



NJCTGA News

Fall 2020

President's Message

A Season of Hope



Chris Nicholson

Each Presidents message I have written to you all has had the general theme of what we are doing for our membership and how well our organization is doing. Not this one. This message is a little different, a little deeper perhaps.

As the days tick off the calendar we are all edging closer to opening day. Like no other previous season we all have deep concerns about the safety of the guests on our farms and the health and well being of our staff and loved ones. Yet like never before our farms and trees will play a critical role in providing one last chance for so many to celebrate the true spirit of the Christmas season.

All of our lives have been turned upside down since March. Our children have missed school, sports have been cancelled or altered, restaurants and small businesses are hanging on by a thread, and even a Sunday at church has been changed. We have all suffered in so many ways.

We have shared links to Rutgers guidelines for agrotourism and the NCTA recommendations for choose and cut farms. Read them. Follow them. Embrace them. Put your personal opinions and political beliefs aside and educate yourself as to your responsibility to assure everyone's safety as much as you possibly can. Do this if not for your wellbeing then for the well being of choose and cut industry in our state. Place hand sanitizer and wipes everywhere, provide masks for any customer who does not have one, place social distance signs wherever possible. Do these

continued on page 2

2020: A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

COVID-19 Resources for NJ Christmas Tree Growers

At the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station the faculty, staff and volunteers continue to work to provide access to factual information, science-based resources, and the breadth of expertise that exists at your state university. Their website is a launching point for a wide range of resources to help address issues presented by the COVID-19 public health emergency, from sanitation to personal wellness and nutrition, to at home educational resources for children.

Several informative fact sheets are available at the website that should provide help for NJCTGA members this season. **Considerations for Agritourism Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic** reviews compliance with Governor Murphy's executive orders, guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, and practicality of implementing required or recommended practices to limit transmission of COVID-19. You can view and download the fact sheet at:

https://agritourism.rutgers.edu/pdfs/Considerations_for_Agritourism_Operations_During_the_Covid19_Pandemic.pdf

Rutgers Plant and Pest Advisory in May states: *As farms start-up their pick-your-own seasons we are becoming more aware of negative customer feedback on social media sites. Comments have mostly been specific to the requirement of customers wearing face coverings while outside at a farm retail business. Your farm is deemed an "essential retail business" allowing you to be open, but requiring you to follow state guidelines. Customers are required to wear cloth face coverings at all times while at any essential retail business, including farm markets, farm stands, and pick-your-own locations. Those with health conditions where a face covering would cause a negative impact on their health and children under the age of two are exempted from this requirement. This season will be unlike any other you have had at the farm, and your customers experience will be different than what they are used to. This season your farm has the opportunity to provide a safe place to obtain local, healthy food, and hopefully they will make a few good memories while practicing social distancing and using face coverings appropriately.*

Rutgers has gathered resources to help deal with impacts to your farm operation. The second link is the newly released NJDH printable poster outlining the requirements of all businesses allowed to operate during this time, including the mandate all operating businesses require customers and employees to wear face coverings.

continued on page 2



New T-Shirts Available!

The NJCTGA Board of Directors is pleased to offer our members new NJCTGA T-shirts at a very reasonable cost. They are high quality Gildan T-shirts that do not shrink at all. **See the order form on page 11!**

2020: A Year Like No Other *continued from page 1*

NJ Executive Order 122 – Full length (see page 6, letter K for specifics)

"Require workers and customers to wear cloth face coverings while on the premises, except where doing so would inhibit that individuals health or where the individual is under two years of age."

NJDH Guidance for Retail Businesses – Requirements for all Businesses Continuing to Operate (printable poster)

"Require workers and customers to wear cloth face coverings, and require workers to wear gloves."

NJDH/NJDA/DOL Guidance for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, Their Employers, and Housing Providers

"Workers must wear face coverings at all times, including during transportation, while working, and while in the presence of others."

Other fact sheets and links are available that may also help. Make sure to check out the Rutgers web site at: njaes.rutgers.edu/covid-19/.

The NJ Department of Agriculture website also includes lots of

information on COVID-19 including information on farm labor, and marketing and development www.nj.gov/agriculture. In addition the NJDA website has links to important COVID-19 information from the NJ Department of Health.

