

# CHRISTMAS TREE PROMOTION BOARD **ANNUAL REPORT** **2019**



**WWW.ITSCHRISTMASKEEPITREAL**



# RESEARCH:



CONE FORMATION CHECK



FERTILIZATION TRIAL

“The number and quality of research grant proposals continues to rise each year.”

The CTPB continues to invest in research to improve Christmas tree production throughout the United States. In fiscal year 2018-19 over \$243,000 was contracted by the CTPB to universities for Christmas tree research. The CTPB supports ongoing long-term research projects such as the Collaborative Fir Germplasm Evaluation Project (CoFirGE) as well as new projects addressing rising concerns of the industry.

**Control of coning in Fraser Fir at Michigan State University** is a multi-year research project supported by CTPB funds. Researchers applied plant growth regulator to prevent cone formation, and continued evaluation of treatments applied in previous years, to determine the longevity of coning control. Additionally, organic herbicide treatments were used modified rates and timing to better control cone formation. Finally, coning response to environmental variables were evaluated in Fraser, Korean, Concolor and Nordmann fir.

A CTPB funded study at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station tested the hypothesis that the roots of **bare-root transplants** are insufficient for obtaining adequate plant nutrients in the year of planting, even when soil tests would suggest that there is adequate fertility. **Controlled release fertilizer** was tested on a variety of firs and spruce. Fertilized trees sustained greater terminal growth and had improved color compared to unfertilized. But before adoption of this practice is recommended, trees will be evaluated after spring bud break to compare bud death between treatments.

[WWW.CHRISTMASTREEPROMOTIONBOARD.ORG/RESEARCH/](http://WWW.CHRISTMASTREEPROMOTIONBOARD.ORG/RESEARCH/)





**CoFirGE GRAFTING**

A project funded by the CTPB at Oregon State University **collected Nordmann fir seed** from three regions in the Minor Caucasus Mountains region of Georgia to produce seedlings and **identify regionally adapted sources of Nordmann fir** that produce superior Christmas trees across the major production regions in the United States. This project may give U.S. Christmas tree growers new tree species options. Potential environmental benefits include reductions in industry-wide pesticide use, improved tree establishment rates and greater production system resilience in the face of stresses resulting from climate change.

North Carolina State University received a CTPB research grant to develop **control options for herbicide resistant weeds** in Christmas tree production. Herbicide resistant weed species of importance to Christmas tree production were identified and herbicide alternatives to glyphosate were tested for efficacy and tree injury. Preliminary results indicate that pre-budbreak applications of cloransulam, 2,4-D amine, saflufenacil, and topramazole dramatically improved horseweed control. Evaluations of pre-and post-budbreak applications will continue.



**NEEDLE RETENTION**

Scientists at Washington State University are working on three research projects funded by the CTPB. Trees that are predisposed to shed needles were used to evaluate the effect of preharvest applications of Harvista (1-MCP) in **reducing ethylene-induced needle loss** on Douglas-fir, balsam fir and Canaan fir. Industry surveys have shown that messiness/needle loss is one of the top reasons consumers cite for dissatisfaction with fresh Christmas trees. If effective, this would provide growers with a potential tool to improve the quality of trees and consumer satisfaction with the use of real trees.

Washington State University scientists are producing Trojan fir seedlings for greenhouse trials to **determine the susceptibility of Trojan fir to regional Phytophthora species** that cause root rot on Christmas trees. Phytophthora Root Rot (PRR) is a serious disease of true fir, resulting in substantial losses in the Christmas tree industry. Very little is known about the susceptibility of Trojan fir to PRR. The identification of another source of true firs that is resistant to PRR provides growers with an alternative to chemical treatments to control this disease.

The Douglas-fir twig weevil, probably the most damaging and least understood insect pest- in Christmas tree plantations in the Pacific Northwest is the subject of a CTPB research grant at Washington State University. Population structure, distribution, and life cycle of is critical to optimizing control of this pest. The name of this pest is misleading as it has now been found on every tree species grown in the PNW. This small weevil recently emerged as a significant problem in both exporting and in developing a quality tree for the domestic market. Currently control of twig weevil is based on multiple applications of insecticides due largely to the lack of information relating to critical stages in the life cycle of this pest.

