



Real Christmas Tree Board
PO Box 77
Howell, MI 48844



JOY

...to naughty pups and nice photo ops.



JOY

...to only 100 more days until Christmas!

JOY TO THE REAL



U-CUT TREES

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



CAUTION
PLEASE
Christmas Trees
CROSSING



Real CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD



JOY

...to wrapping up unwrapping.



HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL? **#1**

- #2 MERRY
- #3 NOSTALGIC
- #4 CALM
- #5 THANKFUL

JOYFUL

84

of people who switched to a real Christmas tree last year say they wish they'd done so sooner.



JOY

...to the official scent of Christmas.

JOY TO THE REAL

RCTB 2023 Promotion and Messaging Campaign

In 2023, the Real Christmas Tree Board chose to focus on three promotional objectives:

1. Increase the use of RCTB data, messages, or spokespeople in all Christmas tree coverage from priority media targets.
2. Increase purchase intent among target audiences.
3. Increase the number of retailers accessing RCTB marketing materials.

For each of the three objectives, RCTB, with our agency partner, set a few specific “Key Performance Indicators” – or “KPIs.” These are aspects of our work that we can measure to gauge success, progress, or opportunity for improvement.

In nearly every case we met or exceeded our key performance indicators.

Increase the use of RCTB data, messages, or spokespeople in all Christmas tree coverage from priority media targets.

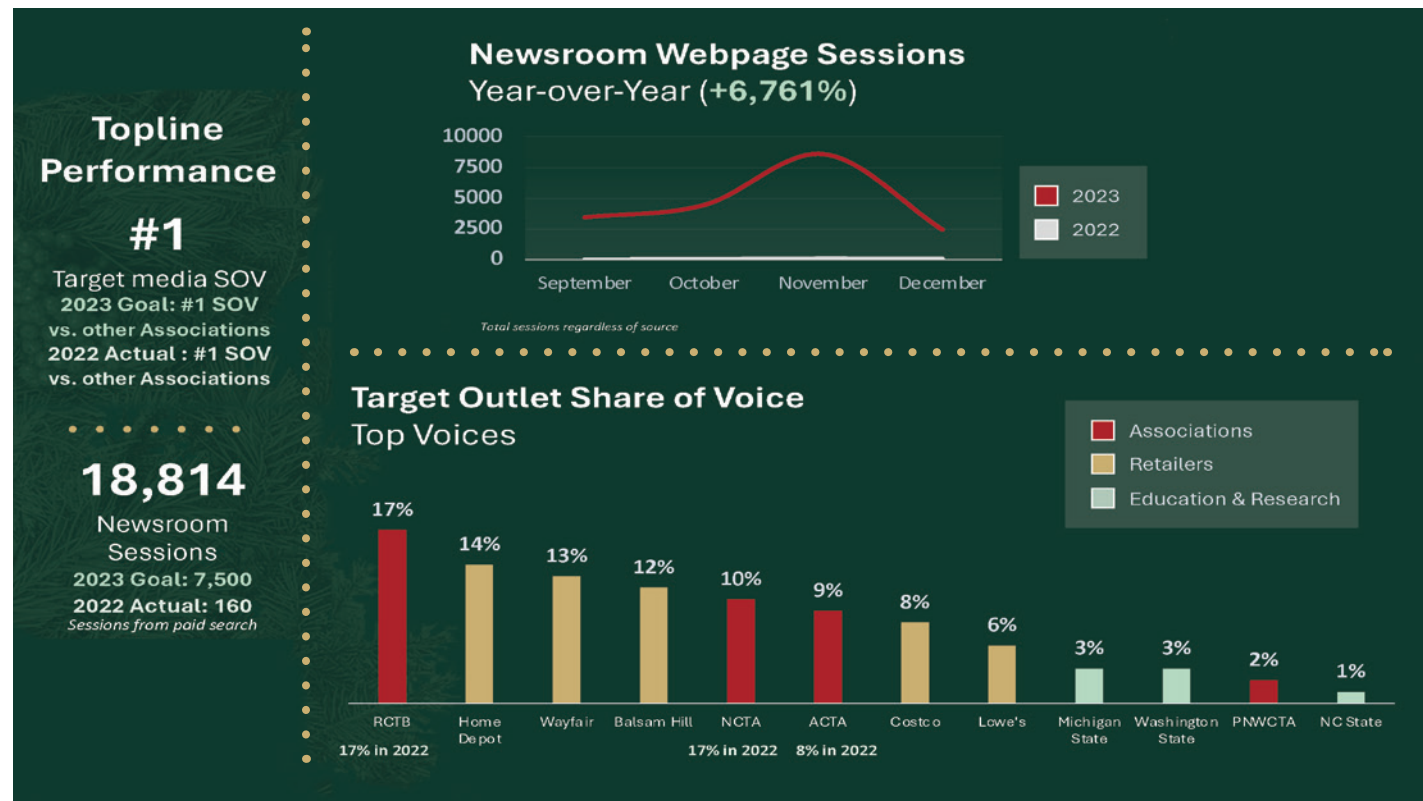
It is clear the media have come to regard RCTB as a reliable source for their annual Christmas tree stories. Three separate reporters from the New York Times alone contacted RCTB, resulting in two separate stories. This is a remarkable amount of recognition from a marquee media outlet. That’s in addition to coverage from ABC’s Good Morning America, CNN, Good Housekeeping, NBC’s TODAY, and NPR.