Bustard Advertising, located in southeastern PA, is a well known supplier of Christmas tree farm promotional products and farm marketing materials. They provide a wide range of materials for sale to help growers address COVID-19 this sales season. Materials include signage, masks, hand sanitizer and more. As a Christmas tree grower and tree retailer, Jay Bustard has a good handle on what your farm may need this year. In addition, Jay has pledged to return 5% of all sales from NJCTGA members to our association this season. If you order from Bustard Advertising, make sure you identify yourself as an NJCTGA member. You can see Bustard's materials at www.jrbpromo.com

The National Christmas Tree Association has also produced very useful facts sheets on COVID-19 recommendations for Choose and Cut farms as well as Christmas tree lots. See information under *News From NCTA* later in this newsletter.

DUES ARE DUE!

Thank you to all of you who are current with your dues. However, if dues have not been paid in 2018 and 2019, you will no longer receive emails and other info as we don't want to annoy you with unwanted communication. But if you want communication from us and your dues are due, do what I would do – pay up!

President's Message

continued from page 1

things so that our industry shines and your farm thrives during these difficult and trying times. Pick up the phone and call as many growers as you can. Share ideas and thoughts about our responsibility. As I have said before in my message, we are all in this together.

As many of you know I underwent a life saving kidney transplant five years ago. In order for my body to not reject this kidney I am forced to take Immune system suppressants. My immune system is less

than half of the normal healthy person. It seems as though the drugs that have kept me alive these last few years are now what make me so very vulnerable to this virus. A cruel joke if you will. Yet, in some strange way my farm and the time I have spent in near isolation on it these past months have given me a perspective that most could never have. I am the luckiest man in the world. I get to grow Christmas trees which will grace thousands of homes on this Christmas Eve. I spend time out-

side, with nature, with my trees, with my honey bees, with my thoughts, with my hopes, chasing my dreams. We, Christmas tree growers, are blessed.

I wish you all the most successful season ever. When your gates open in just a few weeks remember these words. Be safe, be kind, be patient and most of all be understanding that so many have suffered this past year. Good Luck.

Christian

In Memoriam

**Brother Luke
O'Connell**

St. Paul's Abbey
Christmas Tree
Plantation

Newton,
Sussex County

Hugh Fordin

Pleasant Valley
Tree Farm

Titusville,
Mercer County

Terry Essig

Essig Trees
and Wreaths

Glen Gardner,
Hunterdon
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

DESIGNED AT ROWAN COLLEGE AT BURLINGTON COUNTY



Grower's Spotlight:

ALGER TREE FARM Tewksbury, Hunterdon County

By: Tim Dunne



Tim Dunne

Alger Tree Farm in Tewksbury, Hunterdon County is a 17-acre farm nestled in the beautiful countryside of Northwestern New Jersey. Katrina Alger, a veterinarian by day, has run the farm since 2005, but the roots of the farm go back to 1966 when her father started Alger Tree Farm. Today

Katrina and friend Peter do most of the tree work at the farm with her two children and a few friends helping out during the sales season.

A nice mixture of various sizes of blue spruce, Norway spruce, Douglas fir and concolor fir are growing in the 8 acres of trees at the farm. Katrina reported that her father met with Dave Crowshaw in the 1960's and together they decided to try concolor fir as a new Christmas tree species for New Jersey. It was a hit in the 1960's and still is today at the farm, as it is their most popular species. Katrina and I discussed the



Veterinarian Katrina Alger with one of her horses below a Christmas tree field.

finicky growth habits of concolor fir and she gave me some of her shearing secrets for concolors. Unfortunately this spring's heavy freeze on May 13th damaged new growth and hurt the concolor firs, a

very uncommon occurrence here at Alger Tree Farm. Luckily most of the damaged trees were smaller individuals that are not yet ready for harvest.

Katrina has been a member of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association since she took over the farm operation in 2005. Her father told her that joining our group was a necessity for a Christmas tree farmer and she has never regretted joining the association. She reports that meetings "help her keep up to date on any new pests or diseases of trees and how to best control them". Also the continuing education credits for her pesticide applicators license are valuable and easy to get at association meetings. Katrina loves



One of the beautiful concolor firs at Alger Tree Farm.

the "Growers Panels" we have at meetings where a small group of growers discusses their experiences on a certain topic and answers questions from the meeting attendees. "It is good to hear the perspective of several growers on the topics," Katrina said.

Katrina had some advice for new growers. "Over the years you will probably see cycles where you have lots of big beautiful trees, and happy customers. Then due to heavy sales, you will be short of nice big trees and customers may not be happy". This is especially true for smaller growers such as Alger Tree Farm. "We do not have room for growing lots of trees of all ages in our smaller fields". Right now at the farm they have some nice larger trees, but many smaller trees are coming on that will not be ready for sales for a few years.