For a list of research projects being funded in the 2019-20 fiscal year, please visit: <https://www.christmastreepromotionboard.org/research/>

Plans are underway for announcing the request for research proposals (RFP) for the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year in early May 2020. Results of the CTPB grower survey on Christmas tree research topics have been incorporated into the RFP to set research proposal funding priorities. The number and quality of research grant proposals continues to rise each year.

# PROMOTION:



KELLY CLARKSON SHOW



PHOTO CONTEST



SATELLITE MEDIA TOUR

## CTPB 2019 Campaigns

CTPB's "It's Christmas. Keep it Real!" campaign was able to successfully build on the growth from past years. The campaign remained focused on its main objectives of increasing the value and demand for fresh cut Christmas trees and building a lifelong real tree customer base, specifically with Millennial families in mind.

### Millennials Get Social

Millennial moms account for approximately 9 million people, 22% of all moms, so reaching them was key in 2019. CTPB decided to meet Millennial moms and dads (the young adults born between 1977–1995) where they are – on social media! When Millennials are passionate about something, they share it with everyone, becoming ambassadors and exposing others who are within their sphere of influence. Reaching and then retaining Millennial support will continue to be a vital aspect of CTPB's campaign in the coming years.

CTPB made a concerted effort to launch the social media portion of the campaign earlier than in past years, beginning in July and ramping up in September with #KeepItReal365. This was perhaps one of the more successful changes this year, with relevant content able to be shared every day throughout the year. The desire to spend quality time with friends and family is not limited to Christmas and the year-round approach of #KeepItReal365 allowed CTPB to spread the sentiment in a fun, thought-provoking and engaging manner; reminding people to focus on the real moments in life. Engagement in the off-season was a primary contributor to the social campaign's growth, being more cost effective to advertise and gain new followers earlier in the year.

The ability to post reusable and sharable content continues to be key for the campaign. Additional social post themes in 2019 included the #EcoMonday series, where the social media push presented real tree sustainability and environmental stories and the "Ask a Farmer" series that included questions posed by consumers and responses from Christmas tree farmers. An additional series of social posts using man-on-the-street interviews centered around family traditions, such as, "Who has final say when your family picks a tree?" and "White or multi-colored lights?" as well as a collection of shareable "Tree Care Tips" was added to the social mix.

To create new video assets to share, the team visited Austin, Texas, and both Detroit and Ann Arbor, Michigan, on Thanksgiving weekend to capture the joy and fun as families made their fresh Christmas tree selections. Within days, the team was able to begin posting these videos on our social media channels – a total of eight new videos debuted.

### Website

The "It's Christmas. Keep it Real!" campaign tagline and logo remained the same again this year, but CTPB's online presence received an update with a new consumer website. Concept Farm created a website designed to span multiple years focusing on a modular design that would be

robust enough to present a variety of additional content in the future and ensure an ideal user experience on any device. The website launch was supported by a dedicated search campaign to drive traffic to the site using search engine optimization techniques developed by Fleishman Hillard and a modest search engine marketing budget. This new website is simple and flexible, offering opportunities for the campaign to house new content as it becomes available.

### Earned Media

The 2019 public relations campaign embraced a "first and frequent" approach: getting out early with interesting consumer holiday facts for media consumption. In September, CTPB public relations partner, FleishmanHillard, executed a consumer poll of 2,000 parents with the goal of identifying meaningful and fun insights around the experience of having a real tree during the Christmas season. Press releases, infographics and even video content were used to reach the media with our survey results, statistics and campaign messaging points:

- Real Christmas Trees are better for family memories
- Real Christmas Trees are better for the environment
- It's Christmas. Keep it Real!

Ad agency partner, Concept Farm supported this consumer poll project. Using man-on-the-street

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## "MAN ON THE STREET" INTERVIEWS

## SOCIAL MEDIA

video casting and production, they were able to produce videos to supplement three press releases that featured consumers answering the very questions posed in the survey.

### Sponsored Opportunities & Partnerships

2019 marked a second successful partnership with popular Millennial parent website, Red Tricycle. The typical Red Tricycle mom is active on social media, with 81% posting at least once per week, and 85% sharing Red Tricycle content at least once per month with a friend. With 67% of Red Tricycle moms identifying as influencers, or as someone who other parents look to as being "in the know" about new products, this partnership was especially important to build the relationship with CTPB's target audience.

