



# NJCTGA News

Spring 2019

## President's Message



Chris Nicholson

Winter is over and spring has finally arrived. I hope this finds you all in good health and that everyone's farm has withstood the winds and snows of this winter. As we approach the spring planting season I can only cross my fingers that this season brings us some better weather than we had last year. The rain seemed to never end last year, and as I sit at my desk and write this President's message I am looking out the window at, you guessed it, rain. We will endure, we are farmers and we always endure no matter the circumstance.

Tim Dunne has thrown his hat in the ring once again and offered to take over this newsletter from Anne Edwards. Anne served many years as President, continues to serve as a board member. Thank you Anne for your years of dedicated service to our membership and our industry. As for Tim, he does great work on behalf of the association and is also a very dedicated member. If you happen to run into either one of them a thank you goes a long way for a volunteer.

If you missed our winter meeting you missed one of the best meetings we ever had. Attendance was fantastic, over 100 guests! The highlight was the return of our wreath contest. This contest had been in hiatus for many years until John Wyckoff took the initiative to bring it back. It was so nice to see nearly thirty entries lining the tables. Congratulations to the winners and make sure you bring a wreath next year.

Our twilight and summer meeting have been planned and I hope to see you at them. Lots of work goes into them and as you know these meetings are a great way to see other members and compare notes.

*continued on page 4*

## Planting Turkish Firs? Proceed with Caution

Turkish firs work in some soils, but they won't be a perfect fit for every site.

Reprinted from *America Agriculturalist*

Phytophthora root rot poses a significant financial threat to the Christmas tree industry in New York state. According to 2012 data, New York state had nearly 19,000 acres planted across 1,185 farms, making it the sixth-largest Christmas tree producer in the nation.

In 2015, Phytophthora's advance against the popular Fraser fir prompted an evaluation of the Mediterranean Turkish fir as a less-susceptible alternative.

The Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York estimates that, if Turkish fir could be successfully grown in New York state, the annual revenue potential for a 15,000-tree farm with 30% Turkish fir could be \$263,000. The trees are thought to be especially suited for use on underutilized acres with heavy, wet soil.

With a New York Farm Viability Institute grant, Russell D. Briggs, director of the Division of Environmental Science at the College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry in Syracuse, worked with Travis



*Travis Drexler of Springside Farm participated in the Turkish fir study and stands in a field of Turkish fir on his farm.*

Drexler of Springside Farm in Fabius and eight other growers to evaluate Turkish fir, as little research had been done previously to assess its true potential.

"We need research to help us manage the challenges of disease, pests and tree loss," Drexler says.

*continued on page 2*

## Did you pay your NJCTGA dues for 2019?

The NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association dues are payable in January each year. You should have received a dues notice in a January mailing with information about the annual winter meeting. Executive Secretary Donna Cole will keep you as an active member well beyond the January due date. You will continue to receive important email messages and newsletters. We do hope you send in your dues in a timely manner.

**Remember, in order to be listed in the annual Choose & Cut sales guide (both print and on-line) this fall, you will need to be a member in good standing with 2019 dues paid in full.**

A 2019 membership application is on page 7. Thank you!

## Planting Turkish Firs *continued from page 1*

In 2015, he set aside land for an experimental planting of 100 Turkish firs.

"It was logical to try Turkish fir because it is less prone to Phytophthora. A mature Turkish fir can be a beautiful tree with the soft, high-quality foliage that consumers want," he says.

The trial compared the survival of the Turkish fir vs. Fraser fir on different soil types in different regions of the state, and in plots designed to fit individual farm management protocols.

"We planted this trial on nice ground because if a tree won't grow on your best ground, it won't grow on your worst," he says. "We want whatever we plant to have the best opportunity to return per acre."

After three years of research, Springside Farm had the best survival rate of both species. Ninety-five percent of the Frasers remained while 83% of the Turkish firs remained but were much shorter.

"Turkish fir is naturally slow growing, however, the national demand to try it put us at a greater disadvantage. The stock we received was very small and arrived a little past our usual planting time. The Frasers were twice the height at planting," Drexler says.

Briggs and his research team managed fertilization of the plots.

"The use of slow-release nitrogen did not produce any significant differences. Foliage sampling for tissue N was consistently higher with the Turkish firs, but varied by farm," Briggs says.

While one farm pulled the Turkish firs to replace with a proven species, Drexler is letting his grow.