One of our KPIs is called “Share of Voice.” This is a measure of how RCTB stacked up against other groups competing for similar attention from the media on the topic of Christmas trees – for example, the ACTA. Among our list of target media outlets, we’re pleased to report that RCTB came in No.1 in share of voice this season and earned more than 1,000 placements among total media.

A particularly telling result shows that sessions for the RCTB.com newsroom came in 150% higher than our target number for the season – 18,814 total sessions!



These successes are the result of frequent media relations from July to December using data from our annual grower and consumer surveys, updated seasonal fact sheets, a refreshed online newsroom with expanded content, quick responses to emerging topics and issues, and paid search engine marketing, or “SEM,” designed to help journalists find us anytime they Googled for information about Christmas trees.



Promotion and Messaging Campaign *continued...*

Increase purchase intent among target audiences.

How do you assess someone's purchase intent? You ask them. But it's important when and how you ask them.

We use our consumer survey in August to talk to consumers when the season is still ahead of us, but not so far ahead that it seems odd to be thinking about Christmas. We start the survey by asking various questions about how likely the respondent is to buy a real Christmas tree this year. Next, we ask a series of questions about their reactions to various positive real Christmas tree messages. And then we ask them about their purchase intent – AGAIN.

This gives us data not only on purchase intent, but also about the degree to which messages can affect it.

This year, purchase intent increased by 11 percentage points after hearing positive real Christmas tree messages. When we work our messages, our messages work to increase purchase intent.

New to the ways we shared our messages this year was a podcast initiative. Backed by data that shows millennial parents are frequent podcast listeners, RCTB partnered with iHeart media – including its Hispanic streaming network – to develop and deliver 12 highly targeted ads across more than 400 podcasts, including three shows where the hosts read the ad themselves, adding personal stories for even more authenticity.

In addition, social media continued to be a key channel for our messages. More than 70 pieces of content across Facebook and Instagram highlighted 'Joy to the Real' and the emotional impact of real Christmas trees - from the "perfectly imperfect" journey of finding a tree, to those real holiday moments that all families can relate to.

The result? The engagement rate on organic Facebook and Instagram posts met or exceeded industry benchmarks and 2023 targets.

Meanwhile, paid ads on the Meta platforms drove consumers to visit the RCTB website – with over 98,000 total link clicks, vastly exceeding a target of 8,000 link clicks.

Another way we measure consumer interest is Retail Locator sessions on the RCTB website. We use SEM (Google search, Google ads) to help move consumers searching for Christmas tree information to the Retail Locator. The 69,721 visits this season exceeded our target by 74%!

Increase the number of retailers accessing RCTB marketing materials.

This year saw the debut of a new long-term objective based on the idea that if retailers were to adopt our messages in their own marketing, the industry could amplify its reach exponentially.

Although the board and its members have a wealth of anecdotal information, it was important to start with intentional and methodical data-gathering. Through a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with independent lots, garden centers and big box representatives, RCTB gathered insights into what kind of support retailers want from the board and growers and wholesalers.

Based on their inputs, a pre-Thanksgiving newsletter was provided to retailers with downloadable assets, social media links, key messages, and more. Opened more than 380 times, it's a modest but solid start. Future communications efforts may include seasonal retailer forums for the exchange of ideas, tips, and resources. The 2024 season will give us a more meaningful range of activity to measure.