The partnership included dedicated email, exclusive sponsorship of the Christmas channel, premium banner ads, and a guarantee of 7.6 million impressions. It also included a month-long, co-branded national photo and video contest, "Real Trees, Real Memories," where contestants could use hashtags to enter photos of their family's real tree buying experience.

The Satellite Media Tour was CTPB's most successful SMT yet with 31 television and radio interviews across the country and content that was aired 2,154 times, broadcast live from a southern Florida Christmas tree lot. Lifestyle expert, Stefaney Rants, and Christmas tree retailer, Scott Lucas, served as spokespersons for the campaign and pre-interview preparation insured that the desired messages were front and center in each

interview: real Christmas trees are best for making memories and better for the environment.

One of the biggest opportunities for national recognition came as the CTPB secured a segment on The Kelly Clarkson Show, which aired on November 22. Clarkson, the Grammy Award winner turned daytime talk show host and Millennial mom herself, was joined in studio by two Christmas tree growers on a set designed to replicate a Christmas tree lot, complete with more than a dozen fresh trees. As Clarkson posed questions to the growers, her celebrity guests "went shopping" at our Christmas tree lot and were able to find the perfect tree for their family.

### Other Opportunities

As in years past, the CTPB invested in Trees for Troops, assisting with the cost and tree tags, tag shipping, and a year-round social media campaign. The program, sponsored by the Christmas Spirit Foundation, was able to donate more than 18,000 real Christmas trees to 79 military bases in the US, Guam, and Afghanistan.

The CTPB also sponsored Christmas trees to accompany the National Christmas Tree in the nation's capitol. This is the second time that the CTPB has been asked to assist with this project.

### Tying It All Together

The campaign saw a tremendous return on investment. The three press releases and video release were picked up and shared in more than 1,500 media pieces garnering 413,000,000 impressions. The satellite media tour produced 2,154 unique pieces and racked up 14,000,000 impressions. The Red Tricycle content and

contest was picked up by over 150 news outlets, delivering more than 10 million impressions and 1,388 qualified contest entries. The Kelly Clarkson Show broadcast reached 1 million viewers and 8 bonus social posts reached an additional 1.3 million: inspiring 76,734 engagements.

The campaign social channels saw a marked increase in activity and the CTPB was able to increase the number of Facebook followers by 140% from 46,000 to over 110,000 followers. Those followers have a high concentration of young families, the exact audience that CTPB aimed to reach.

CTPB Promotion Committee Chairman, Paul Battaglia commented, "We're lucky to feature a product as iconic as a real Christmas tree, and when it's shared as part of authentic experiences, the stories tell themselves."

**"We're lucky to feature a product as iconic as a real Christmas tree... the stories tell themselves."**

# FINANCIAL:

## 2018-2019 Financials

CTPB is required to have an independent Certified Public Accountant audit its accounting records each fiscal year in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. The fourth audit of CTPB was

completed January 16, 2020 by Propp Christensen Caniglia, Roseville, CA. They issued a clean opinion of CTPB's financial statement, also known as an "unmodified report" in accounting terminology. These excerpts from the audit

provide an overview of CTPB's financial status at the end of its 2018-2019 fiscal year. Please visit the CTPB website to see the full audit report

<http://www.christmastreepromotionboard.org>

(the audit is posted on the Industry Information page).

### STATEMENTS OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS – MODIFIED CASH BASIS

July 31, 2019 and 2018

	ASSETS	2019	2018
Current Assets:			
Operating Cash		1,096,928	1,182,575
Cash Reserves		298,514	—
Total Assets		1,395,442	1,182,575
	LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities:			
Accrued Expenses		195,083	72,203
Net Assets without donor restrictions:			
Designated by the Board for cash reserves:			
Reserve for future projects		177,318	—
Reserve for Research		121,196	—
Undesignated		901,845	1,110,372
Total Net Assets		1,200,359	1,110,372
Total Liabilities and Net Assets		1,395,442	1,182,575