"It would be unfair to attribute loss just to the variety. A number of factors influenced this trial. I will extend evaluation until the trees reach a cutting height, so we are leaving the planting in," he says.

Drexler also has a Plan B.

"The fluffy needles that make the Turkish firs sell as trees also make great wreaths, which return a higher value per tree," he says. "Opportunities like this Turkish fir project are important to the tree

industry. By committing not even a half-acre to the research trials to learn that a variety may not work as well as hoped represents a potentially significant financial savings had we jumped in with a large planting based on the thought that this was next great hope for our industry."

John Fowler was hoping Turkish fir would grow well in trouble spots at his Grace Farms in Central Square. He interplanted Turkish firs in harvested openings among his mature trees. "We have replaced half-a-dozen Frasers every year for several years and have tried several different species on our downsloping land on poorer ground," Fowler says.

Although the farm's Turkish firs grew to the largest diameter in the trial and had the second-highest survival rate vs. Frasers, they did not do well enough to join the farm's cropping plan.

"This trial was worthwhile for what we gained from Russ Briggs' experience and expertise, learning what we can do to grow the farm into the future," Fowler says. "We need hardy trees that can handle extreme changes from wet to drought years, flooding to heavy snow.

"We will not plant any more Turkish firs, but we now know more about caring for the species we are focused on, including Fraser, Canaan and concolor. We needed this science-based evaluation to know which direction is best for us, and it shows the people who prefer real trees that as growers we are working closely with researchers to supply customers' needs as growing conditions change."

The poorest survival and growth for Turkish fir occurred on sites characterized by relatively high soil pH and high extractable phosphorus, which results in small height and diameter.

Project collaborators included Cornell University, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Penn State University.

## Welcome New Members!

### Peter Tomasini

Evergreen Acres, Branchville, Sussex County  
(formerly owned and operated by Howard Worts)

### Ed Fox

Port Norris, Cumberland County  
(farm not yet named)

## *In Memoriam*

### **Harold Kilbride passed on August 24, 2018**

Woodfield Christmas Tree Plantation  
Colts Neck, Monmouth County

### **Sam Akin passed on December 24, 2018**

Fairview Farm  
Long Valley, Morris County



Published by the New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association

**njchristmastrees.org**

Contact Donna Cole, Exec. Secretary, at (908) 735-4658 or email [execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org](mailto:execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org)

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# Grower's Spotlight:

## COLE'S COUNTRY TREE FARM

### Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County

By: Tim Dunne



Tim Dunne

Christmas trees have been growing at Cole's Country Tree Farm in Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County since 1982. After more than 35 years, the scenic farm in the hills of Hunterdon County still provides beautiful fir, spruce and pine trees to customers near and far. The 40 acre farm has about 8-10 acres of Christmas trees, woodlands, several hay fields and pasture for the farm beef animals. The farm was awarded the River Friendly Farm designation several years ago. Donna Cole and her son Drew gave me a tour of the well-maintained farm on a sunny day in March.

Drew explained that the farm primarily grows Douglas fir, Norway spruce, Colorado blue spruce and white pine. Canaan fir and concolor fir have been grown previously but problems with white-tailed deer have led them to stop growing many of these true firs. The Coles plant about 800 new transplants every year and Drew emphasized that new growers must plant every year. "If you miss planting one year you will probably regret it down the line," Drew explained.



Donna Cole and son Drew in a beautiful field of Norway spruce at Cole's Country View Farm.



Nicely sheared Douglas firs next to farm lane lined with mature white pines.

Donna Cole reported that they have been members of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association (NJCTGA) since 1992. Donna currently serves as the Executive Secretary of the NJCTGA. Donna quickly described that "education" was a great benefit from being an association member. "The \$65 annual dues are a bargain for all the tours, meetings and speakers who educate us growers," Donna said. Donna mentioned that she belongs to several other profes-

sional organizations and they all cost over \$100 annually. She also told how she first saw a Kelco bow making machine at a winter meeting years ago where she learned to make her own decorative bows. She now makes hundreds of bows to adorn the wreaths, grave blankets and center pieces the family makes for Christmas tree season. Without the NJCTGA meeting, she may have never learned this valuable skill.



Field of young spruce trees on steeply sloping fields below the farm shop.

Drew especially likes meeting and talking Christmas trees with other growers at NJCTGA twilight and summer meetings which include tours of the farms. There you can view machinery, discuss disease and pest issues and get ideas how to run your own operation. Drew suggested that any new grower should visit successful farms in their area to meet experienced growers and pick their brains. "Find out what species grow well in your area and start with these trees," Drew said.

