabaugh, John Coward, Rick LeBlanc, Cynthia Cranston, Dan Leidl, Peter Sweet and Jim Colburn.

The minutes of the November 2012 meeting were approved as printed.

Treasurer Report- Joe Meichelbeck, distributed copies and reported on YTD spending and budget projections for the year. There is a small deficit anticipated, primarily the result of a decrease in membership dues. The budget was based on 131 members. Our cash balance will remain in the range of \$38K. A contribution was made to the Connecticut Research Station in Dr. John Ahrens memory.

Membership - Secretary, Jim Colburn, reported that to date we have 121 members. That represents 2 new members. The "Grower's Manual" is no longer in print and we have one copy remaining for distribution to new members. The Board asked the Secretary to look into photocopying or obtaining electronic copies of the popular book.

Dept. of Ag Resources: Representative Rick LeBlanc reported good attendance and press coverage for the annual tree cutting ceremony by Commissioner Gregory Watson Thanksgiving weekend. There are a number of upcoming conferences and meetings this winter, such as the first conference in New England addressing urban farming. Information is available on the updated Mass Ag website. Rick noted the Massachusetts Agriculture calendar had record sales and he thanked us again for our sponsorship. The USDA census surveys have been mailed and all Christmas tree farmers should have received one. Federal funding and other programs are based on this data and Rick encouraged all to complete and submit either the paper or online version. Dave Morin agreed to send an email reminder to the general membership.

NECTA: John Coward reported the next NECTA meeting is scheduled for the end of February.

Marketing - The Christmas tree giveaway was a success. Total entries to be announced. There was no information as to where the certificate was redeemed. After discussion, there remained some doubt as to the value of the names and addresses obtained through the drawing and there are no plans to use the data for marketing purposes at this time.

Nominating - There will be an opening for one new Board member next year.

Meetings - We have one commitment for a June twilight meeting. At the April Board meeting we will set the remaining twilight meetings and agree on the date and place of the annual meeting.

New Business – Cynthia Cranston discussed the Association's website and asked permission to make changes to keep the site current and relevant. The Board acknowledged and supports Cynthia's efforts.

Ag Day at the Statehouse is scheduled for April 2, 2013. A motion was made, seconded and approved by vote to spend \$40 for the table registration fee. Dave Butt and Jim Colburn will represent the Association.

Old Business – Seth Cranston reported that two sets of lights, enough for a ten foot tree have been purchased for \$60 and will be available to decorate the tree at the "Big E."

"Shearings" : The hard copy will continue for now. The future of "Shearings On-Line" include color, more photo's, resource links and extended articles.

*Meeting notes respectfully submitted by Jim Colburn,
Secretary MCTA*

When it comes to being fair with all heirs, it is a good practice to involve everyone in the transfer process and to communicate to all heirs the final plans for distribution and transfer of assets.

This communication should be done prior to your death so farming heirs are not left in an embarrassing position of trying to explain your actions.

Issue of a Fair Selling Price:

If the parents decide to sell part or all of the farm to any of their children, what is a “fair selling price” for the farm property. This is particularly crucial to the adult children farming with them who have invested a lot of sweat equity into the operation already. The largest share of the parents’ financial investment for retirement is tied up in the farming operation. Nearly all of their assets are farm related.



If the parents decide to sell the farm for “top

market dollar”, could a farming son/daughter ever afford that selling price? It could mean taking on a substantial amount of debt that they will never be able to repay during their lifetime.

Yet on the other side of this issue, the parents cannot afford to just give their farm away or sell at the lowest bargain price. Parents can expect to live a longer retirement and will need a secure financial future for the many years ahead.

Working out a fair selling price that provides the parents with a secure financial retirement but at a price that the children can afford is certainly no easy matter.

These adult children must begin to gain ownership of farm assets now and to build their own net worth. That way these children are in a position to borrow the necessary loan funds from a lender to finance the purchase of the home farm if the parents decide or are forced to sell.

In Summary:

It important to have a strategic plan for ownership succession in place for the next generation. These sticky and emotional issues need to be discussed among family members since avoiding these issues can have disastrous consequences later. Parents must have a clear vision of the future of their family farm business and then be willing to discuss their ideas with the children who plan to return back home.

