

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
May 15, 2025

Via Video Conference

Welcome, and Roll Call: Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. Eastern time.

Board Members in Attendance: Chuck Berry, Renee Beutell, JoLynn Stroda, Jan Hupp, Ryan Tyce, Jane Neubauer, Derek Ahl, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich and Gary Thomas

Board Members Not in Attendance: Mike Jones and Charles Fowler

USDA Representative in Attendance: Sarah Richardson

Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

Guest in Attendance: Barry Campbell

Agenda

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to approve the agenda as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Meeting Minutes

Under Compliance Committee, under the letter a., should be “audits” instead of “adults”.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Jane Neubauer to approve the April 15, 2025, Board meeting minutes as corrected. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report – Chuck Berry reported.

- a. **Nominations** – Berry shared that there are four open seats: one Eastern, one Central, and two Western. All nominations must be submitted by June 1st. The Board has received four Eastern nominations, one Central, and three Western nominations.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee – Marsha Gray reported in Mike Jones' absence.

- a. **April 2025 Financials** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the April 2025 financials.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to accept the April 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Update on Research Contracts and Completed Projects** – Knudson shared that annual performance reports have been sent and are due back by May 29th.
- b. **RFP Announcement and Recommendation Process** – The RFP was announced, and proposals are due on or before July 3, 2025.

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich reported.

- a. **Update** – Aldrich shared that the Committee is discussing different ideas for the RCTB booth at the upcoming National Meeting in Michigan in mid-July. The Committee would like a tangible item that can be passed out, taking producers to the .org website rather than the .com website. Board members shared suggestions. Aldrich will connect with Marsha Gray and provide the Board with a few options.

Governance Committee –

- a. **Update Recommended Changes to Order** – Sarah Richardson will report on the Order under the USDA report in Charles Fowler's absence.

Compliance Committee – Derek Ahl reported.

- a. **Update** - Marsha Gray shared that Jim Lantz has several audits scheduled for May.
- b. **Non-responding Audit Candidate scheduled for audit** – Gray shared that the audit candidate refusing an audit has agreed, and the audit has been scheduled for the end of May.

Promotion Committee – Jane Neubauer reported.

- a. **2025 Campaign Planning** - Neubauer shared that she, Kari, and Marsha will meet with FleishmanHillard on June 3rd to discuss their big ideas for the upcoming campaign season. FleishmanHillard's presentation will be recorded and available to the Promotion Committee and Board. The Committee will then meet on June 9th or 10th to review the ideas and assemble their campaign for the coming year.
- b. **Social Posts** - Neubauer shared that the committee has been discussing off-season social posts. The Committee seeks anyone willing to help fill the off-season with informative and engaging content for the RCTB social channels. To submit ideas or posts, contact Marsha Gray. All content must be reviewed and approved by USDA.
- c. **Tariffs** – Neubauer shared that they have communicated with the media team at FleishmanHillard regarding the recent tariff news. FleishmanHillard does a great job of tracking all news articles.
- d. **Virtual Field Trip** – Neubauer thanked Jan Hupp for hosting the virtual field trip at his farm on April 25th.
- e. **Grower Survey** - Marsha Gray shared that each year, with the help of FleishmanHillard, a survey in SurveyMonkey is created and sent to wholesale growers. We plan to take this survey two or three times this year in order to capture grower input on the changing economic landscape. So far, thirty-two responses have been received from the survey sent on Monday.

Management Staff Update – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** - As of May 14, 2025, the RCTB has received 1,054 payers through the lockbox and online portal for \$1,191,239.40, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs for \$221,415.91, totaling \$1,412,659.31. In addition to the May assessment collection report, a comparative version of the assessment report was also provided, comparing May 14, 2025, to August 8, 2024. Board members discussed the two reports.

New Business:

- a. **Independent Economic Evaluation Contractor Recommendation** – Chuck Berry shared that the USDA requires the Board to complete an economic evaluation to evaluate the program's impact every five years. Marsha Gray shared that seven proposal requests were sent, and two were received back: Timothy Richards with Arizona State University and Dr. Ronald Ward. Gray shared that Timothy Richards conducted the last economic evaluation for the Board. Richards also works with the National Christmas Tree Association to interpret their survey data. The budget for the review is \$30,000, although Richard's proposal may come in under budget. USDA approved a cost split into two fiscal years: \$15,000 in this fiscal year, 2024-2025, and the second \$15,000 in the subsequent fiscal year, 2025-2026.
- A question was asked about how the Board felt about the past results from Timothy Richards. Marsha Gray said they were pleased with the data that Richards returned to the Board.

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve the contract with Timothy

Richards at Arizona State University for up to \$30,000 to conduct the Independent Economic Evaluation.
MOTION APPROVED.

b. **Management Contract – Gray Management, LLC.**

Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski left the meeting before the Executive Session.

The Chairman, Chuck Berry, called the Board into an Executive Session at 11:51 a.m. Eastern time to discuss the Gray Management contract for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

The Chairman, Chuck Berry, adjourned the Executive Session at 11:56 a.m.
Marsha Gray and Jenny Tomaszewski rejoined the meeting.

During the Executive Session, the Board approved the Gray Management contract as presented.

USDA – Sarah Richardson reported.

- a. **Status - Non-responding Importer** - Richardson shared that the case remains with the Legal Department.
- b. **Status - Recommended Order Changes** - Richardson shared that the Office of General Counsel has cleared the Order to be legally sufficient. It has been sent to the office of the Deputy Administrator for review and then to Legislative Review, which is the last stop before it is published for a 30-day comment period.
- Marsha Gray thanked George Webster and Sarah Richardson for their work and timely approvals.

For the Good of the Order/ Announcement: No items were reported.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Future Meeting Schedule** - The RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 19, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.
- b. **Summer In-Person Meeting** - July 24, 2025 – Dutchman Tree Farms, Manton, Michigan, in conjunction with the National Christmas Tree Association meeting.

Adjourn:

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Jolynn Stroda to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:04 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,
JoLynn Stroda
Secretary