

NEWS RELEASE

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Banner Crop Expected for N.C. Christmas Trees

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Despite a year of weather extremes, beginning with months of rain followed by a dry fall, North Carolina Christmas tree growers will be harvesting a banner crop of trees – and one North Carolina Fraser fir, grown by a former North Carolina State University professor, will journey to Washington, D.C., to be displayed in the White House.

The extra moisture earlier this year wasn't a problem for mature trees and won't affect this year's crop, according to Jeff Owen, area forestry extension specialist in NC State's College of Natural Resources who is located at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center in Fletcher.

"We did have root rot disease problems with young trees, due to excess moisture," says Owen. "That may affect the number of trees available down the road in six to eight years. Now, we still have an ongoing shortage of the larger trees due to strong sales and large harvests in recent years, so folks looking for big trees will need to shop early."

This year more than 4.5 million trees will be harvested, at a value of about \$110 million. Buyers can expect to pay an average of \$6 per foot for their Fraser firs, which make up the majority of trees grown and sold in North Carolina. Most farmers have started harvesting the trees; they should be arriving at retailers in time for Thanksgiving.

Buyers who want to find a really fresh tree can perform a few simple tests as they shop. "The needles should be flexible, not stiff and dry," says Owen. "The stems of twigs should look smooth, not wrinkled. The foliage on fresh trees will feel colder to the touch than on a dry tree given the same shade conditions. Finally, make sure you get a fresh cut taken off the base of the tree you buy, and keep the tree in plenty of water."

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Christmas tree farmers take great pains to cut, store and ship their trees in ways that preserve freshness for the customer, Owen adds. “Our tree industry delivers a high-quality product year after year under all kinds of conditions,” he says.

A near-perfect specimen of the N.C. Fraser fir industry’s high-quality product will hold the highest place of honor for a Christmas tree this year: inside the White House. Smokey Holler Tree Farm, owned by Earl Deal – a former professor of wood and paper science at NC State – and his family, will be sending an 18-and-a-half-foot Fraser fir to Washington, D.C., the day after Thanksgiving. The Deals earned this honor by placing first in the 2004 national Christmas tree contest held by the National Christmas Tree Association.

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