Resources:

David M. Kohl, Alex White, Dixie Reaves, and Amanda Wilson, Farm Management Update, June 1996 Virginia Cooperative Extension “Ten Rules of Transition Management”

“Transferring the Farm Series: #9” Dr. Hanson ©1998 Regents of the University of Minnesota . Dr. Hanson is a professor of Farm Management and Agricultural Finance in the Department of Agriculture Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

“Protecting the On-Farm Heirs” Erlin J. Weness, University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1994//agecon.uwo.edu/Risk Mgt/ Financial Risks

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TAX TALK

Federal 2013 Tax Changes to Date:

Payroll taxes will revert to 6.2 percent. A 2 % hike means if you earn \$50,000 will pay an additional \$1,000 in payroll taxes this year, or about \$83 per month.

Estate/ Death Tax : Federal estate tax exemption, lifetime gift tax exemption and generation skipping transfer tax exemption has been indexed for inflation. The tax rate for all the above for estates valued over \$5.25 million (\$5.12 in 2012) has increased from 35% in 2012 to 40% in 2013. These unified exemptions will continue to be indexed for inflation in 2014 and later years.

"Portability" of the federal estate tax exemption between married couples has become permanent. ATRA makes portability of the estate tax exemption between married couples permanent

for 2013 and beyond, which means that in 2013 a married couple can pass on \$10.5 million to their heirs free from federal estate taxes with absolutely no planning at all. Note, however, that even if the deceased spouse's estate will not be taxable (in other words, is valued less than \$5.25 million), the surviving spouse will nonetheless be required to file IRS Form 706, *United States United States Estate (and Generation-Skipping Transfer) Tax Return*, in order to take advantage of the deceased spouse's unused estate tax exemption, otherwise the deceased spouse's exemption will be lost.



The "pick up tax" was not resurrected. In 2005 the "pick up tax" was phased out under federal law. The pickup tax was a state estate tax that was equal to a portion of the federal estate tax bill and was

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collected by state taxing authorities. If the estate tax laws were allowed to revert back to the laws that were in effect in 2001, then the pickup tax would have suddenly reappeared in 2013, which would have meant that states such as California, Florida and Texas would have once again collected a state estate tax in the form of a pickup tax.

Unfortunately for states without a freestanding estate tax, ATRA did not resurrect the pickup tax, so it continues to remain dormant and will not reappear any time soon. Refer to the State Estate Tax and Exemption Chart for the list of states which currently have a freestanding estate tax.

Special planning will be required for state estate taxes in some states. To date, none of the states that have enacted a freestanding state estate tax have made the state estate tax exemption portable between married couples. This means that in states where there is a difference between the state estate tax exemption and federal estate tax exemption (such as in Maine, where the 2013 estate tax exemption is only \$2 million, which leaves a \$3.25 million gap between the state and federal exemptions), married couples will need to include special planning in their estate planning documents in order to take advantage of both spouses' state estate tax exemptions. Refer to the State Estate Tax and Exemption Chart for the list of states which currently have a freestanding estate tax.

Special planning will be required for generation skipping trusts. Estate tax exemption has not been made for the generation skipping transfer. This means that in order for married couples to take advantage of both spouses' generation skipping transfer tax exemptions, special planning will be required in married couples' estate planning documents.

*Resources: IRS.gov: 2013 Death tax changes "Wills & Estate Planning" by Julie Garber
Massachusetts Tax Reform: mass.gov/Boston AP/Globe.com, Jan. 16,2013*

Massachusetts 2013 Tax Proposals

Governor Deval Patrick proposed a bold plan to raise an estimated \$1.9 billion to pay for future investments in infrastructure, transportation, education and technology.

The proposal plans includes an increase in the state's 5.25 percent income tax to 6.25 percent while slashing the sales tax rate from 6.25 percent to 4.5 percent.

Other items include a tax of 6.25% tax on soda and candy. As well 50 cent tax increase on cigarettes totaling \$3.01 tax per pack. Other items for consideration are expanding bottle bill to include any drink in a plastic.(five cent deposit) The governor said he wanted to eliminate 45 individual tax deductions, and there is a good chance that at least some of those are considered highly valuable to Massachusetts citizens. Some include the tuition and charitable contribution deductions.

The state income tax wouldn't apply to the first \$8,800, up from \$4,400. To help those low-income earners and the impact on the highest earners.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Massachusetts is \$65,981. Assuming there are two earners contributing to such a household figure and both work in the Bay State, their total state income tax contribution would grow to about \$1,400 a year compared to \$1,176- an increase of approximately \$483 dollars when not taking the 45 income tax deductions proposed for elimination into account.