Nice blue spruce ready for sale this Christmas tree season.

Katrina volunteered to host the NJCTGA annual summer meeting this past August, but that meeting was canceled due to the pandemic. She still plans on hosting the meeting next year and we hope to see you all there.

New farm logo on shirts ready for the 2020 season.



Tim Dunne, owner of Woodsedge Farm, Belvidere, Warren County, visits farms throughout the state and writes the Grower's Spotlight.

NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION

Choose & Cut Farm COVID-19

BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Christmas Tree Association has developed these best practice recommendations for Choose & Cut farms to use as guidance to adapt their business to the circumstances they will face during the 2020 Christmas season due to COVID-19.

Choose & Cut farms must protect the health and safety of their employees, provide customers with the confidence they need so they can enjoy selecting a tree without risk and demonstrate to state and local officials they are conducting business responsibly. We highly encourage you to develop the best possible response to these recommendations:

DEVELOP A COVID-19 PLAN

- Frequently sanitize items and areas such as hand saws, tree cart handles, counter tops, door handles and restrooms
- Limit the number of customers permitted inside buildings, minimize or eliminate wagon rides, fire pits, or other places that people gather
- Supply no touch garbage receptacles
- Offer Santa either on closed circuit TV or live at a distance
- Do not erect photo op "cut-outs" where faces come in contact
- Offer individually bagged food items instead of self-serve loose items such as cookies
- Provide a server for drinks instead of offering self-serve
- Require all dogs to be on a leash, or discourage dogs, as they cause unnecessary interaction among customers
- Encourage customers to tie their own trees on their vehicles by offering an instructional video

SALES & PAYMENT

- Install windows or plexiglass partitions at sales counters
- Offer Curbside pick-up
- Use a touchless pay credit card system
- Price products to limit the use of coins
- Eliminate the need for customer signatures on credit card transactions

PROTECTING CUSTOMERS

- Take staff temperature daily, provide PPE for all employees, do not permit staff exhibiting symptoms of illness to come to work
- Encourage customers to visit during non-peak hours

- Create special hours for select customers (elderly and at risk)
- Advise customers that you reserve the right to deny service to anyone displaying signs of illness or not following farm guidelines
- Have sanitizing stations available to staff and customers
- Request masks be worn by those able to without adverse health impacts
- Require masks be worn when social distancing is not possible, as on wagon rides to fields or in checkout lines
- Offer masks or neck gaiters for sale (with farm name or logo)

COMMUNICATIONS

- Discuss procedures with staff to keep employees safe
- Train staff on new procedures to keep customers safe
- Communicate early the proactive steps your farm is taking to keep customers safe through website, newsletter, social media, phone message, local paper, etc.
- Recommend signs at farm: wear mask inside buildings, limited numbers in gift shop (follow your state/county regulations), maintain social distancing, manage customer flow (one-way traffic in and out)
- Stress no visitors to farm if ill or had contact with someone ill with COVID-19
- Consider sign in sheet with family name and phone number. Break into morning/afternoon each day

RESOURCES

- Additional information is available on CDC, State and Local Health Department websites
- **There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted on plants or plant products** Source: Cornell Cooperative Extension/New York State Integrated Pest Management

NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION

Christmas Tree Lot COVID-19

BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Christmas Tree Association has developed these best practice recommendations for tree lot operators to use as guidance to adapt their business to the circumstances they will face during the 2020 Christmas season due to COVID-19.

Tree lot operators must protect the health and safety of their employees, provide customers with the confidence they need so they can enjoy selecting a tree without risk and demonstrate to state and local officials they are conducting business responsibly. We highly encourage you to develop the best possible response to these recommendations:

DEVELOP A COVID-19 PLAN

- May be needed for lot permits
- Designate a qualified COVID-19 coordinator to develop and implement the lot's COVID-19 plan
- Plan should consider NCTA's best practice recommendations
- Meet CDC and local regulations
- Provide personal protective equipment for employees
- Establish sanitizing protocols, also provide and encourage customers to use hand sanitizer upon entering the lot
- Adapt as changes occur

OFFER A DRIVE-THRU SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

- Having this capability and communicating it will attract at-risk and concerned customers
- Explore alternatives to traditional face-to-face sales if drive-thru is not possible