### STATEMENTS OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES – MODIFIED CASH BASIS

For the Year Ended July 31, 2019 and 2018

	2019	2018
Revenue:		
Assessments	1,729,684	1,587,560
Interest Income	9,688	2,336
Total Revenue	1,739,372	1,589,896
Expenses:		
Promotion Committee	1,013,168	913,516
Research Committee	253,590	237,180
Industry Relations Committee	73,795	59,616
Special Projects	1,275	20,127
Professional Services	175,080	172,120
Board Meetings	20,406	37,533
Audit Fees		11,157
Bank Fees	4,873	5,535
Insurance	1,576	1,309
Office Expenses	3,464	3,579
Other Administrative Costs	19,091	17,672
USDA Fees	83,067	183,382
Total Expenses	1,649,385	1,662,726
Change in unrestricted net assets	89,987	(72,830)
Net assets without donor restrictions, beginning of year	1,110,372	1,183,202
Net assets without donor restrictions, end of year	1,200,359	1,110,372



# EDUCATION:

## Teaming with NCTA

For the fourth year in a row, the CTPB has teamed up with the National Christmas Tree Association on two critical projects by funding the cost of the **“Voice of the Industry”** and participation in **the National Fire Prevention Association trade show.**

Each holiday season, the NCTA responds to calls and emails from the media and consumers; posing questions regarding Christmas trees and the industry. The availability of a qualified team member answering these questions is a tremendous asset to the entire industry as factual information is relayed and inaccurate stories are addressed.

NCTA's seasonal spokesperson, Doug Hundley, responded to hundreds of emails and fielded calls from media outlets and consumers, alike. Both Hundley and NCTA Executive Director Tim O'Connor conducted numerous media interviews by phone, on camera and by email. A significant number of media stories on Christmas trees during the 2019 season were influenced by or included quotes from NCTA representatives.

The CTPB also continues to fund the industry's participation in the **NFPA Trade Show,**

where industry members talk with fire fighters, fire chiefs and others in the industry. The primary emphasis is to help the fire industry better understand our product from a safety standpoint and to discourage them from participating in “tree burn” demonstrations for the media with dry trees during the holiday season.



Ellis Schmidt and Richard Moore represented the industry at the 2019 NFPA Trade Show.



**ELLIS SCHMIDT ENGAGING WITH PARTICIPANTS AT THE NFPA TRADE SHOW**

# 2020 BOARD:



**OUR 2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Front row:**

Roger Beyer  
Beth Walterscheidt  
Mark Schmidlin  
Bob Schaefer

**Back row:**

Paul Battaglia  
Bill Brawley  
Charles Fowler  
Jim Corliss  
Gary Westlake  
Chris Maciborski  
Derek Ahl  
Della Deal



Christmas Tree  
PROMOTION BOARD

PO Box 77  
Howell, MI 48844

# CTPB INFORMATION:

## Meet the Board

### Eastern Representatives:

Jim Corliss, Maine  
Della Deal, North Carolina  
Charles Fowler, North Carolina  
Gary Westlake, Pennsylvania

### Central Representatives:

Derek Ahl, Wisconsin  
Beth Walterscheidt, Texas

### Western Representatives

Paul Battaglia, California  
Roger Beyer, Oregon  
Bill Brawley, Oregon  
Bob Schafer, Oregon  
Mark Schmidlin, Oregon

### Importer Representative

Chris Maciborski, Michigan

## Meet the Staff:

The CTPB is managed by Gray Management, LLC:

**Marsha Gray** – Executive Director,  
[marsha@christmastreepromotionboard.org](mailto:marsha@christmastreepromotionboard.org)

**Jenny Tomaszewski** – Administrative Assistant  
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**Cyndi Knudson** – Director of Research  
[Research@christmastreepromotionboard.org](mailto:Research@christmastreepromotionboard.org)

**Beth Kohn**, BAK Bookkeeping – Bookkeeper

## Contact Us:

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## E-Newsletter

All growers (even small farms that are exempt) are encouraged to sign up for the CTPB e-newsletter. The e-newsletter is the best place to get up-to-the-minute details on our promotion and research. To sign up, please make your request at:

[info@christmastreepromotionboard.org](mailto:info@christmastreepromotionboard.org) or call **800-985-0773**.