During the busy Christmas tree sales season Drew's wife Heather and son Tucker help run the operation as well as Donna's other son Doug who helps when he can. The family sells trees, wreaths, grave blankets as well as tree stands, local honey and locally made candles. They are open seven days a week from 8 AM until dusk so all hands must be on deck!

Donna's best advice to a new grower – join the association, you will not regret it. Drew's advice – "don't quit your day job", Drew joked. And he did not. Drew owns and runs a successful Hunterdon County landscaping and firewood business, C&C Lawn Care, all year when he is not out in his trees.



Large pile of firewood split and drying at the farm for Drew's other business, C&C Lawn Care.







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COLE'S COUNTRY TREE FARM - ALEXANDRIA TWP.



HIGH IRON FARM - BLOOMSBURY, NJ

## NJCTGA Officers

**Chris Nicholson, President**  
Cnicho6345@aol.com  
973-865-6362

**Tim Dunne, Vice President**  
tandmdunne@emabarqmail.com  
908-453-2818

**Donna Cole, Executive Secretary**  
execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org  
908-735-4658

## NJCTGA Directors

**Andrew Alpaugh**  
frstree@comcast.net  
609-397-0615

**John Curtis**  
curtistreefarm@gmail.com  
908-387-1225

**Anne Edwards**  
wedwards@rcn.com  
609-758-7729

**Jim Giamarese**  
giamarese@comcast.net  
908-813-9904

**Matt Martini**  
cherryvillefarms@earthlink.net  
908-806-4580

**Bryan Stimpson**  
bryan.stimpson@nj.usda.gov

**Larry Toth**  
ltatoth@comcast.net  
609-758-5855

**John Wyckoff**  
wyckoff@emabarqmail.com  
908-489-2186

## President's Message *continued from page 1*

If you take one thing from a meeting it was worth attending is what our senior members tell me, wise advice.

I have served many years as President, so many in fact I have lost count. I will continue to serve because I still really enjoy it. Please reach out to me and let me know how we can improve the association, I always love feedback and I want us to con-

tinue to evolve and help one another achieve our goals, growing and selling great trees.

Good luck this season.

Chris Nicholson  
*President*

### NJCTGA Newsletter Ad Sizes & Rates

**FULL PAGE**  
7.75" wide x 9.875" high ..... \$100

**Half Page**  
7.75" wide x 4.863" high ..... \$60

**Quarter Page**  
3.795" wide x 4.863" high ..... \$35

If possible, ads should be submitted in PDF format, in 4-color process.

Contact Executive Secretary  
Donna Cole for additional details.



# 2019 Annual Winter Meeting Review

The last Saturday in January was a cold day outside but warm in the Rutgers EcoComplex as over 90 attendees at the NJCTGA Annual Winter Meeting gathered.

The meeting opened with NJ Agricultural Secretary Doug Fisher providing some brief comments about the fall spotted lanternfly controversy and the NJDA's efforts to convince consumers that a real tree was the way to go. NJDA stepped up, providing several electronic billboards around NJ promoting real choose& cut New Jersey

Christmas trees this season. The morning session featured Jim Rockis of Reliable Source Seeds and Transplants in WV who gave us a talk on Growing Firs in NJ, followed by a pesticide update from Dr. George Hamilton of Rutgers University. After a hearty lunch and grower networking time the afternoon session had Dr. Richard Cowles from the Connecticut Ag Experiment Station presenting on Phytophthora rot roots in Christmas trees, an update from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board President Jim Rockis on the Board

activities and the future of the checkoff. The popular Growers Roundtable ended the afternoon presentations.

The brief business meeting featured presentation of awards to the State Tree Contest from the summer and the day's Wreath Contest. Contest results can be seen below. Congratulations to tree Grand Champion winners Carl Paffendorf and Layce Gebhard of the Kingdom of Car-Lay tree farm in Hunterdon County and all the contest awardees.