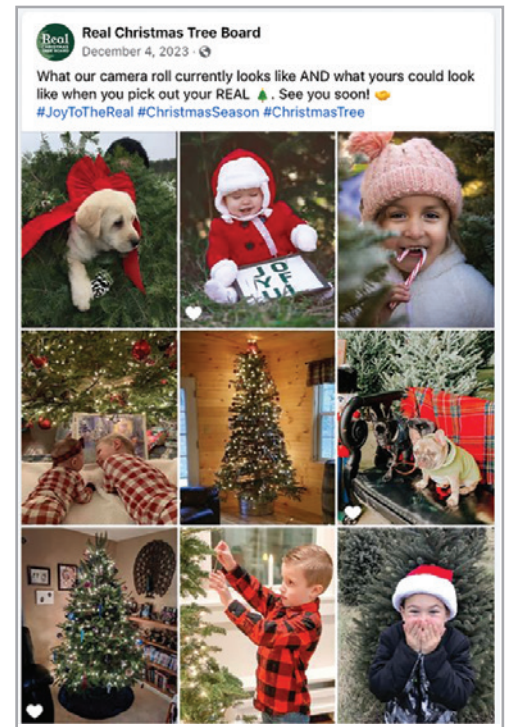
The Real Christmas Tree Board is on a great trajectory with its communications and PR efforts.

We are a trusted and **authoritative resource for the media.**

We are using data to focus efforts and **motivate your target consumer audience** in fresh ways.

We are actively engaging and listening to **retailers to help support sales** of real Christmas trees.

www.realchristmastreeboard.org



Real Christmas Tree Board
Retailer Newsletter

JOY TO THE REAL

Real Christmas Tree Board: Supporting Your Seasonal Sales

Joy to the Real! The best time of year is here, and we know you're hard at work ensuring families across the country have the unique, memory-making and joy-filled experience that only comes from heading out to find their perfect real Christmas tree.

As you prepare to kick off your real Christmas tree sales, the Real Christmas Tree Board is here with tools and resources to support you. Here's a look at what we're doing and what's available to you.

Retail Locator:
Thank you for registering your location on our retail locator! We're driving shoppers here through media activities, social media, and paid search (ads on Google that appear for people who are searching for various things about Christmas trees).

Click Here for the Retail Locator

Resource Hub:
Easily access ready-to-use images, banners, infographics and more!

Click Here for the Resource Hub

Social Media:
Supplement your social media efforts by resharing our Facebook and Instagram content!

Key Messages and Tips:
Along with key messages, watch our intentional communications webinar to learn how to make the most of the moment with media, shoppers, or community members.

2022-2023 Christmas Tree Research



The Real Christmas Tree Board invested a total of \$256,193 in Christmas tree research in FY 2022-2023; covering a wide variety of topics:

Researchers at West Virginia University are **examining the factors of improved mental health associated with different Christmas tree shopping environments** (outdoor biophilic designs offering real trees vs. indoor store designs offering artificial trees) and identifying the specific natural elements of the shopping environment, in addition to other tree-related attributes such as retail locations, prices, species, and height that contribute to positive consumer responses. Christmas tree retailers can use this information to better serve customers. Despite the plethora of literature that identifies the health benefits of nature, very little research examines the phenomena as it relates to Christmas tree shopping.

Weed control is essential in Christmas trees to reduce competition for moisture and nutrients, and allow fast and robust tree growth. Herbicides are the primary weed control option for producers, but herbicide options are limited, and herbicide-resistant weeds challenge weed control. Herbicide resistance has increased weed management costs and growers must now turn to mixtures of herbicides or planned rotations. Increased diversity of herbicide modes of action is needed to manage herbicide-resistant weeds. This Oregon State University project **evaluates the efficacy and crop safety in Christmas trees of one preemergence herbicide (PRE),** fluridone group 12, and two postemergence (POST) herbicides, florasulam group 14 and tiacfenafil group 14.

Noble fir Christmas tree growers have been dealing with the impacts of long, hot summers for at least a decade. Seedling survival rates range from 0 to 80 percent depending on location, planting dates, rainfall patterns, and temperatures. An Oregon State University research study continues a decade **of investigation of various treatments to improve planting year seedling survival.**

Techniques studied include supplemental watering options, biochar and tea bag fertilizer treatments, and the addition of mulch to newly planted Christmas tree transplants. Results from previous years indicate that the mulch does not appear to tie up soil nitrogen, reduces soil temperature and seems to conserve available moisture.