PAYMENT TRANSACTION

- Install physical barriers between cashiers and customers
- Provide masks and gloves for all checkout staff
- Use a touchless credit card payment system (there are many options available which should be explored before the season)
- Limit cash sales to exact change only
- No paper receipts or customer signatures
- Consider pre-orders, payment by phone, on-line orders and home delivery
- Disinfect payment area often

SIGNS

- Designate social distancing, entries, exits and traffic flow patterns
- Establish one-way traffic with separate entry and exit points if possible
- Identify hand sanitizer stations, payment locations and methods and other things of importance for customers to know

EMPLOYEE ILLNESS PLAN

- Create a plan and ensure all employees are familiar with it
- The plan should include how to handle employees who are ill or become ill at work
- Having a plan in place will position everyone to respond properly
- Clearly educate and provide employees current information about COVID-19 as suggested by the CDC

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- Follow CDC and local guidance for customer numbers on the lot at a given time
- To maintain 6-foot social distancing 113 square feet per person is required
- Lot layout and traffic flow should be planned to facilitate social distancing
- Limit the number of people in line for payment with social distance spacing signs
- Entrance to the lot may need to be regulated at peak times to maintain the proper head count in the lot
- Encourage regular customers to shop at off-peak times to assist with crowd management



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**Welcome
New Member!**

John and Monica Murray

Murray Christmas Tree Farm

Hampton, Hunterdon County

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. Contact Exec. Secretary
Donna Cole for additional details.

News from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board

Retail Locator to be Featured on "It's Christmas. Keep it Real!" Website

One of the signature features of the soon-to-be-unveiled campaign website is a retail locator. This locator will cover the entire U.S. and will include all types of retail locations that sell fresh cut Christmas trees. Locations will be identified by different colored icons for Choose & Cut farms, Seasonal Lots, Greenhouse/Garden Centers and Mass Merchandisers.

There will be no charge for a retail location to be listed on the site, however each retailer will need to "opt in" and provide information in an on-line format. Wholesale Christmas tree producers will be encouraged to provide this no-cost offer to their retail customers.

The CTPB anticipates having the on-line sign up link available in several weeks and will be widely announcing the sign-up opportunity. Check out the web site for more information www.christmastreepromotionboard.org

Photo Shoots for Christmas Tree Species Guide

Another new website feature is the Christmas Tree Species Guide, providing attractive photos and descriptions of popular Christmas tree species for interested consumers. The guide will kick off in 2020 with photos of 18 popular Christmas tree species; including those found in different growing regions. More species can be added in the future.

The first of three photo shoots took place in Oregon recently, where several species were the stars. Each tree is given the same treatment by photographing a harvested tree, 7 feet in height in a stand with an identical white background and identical lighting. This allows for different trees to be photographed in different locations and still provide a cohesive look. Most importantly, the uniqueness of each species will stand out to website visitors.

The species guide and retail locator are two features of a more robust and user-friendly campaign website. The CTPB will widely announce the launch of the redesigned site in the upcoming weeks. Check out the web site for more information www.christmastreepromotionboard.org

Christmas Trees to be Featured on *How Does It Grow?*

TRUE FOOD TV is the web's most watched channel dedicated to understanding the origins of food. Its signature series *How Does it Grow?* is a first-of-its-kind adventure that discovers where our food actually comes from. The show uses smart storytelling and stunning cinematography to reconnect its viewers to agriculture and the products that consumers purchase every day. Christmas trees will be the first non-edible commodity being highlighted by TRUE FOOD TV.

This segment has been nearly a year in the making and features video of Christmas tree production from planting, to shearing, harvest, retail and recycling. *How Does it Grow?* has a loyal following of 388,000 subscribers and its highest viewed segment exceeds 5 million views!

The Christmas tree segment is targeted to air the week of Thanksgiving and, unlike network television opportunities, remains available to view throughout the season and for years to come.

CTPB Retail Location Sign-Up Nears!

Final testing is underway on the new nationwide Christmas tree retail locator to be featured on the redesigned CTPB consumer website. The CTPB anticipates announcing the open sign up for all retailers starting next week. Sign up will take place on-line and we will provide a direct link to sign up. A reminder postcard will also be sent. CTPB will be offering wholesale growers a "copy and paste" invitation that they can share with their retail customers via email, as well as a postcard that can be mailed to their customer mailing list.

There is no charge to be featured on the locator and this is an "opt-in" opportunity; each retailer must enter their own locations.

Important Consumer Insights for Christmas Tree Marketers!

A consumer survey recently commissioned by the CTPB is providing some tremendous insights into consumers' attitudes toward celebrating the holidays during a pandemic and how that impacts your opportunity to have a successful fresh Christmas tree sales season.