## Annual Christmas Tree Contest Winners Middlesex County Fair | August 2018

### Fir Class

- 1st Place **Fraser X Balsam Fir** from the Perfect Christmas Tree Farm, John Curtis  
2nd Place **Douglas Fir** from Pine Meadow Farm, Larry Toth  
3rd Place **Canaan Fir** from Evergreen Valley Farm, Andy Alpaugh

### Spruce Class

- 1st Place **Norway Spruce** from Kingdom of Carlay, Carl Paffendorf and Laycee Gebhard  
2nd Place **Norway Spruce** from Hidden Pond Tree Farm, Chris Nicholson  
3rd Place **Norway Spruce** from Evergreen Valley Farm, Andy Alpaugh

### Pine Class

No entries

### Table Top

- 1st Place **White Spruce** from Kingdom of Carlay, Carl Paffendorf and Laycee Gebhard  
2nd Place **Canaan Fir** from Hidden Pond Tree Farm, Chris Nicholson  
3rd Place **Douglas Fir** from Pine Meadow Farm, Larry Toth

### Grand

**Champion Norway Spruce** from Kingdom of Car-Lay, Carl Paffendorf and Laycee Gebhard Hampton, Hunterdon County

### Reserve Grand

**Champion Fraser X Balsam Fir** from Perfect Christmas Tree Farm, John Curtis, Phillipsburg, Warren County

## Annual Christmas Wreath Contest Winners Winter Meeting Columbus, NJ | January 2019

### Decorated Class

- 1st Place Hidden Pond Tree Farm - Chris Nicholson  
2nd Place Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm - John Wyckoff  
3rd Place Pine Meadow Farm - Larry Toth

### Undecorated Class

- 1st Place Hidden Pond Tree Farm - Chris Nicholson  
2nd Place Perfect Christmas Tree Farm - John Curtis  
3rd Place Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm - John Wyckoff



Layce Gebhard and Carl Paffendorf of the Kingdom of Car-Lay farm in Hunterdon Co. with their first place and overall Grand Champion ribbons for the 2018 NJCTGA contest.



Alice and Jessie Tonry traveled all the way from their farm in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire to the Winter Meeting and won a Stihl chainsaw doorprize. NJCTGA President Chris Nicholson on the right.



Some of the winning wreaths from the 2019 Winter Meeting wreath contest.

# National Christmas Tree Research Activities



Research into the challenges of today and the future are essential to protecting the value of your farm, as a business to be passed on or sold to future generations of growers. Rutgers, our State University, has made no moves to replace our retired Christmas Tree Extension Specialist since his retirement several years ago, despite New Jersey's national importance in Christmas tree sales and production. Research funded by the Christmas Tree Promotion Board (CTPB) may be our only hope for help for NJ growers. Grower contributions to the CTPB have funded over \$600,000 of research in just four years. Only a national effort can fund research on this level.

## *Research funded so far includes addressing today's challenges such as:*

- shortening tree production cycles
- improving pest suppression
- advancing pesticide use
- improving tree performance once harvested
- addressing implications of climate change
- developing biological controls

## *The CTPB is funding research at top universities across the country including:*

- Penn State University
- Michigan State
- North Carolina State University
- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
- Washington State
- Oregon State

If you think that research is important to your Christmas tree industry, you should consider voting "Yes" in the referendum to continue the Christmas Tree Promotion Board when you receive your ballot this April. The Christmas Tree Promotion Board is a national promotion and research organization funded by assessments on the sale of cut Christmas trees from North American Christmas tree growers. The CTPB invests its resources to achieve its vision and mission of enhancing the value and demand for cut Christmas trees, improving the future of the industry by creating and increasing opportunities for growers, importers and others in the industry through promotion, research and education programs.

## Save the Dates!

### NJCTGA Spring Twilight Meeting and Annual Summer Meeting

Planning is underway for two upcoming field meetings for growers:

The annual **Twilight Meeting** will be held on **Thursday, June 20 from 6 to 8 PM** at Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm in Mansfield Township, Warren County. Marty McMekin has been growing Christmas trees at this 14-acre farm since 1982. He opened his C&C operation in 1988. Join us for some refreshments and a tour of this well kept farm. We can discuss tree varieties, weed control, pest control, shearing, tree sales and more.

The annual **Summer Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, August 17 from 9 am to 3 PM** at Exley's Christmas Tree Farm in Monroeville, Gloucester County. The Exley's established a Christmas tree farm in Sewell in 1961 and have been growing and selling quality trees since then. The family hosted an NJCTGA summer meeting previously at the Sewell, NJ farm location. This year Bill Exley will host NJCTGA growers at the family's second tree farm in Monroeville. Join us for a tractor drawn hay ride tour of the farm, several displays, equipment dealers, a hearty lunch and more. [www.exleyschristmastreefarms.com](http://www.exleyschristmastreefarms.com)

### National Summer Meeting and Tree & Wreath Contest in Nearby North Abington, Pennsylvania – August 8-10, 2019

Mark your calendars! The 2019 National Christmas Tree Association's Summer Meeting and National Tree & Wreath Contest will be held August 8-10, 2019 at Roba Family Farms, North Abington Township, PA in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association meeting.