Additional expansion include Motel/hotel excise tax to the full cost of a room, including the markup from internet resellers. Change the calculation for corporate taxes so that Massachusetts companies that sell products out-of-state . Change the tax treatment for subsidiaries of insurance companies that do not perform insurance-related business Make new investments in technology to better identify and collect uncollected and underreported taxes and expected to generate \$260 million in new revenue for fiscal year 2013.

Phosphites and Their Potential

*By Bob White: Reprinted from NH-VT Tree-Line
September 2012*

Many of us experience trouble getting transplants started, especially if we are on the 2nd or 3rd rotations regardless of our farm practices. Just looking at the farms we have visited for recent meetings: A couple had serious root aphids; one had a major flood; we all had drought; root rots and wet soils can be found somewhere on most farms; the list goes on.

I've found that root aphids have been pretty easy to control following the guidance of Dr. Richard Cowles (who spoke at our summer 2012 meeting). Floods and drought create some challenges: new plants often die from these events, which like Larry Kuhns (who spoke at our winter 2012 meeting) told us: Death isn't the worst thing that can happen. The worst is if the plant survives but never thrives, and this is often the case with wet soil root issues.

Based on Dr. Cowles' initial research results I started looking at phosphates. At this point I am not aware of any evidence that this material works magic in Christmas tree production. It's possible it may drive cone issues, etc., that will only be seen over time.

That said, a root dip on transplants in 2012 with a phosphite and either Imidacloprid or Bifenthen appears to show some promise. Canaan fir plants were very healthy, and put on the same deep green color in this year's new foliage as they did coming from the nursery. Dr. Cowles advised that we should be looking at phosphites but should go slowly as we do not understand them at all yet.

I visited a large vegetable operation that applies foliar phosphite weekly and claims it is pure magic: their harvest increases drastically after each weekly foliar application. Their cost is 10 dollars per acre weekly for the product they used (Rampart). They spray 250 acres every week once the seed is planted.

As we understand it the chemical translocates inside a plant changing the defense properties of a plant, making it able to withstand root rots and other issues.

The vegetable guys believe it does far more than that when applied weekly.

The same phosphite is sold as a fungicide or a fertilizer, with different labels and costs, some are sold with nitrogen added, etc. Currently we have small trials going looking at improving fall color comparing the following fall treatments:

- A. Foliar Phosphite
- B. Foliar slow release Nitrogen
- C. Ground applied Nitrogen
- D. Ground applied N P K
- E. Ground applied K Mag
- F. Ground applied P K (This combo worked magic in Sept. 2011 for needle yellowing.)

For 2013 I plan to root dip all my transplants, and then foliar spray 1 block with Phosphite to compare with other foliar applications. I am told If we foliar this material, do plant changing the defense properties of a plant, making it able to withstand root rots and other issues. The vegetable guys believe it does far more than that when applied weekly. The same phosphite is sold as a fungicide or a fertilizer, with different labels and costs, some are sold with nitrogen added, etc.

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- E. Ground applied K Mag
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Other Publications & Resources

“Branching Out” : Cornell University IPM Newsletter Paper & on-line version available

Cost of *Branching Out* is \$50 for the 2013 season

Cornell University “Branching Out

Department of Plant Pathology

Cornell University

PO Box 6699

Ithaca, NY 14851

email to: ddo1@cornell.edu

Cornell Pest Management Guide: to order

[Http://psep.cce.cornell.edu/store/guidelines/](http://psep.cce.cornell.edu/store/guidelines/)

“Fraser Fir Pest Portal” (new from NC Cooperative Ext)

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/fletcher/programs/xmas/Control/index.html>

Integrated Pest Management for Christmas Tree Production:

(Penn State College of Ag Sciences)

http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/orders_CAS.asp

Southern New England Growers Manual

<http://store.uconn.edu/available-downloads/cooperative-extension-publications/> click on: “Production agriculture”

Submission Deadlines

- Jan. 15 (February Issue)
- April 15 (May Issue)
- July 15 (August Issue)
- Oct. 15 (November Issue)

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Landscape & Nursery Insects:

Bob Childs, (413) 545-1053,

rchilds@psis.umass.edu

Landscape & Nursery Diseases:

Dan Gillman, (413) 545-3208,

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