We have developed three concise "Fact Files" for Christmas tree marketers that provide important information for everyone involved in the marketing of real Christmas trees. These "Fact Files" address three areas; click on the links to these brief, downloadable reports.

It May Not be Christmas-As-Usual, But it Could be Even Better – this Fact File outlines consumers attitudes toward celebrating Christmas during a pandemic, how it may impact their holiday and how those attitudes may impact real Christmas tree sales.

<https://files.constantcontact.com/3de63f9d501/ff6abf2e-712b-4240-a39a-6c1b49146fbf.pdf>

Safety & Sales – briefly outlines and confirms consumers expectations for COVID-19 safety precautions to be taken in the Christmas tree retail setting.

<https://files.constantcontact.com/3de63f9d501/ee9d5e7f-6a94-4101-af21-920a33492d25.pdf>

The Year of the Switch - Once an Artificial Tree Buyer, Not Always an

Artificial Tree Buyer – reveals that consumers who historically have put up artificial Christmas trees may be primed to make a switch to real and a great retail experience could bring them back next year.

<https://files.constantcontact.com/3de63f9d501/22bc7605-2409-4cc0-b02a-0a096454ac71.pdf>

News from the National Christmas Tree Association

NCTA's COVID-19 Best Management Practices

It is likely that Christmas will have a greater significance for many in 2020 as we seek to offset the disruption of normalcy from COVID-19 with a family-oriented holiday experience. However, shopping for a Christmas tree, the iconic centerpiece of the holiday, will be a different experience this year as the risks from COVID-19 must be taken seriously.

Tree lot operators and choose & cut farms must protect the health and safety of their employees, provide customers with the confidence they need to enjoy selecting the perfect tree for their family without risk, and demonstrate to state and local officials they are conducting business responsibly.

The National Christmas Tree Association appointed two committees to develop best practice recommendations—one for **choose & cut farms** (see page 4) and one for **tree lot operators** (see page 5). We highly encourage growers to use these recommendations to develop strategies to protect their workers and customers. Wholesale growers should share the recommendations for tree lots with their customers. Having a COVID-19 plan for your business is an imperative. Please help distribute this information to the entire Christmas tree industry.

Additionally, here is a link to a Cornell Cooperative Extension document on Best Management Practices for the nursery industry we found very useful:

<https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/BMPs-Ornamental-Operations.pdf>

Stay Safe!

An Interesting Note from a NJCTGA Member

Hi Donna

I'm one of your NJCTGA members who's currently in exile in Australia. We are not allowed to fly out of the country this year, so I won't be having a harvest at my farm. What a way to avoid Winter - which is just finishing here.

My purpose in writing is to share the information that we are experiencing a significant shortage of fire wood here in Australia. Winter is just winding down for us and it's really difficult to find additional supplies. It seems that lots of people who stayed at home cranked up their fireplaces. There was also some loss of supply because of the bush fires - but greatly increased demand seems to be the main culprit. Also our version of Home Depot normally puts fat wood fire starters on sale in Sept. Not this year; they were sold out in July.

Some of the Association members may have wood lots in addition to their Christmas tree plantations. While it's a bit late to be cutting wood now, I suspect there may be increased demand for firewood - if the US follows the Australian pattern.

Stay safe and well

Chris Geckeler



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Jay R Bustard Advertising is providing the opportunity to purchase the necessary **Covid-19** products for this Christmas season. As a grower/retailer we are looking at this year's season.

We expect our governor to allow us to do one of the following:

1. Not open up for sales.
2. Open up for delivery or drive thru.
3. Open up like we did other years. (I hope this is it.)



No matter what the option is, as a business owner we will be required by law to offer our employees and customers a safe environment. This will include masks for all employees and sanitizing stations for everyone. If we need to do drive thru or delivery additional signage will be needed.

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New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association T-SHIRT ORDER FORM

Shirts are \$22 if mailed to your home and only \$20 if picked up at Cole's Country Tree Farm.

Sizes available are S, M, L, XL, and 2XL. These are high quality Gildan T-shirts and they do not shrink at all.



_____ shirts to be mailed at \$22 each.

_____ shirts to be picked up at \$20 each.

Total amount enclosed:
\$ _____

Name _____

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Farm Name _____

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Donna A. Cole
**Exec. Secretary/
Treasurer**

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Questions?

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Number of Shirts TO BE PICKED UP \$20/ea.						TOTAL: _____ shirts to be picked up @ \$20 ea.