The bi-annual National Tree & Wreath contest will be conducted on August 8 to select Grand and Reserve Champion growers and wreaths for 2019 and 2020. The Grand Champion growers will earn the honor of providing the tree to the White House and the Reserve Champion growers the honor of providing the tree for the

Vice President's residence for 2019 and 2020. The meeting agenda will include a NCTA Board of Directors meeting and a meeting of the Christmas Spirit Foundation Trustees, along with numerous events, speakers and exhibits.

You can find out more about the meeting at the PA Christmas Tree Growers Association website: <https://christmastrees.org/events/>





## New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers' Association

### 2019 Membership Application

Please update and submit this form with your 2019 dues payment by **February 28, 2019**. Thank you!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Farm Name \_\_\_\_\_

Farm Address \_\_\_\_\_

Farm City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

for access to digital information and NJCTGA News

Seasonal Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Website Address \_\_\_\_\_

Acres in Trees \_\_\_\_\_

Total Acres in Farmland \_\_\_\_\_

**2019 Annual Membership Dues .....\$65.00**

**2019 Annual Acreage Dues .....\$\_\_\_\_\_**

Based on Acreage in Trees. See Chart Below.

**2019 Annual Dues Total: (enclosed) .....\$\_\_\_\_\_**

**Please make checks payable to NJCTGA and mail to:**

**Donna A. Cole, Exec. Secretary/Treasurer, 478 County Road 579, Milford, New Jersey 08848  
908-735-4658**

#### Acreage Dues Rates/Acres in Trees in New Jersey

1-4 acres .....\$ 5.00

5-9 acres .....\$ 10.00

10-19 acres.....\$ 20.00

20-49 acres.....\$ 50.00

50+ acres.....\$100.00



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## Interesting Articles and Photos from NJCTGA Publications from Years Gone By

**Editors Note – Below is the President's message from NJCTGA President George Black from June 2002**

When I started writing this message, my wife Helen asked for equal time, so here it is:

*In the March issue your president George Black introduced himself. Now I will have my turn to tell my side of the story, as the president's other half (really his wife).*

*Spring has sprung here in Blairstown, along with a lot of work. First off we have to make a trip to pick up our seedlings. I was hoping we could stop along the way for some shopping or maybe even stopping to have a nice Pennsylvania Dutch dinner. No such luck this time. We had to get seedlings home and wet them down.*

*As I look over our farm this time of year, I think how lucky I am living here. The mountains are beautiful. The trees are full of promise of lush new growth. I see black bear and turkeys all over the fields. I go for a ride on my ATV and pick lilacs and dogwood. What a life I have as a farmer's wife.*

*Sure I do some dirty work. I get out the mower and mow the grass. I get my exercise with the sun on my body and it is fun. I answer the phone and take messages. I have a meal ready at night. But I don't do the hard work that is involved with planting and taking care of the trees.*

*I love the selling end of it, the good and the bad. I like going to fairs and talking with people. I love telling about our farm, I especially like attending NJCTGA meetings and meeting all of the tree farmers. I am proud to be the wife of a New Jersey Christmas tree farmer.*

*Thank You.*

*Helen Black*



## A Message from your New Newsletter Editor

I am happy to take over the reins from Anne Edwards as your new newsletter editor. I want to thank Anne for her past efforts and her continuing support of the newsletter's layout and publishing. I will make every effort to have a quality NJCTGA out four times a year – spring, summer, fall and winter -- to keep our members abreast of the latest and greatest news for Christmas tree growers. With that being said I would really appreciate it if members could provide me with any items that you feel would be of interest to our members, and worthy of appearing in the quarterly newsletter. This is your newsletter and it should include news important to you. Also please be sure to support the advertisers in the newsletter and mention to them that you saw their ad. We also could use more ads to support the newsletter so let me know if any of your suppliers would like to advertise – I can reach out to them. Thanks and feel free to contact me with any ideas.

Tim Dunne, Woodsedge Tree Farm, Belvidere, NJ  
woodsedgetreefarm@gmail.com