Continuing research at Michigan State University attacks **early cone production in Fraser fir** Christmas trees. If allowed to mature, the cones disintegrate in the fall and unsightly cone stalks remain, reducing tree value. And developing cones divert the tree's resources from shoots and needle growth. To reduce these negative impacts, growers routinely pick cones that emerge each spring. This is labor-intensive, expensive and presents safety concerns when using ladders to pick cones from tall trees. This research focuses on: 1) Evaluating post-emergent cone-control with tractor-mounted herbicide spray applications, 2) Evaluating coning response to plant growth regulators, 3) Selecting genotypes for delayed coning, and 4) Developing protocols for accelerated screening for coning.

Several projects studying Phytophthora root rot (PRR) were funded across the US. Scientists at Washington State University are conducting greenhouse trials to determine the **susceptibility of Trojan fir to regional Phytophthora** species that cause root rot on Christmas trees. PRR limits where highly susceptible Fraser and

noble fir can be grown. Nordmann and Turkish fir are tolerant to PRR and provide an alternative species for growers to use, particularly in areas that are conducive to PRR. Ongoing research indicates that Trojan fir has better growth rates and needle retention than Nordmann fir, and has the potential to produce a high-quality Christmas tree.

A second Washington State University study is looking **at climate change and the potential that it will increase the occurrence and severity of diseases that impact Christmas tree production.** During 2022, extensive mortality of noble and Fraser fir trees occurred in the Pacific Northwest. Working with growers in Washington and Oregon, researchers will identify noble and Fraser plantations that experienced high levels of tree mortality. Dead and dying trees collected from farms across the region will be analyzed to determine if they are being killed by Phytophthora, Annosus, and/or Armillaria root rot. Morphological traits and molecular tools will be used to identify pathogens and determine if there have been shifts in the presence of these species.

Another project looking at phytophthora root rot is **investigating disease-suppressive soils that prevent root infections of susceptible plants,** even when inoculated with a pathogen. Suppressive soils probably require complementary conditions: (1) Bacteria and fungi suppressive of PRR are common in soil. To be effective their activity needs to be stimulated by simultaneously adding organic matter and nitrogen to soil. (2) High soil calcium levels (3) Populations of microorganisms (notably *Trichoderma* spp. fungi) beneficial for suppressing phytophthora can benefit from the addition of elemental sulfur. Researchers at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will investigate these factors and their combinations on Fraser fir. In a second experiment, root dips of commercially available microorganisms suppressive of phytophthora root rot will be compared.

Additional research on previous trials to determine the potential effectiveness of postharvest fumigation treatments with Bluefume (HCN) in killing EHS are being conducted at North Carolina State University with USDA ARS scientists. Replicated **fumigation trials to address regulatory issues associated with the potential spread of elongated hemlock scale (EHS) life stages on infested Fraser fir** Christmas trees and greenery products, and the **detection of Megastigmus larvae in imported conifer seed.** *Megastigmus*-infested conifer seed will be used to assess the effectiveness of Profume (sufuryl fluoride) for controlling *Megastigmus* larvae of this quarantine pest of seed. After treatment, viability and vigor tests will be conducted using non-infested fumigated seeds to determine if the fumigation treatment has any adverse effect on seed quality and germination.

Seeds of many conifer species can be stored for decades with minimal loss of viability and vigor. However, seeds of several true firs are notorious for their poor long-term storage. Germination and vigor of two Christmas tree species, Nordmann fir and Turkish fir, degrade significantly after just two years in cold storage. US

nurseries rely heavily on imported sources for these species, so improvements to storage longevity would be of great benefit. There is considerable variation in practice pertaining to the harvesting, processing, and storage of Nordmann and Turkish fir seed, and potential for improvement. Washington State University researchers are taking multiple approaches to **improve the longevity of Nordmann and Turkish fir seed kept in cold storage** and development of web-based “best practices”.

The Christmas Tree Genetics Program and the Molecular Tree Breeding Laboratory at North Carolina State University, is collaborating on a research project to **develop genomic resources to rapidly advance genetic improvement efforts of fir (Abies spp.) Christmas trees** for the U.S. industry. Traditional genetic improvement methods cannot keep pace with the challenges associated with climate change and increased damage from pests and pathogens. The application of genomics-assisted breeding tools can accelerate cycles of genetic selection and **reduce the time between generations from 25-30 years to 10 years or less.** This project will develop a comprehensive set of transcripts/genes for Fraser fir to facilitate genome annotation and development of genomic tools to rapidly advance genetic improvement of fir Christmas trees.

Douglas fir needle midge causes defoliation of needles, making a tree unmarketable. Mexico does not allow importation of Christmas trees with needle midge damage and entire truckloads of trees may be rejected if

one of the trees has signs of needle midge. Control has traditionally relied upon a contact insecticide applied at the adult emergence and egg laying period. While several insecticides are labeled for needle midge control, growers have relied primarily on chlorpyrifos (Lorsban). Chlorpyrifos faces restrictions and will be phased out in several states for Christmas tree production. Oregon State University is **evaluating the effectiveness of currently labeled needle midge control materials** and screening some additional materials to provide guidance to growers on control of this pest in the absence of chlorpyrifos.

A research project conducted by Dalhousie University is **assessing the potential of pyroligneous acid to inhibit bacteria growth in Christmas tree stands and fungal accumulation on stomata.** Pyroligneous acid is a completely organic bio-stimulant and pesticide. By mitigating any accumulation of bacteria and fungi, water uptake and stomatal conductance should remain high and contribute to better postharvest needle retention. Pyroligneous acid is being evaluated for use as a water additive and foliar spray.

A full listing of RCTB-funded research projects can be found on the Research tab of the RCTB website: www.realchristmastreeboard.org



Thank you to our dedicated researchers!



Meet the Staff

The RCTB is managed by Gray Management, LLC:

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Meet the Board:

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 Mike Jones, Oregon
 Bob Schaefer, Oregon
 Mark Schmidlin, Oregon

Importer Representative

Larry Downey, Quebec, Canada

2022-2023 Financials

The Real Christmas Tree Board (Christmas Tree Promotion Board) 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 sixth audit of RCTB/CTPB was completed in October of 2023 by Propp Christensen Caniglia, Roseville, CA. They issued a clean opinion of RCTB's financial statement, also known as an "unmodified report" in accounting terminology. These highlights from the audit provide an overview of RCTB's financial status at the end of its 2022-2023 fiscal year. Please visit the RCTB website to see the full audit report

www.realchristmastreeboard.org/industry/

STATEMENTS OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES – MODIFIED CASH BASIS For the Year Ended July 31, 2023 and 2022

Revenue:	2023	2022
Assessments	\$1,573,091	\$1,750,642
Donations	2,760	4,819
Interest Income	16,660	4,756
Total Revenue	\$1,592,511	\$1,760,217
Expenses:		
Promotion Committee	\$950,733	\$1,016,726
Research Committee	292,716	285,658
Industry Relations Committee	27,716	32,033
Special Projects	36,000	
Professional Services	230,746	220,258
Education	7,000	8,255
Board Meetings	19,151	58,513
Compliance Auditing	46,780	32,104
Bank Fees	5,027	4,100
Insurance	2,116	2,503
Office Expenses	4,023	4,524
Other Administrative Costs	5,543	12,154
USDA Fees	68,420	63,996
Total Expenses	\$1,695,971	\$1,741,094
Change in unrestricted net assets	(\$103,460)	\$19,123
Net assets without donor restrictions, beginning of year	1,574,085	1,554,962
Net assets without donor restrictions, end of year	\$1,470,625	\$1,574,085

STATEMENTS OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS – MODIFIED CASH BASIS July 31, 2023 and 2022

ASSETS		
	2023	2022
Assets:		
Current Assets:		
Operating Cash	\$1,656,466	\$1,712,239
Cash Reserves	204,668	224,668
Total Assets	\$1,861,134	\$1,936,907
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities:		
Accrued Expenses	\$390,509	\$362,822
Net Assets without donor restrictions:		
Designated by the Board for cash reserves:		
Reserve for future projects	87,318	107,318
Reserve for Research	117,350	117,350
Undesignated	1,265,957	1,349,417
Total Net Assets	\$1,470,625	\$1,574,085
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$1,861,134	\$1,936,907

Check out the RCTB Research Webinar Series. This quarterly webinar features presentations on RCTB funded research. Upcoming topics are:

April 23, 2024 – The Christmas Tree Genome Project to Rapidly Advance Genetic Improvement with Dr. Justin Whitehill, North Carolina State University – What is genomic research? How can this impact the Christmas tree industry? Presentation will discuss genetic sequencing of Fraser Fir and applications for advancements in tree breeding programs.

June 25, 2024 – Weed Control in Christmas Trees with Dr. Joe Neal, North Carolina State Univ. and Dr. Marcelo Moretti, Oregon State Univ. - Weeds are one of the biggest challenges all farmers face. What are options to control problem weeds in Christmas tree fields?

Webinars begin at 11 am eastern and you must register in advance at this website: <https://events.anr.msu.edu/ChristmasTreeQuarterly/>



Thank you to Michigan State university for hosting this series.