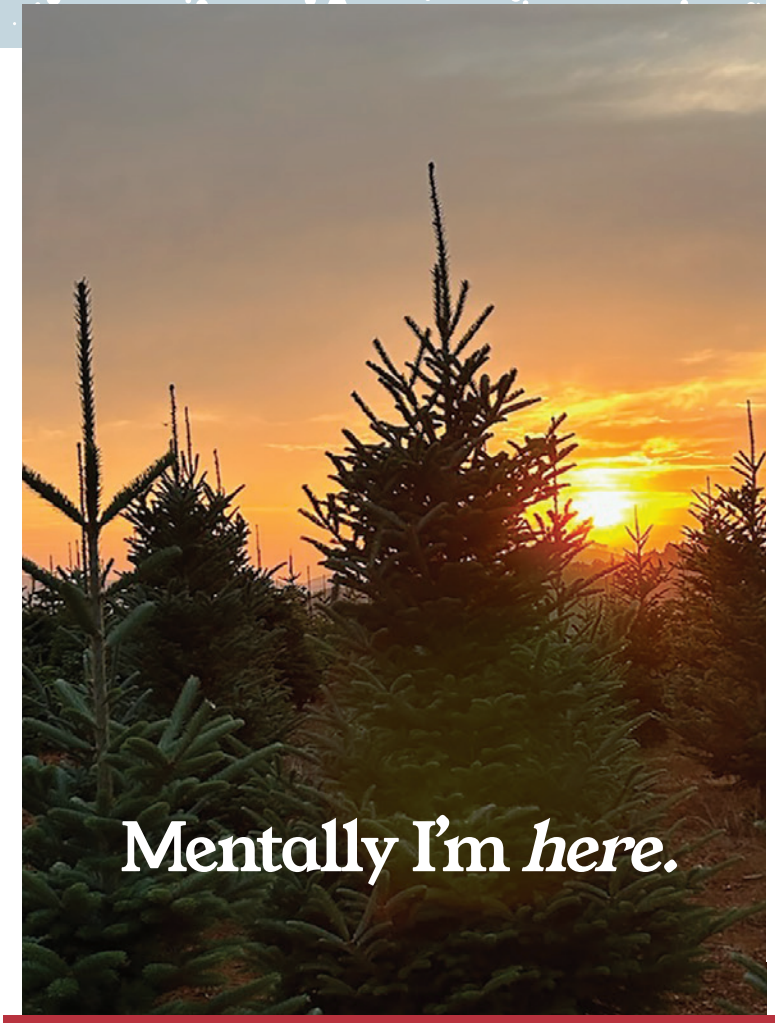
Real Christmas Tree Board
PO Box 77
Howell, MI 48844



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Real
CHRISTMAS
TREE BOARD

RCTB 2024 Promotion and Messaging Campaign

DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING

The Real Christmas Tree Board 2024 Consumer Survey, which measured the purchase intent of 1,500 adults ages 21 – 54 prior to the start of the holiday season, provides critical data used to inform Real Christmas Tree Board messaging, develop data-driven marketing strategies and define specific key performance indicators that measure the effectiveness of RCTB's marketing programs. Survey respondents, in fact, indicated that RCTB messaging does play a role in purchase decisions with consumers' likelihood of purchasing a real Christmas tree jumping seven percentage points (to 43%) after being exposed to RCTB messaging. And the messages that resonate most with consumers? Joy, scent and sustainability. Further, messages that connect the scent of a Christmas tree to holidays and highlight environmental benefits were most impactful in purchasing decisions.

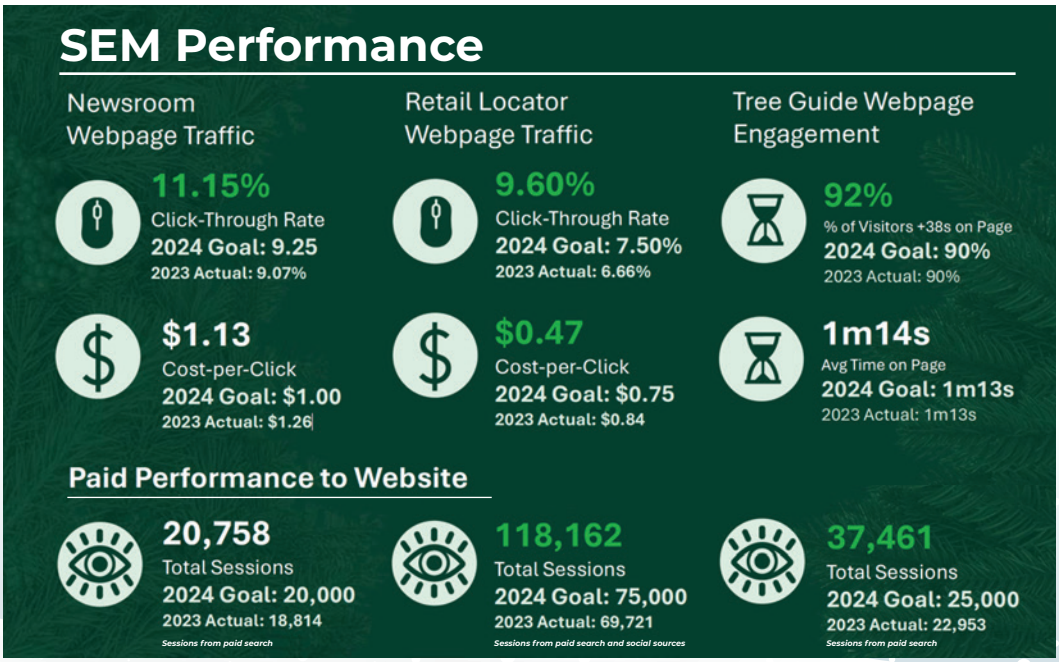
Following is a summary of RCTB's data-driven efforts to increase purchase intent among targeted audiences, maintain RCTB's leadership as the primary resource for real Christmas tree information, and broaden the reach of and engagement with RCTB content.

MARKETING INITIATIVES SHARE KEY MESSAGING WITH TARGETED AUDIENCES

To cost-effectively engage with targeted consumers, RCTB used search engine marketing and mobile ads on favored social media platforms to engage with consumers while they were at home or out and about. RCTB provided relevant and engaging content to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions and locate their nearest real Christmas tree retailer by pairing key messaging with calls-to-action that drove consumers to RCTB's Online Retail Locator and consumer-facing webpages showcasing why they should purchase a real tree, and which variety would best suit their lifestyle.

RCTB continued to emphasize the joy associated with integrating real Christmas trees into the holiday experience as its primary messaging. In keeping with the consumer survey results, marketing efforts showcased the joy of creating new memories while choosing, decorating and enjoying a real tree, while capitalizing on the nostalgia consumers feel when recreating long-standing holiday traditions in their own homes.

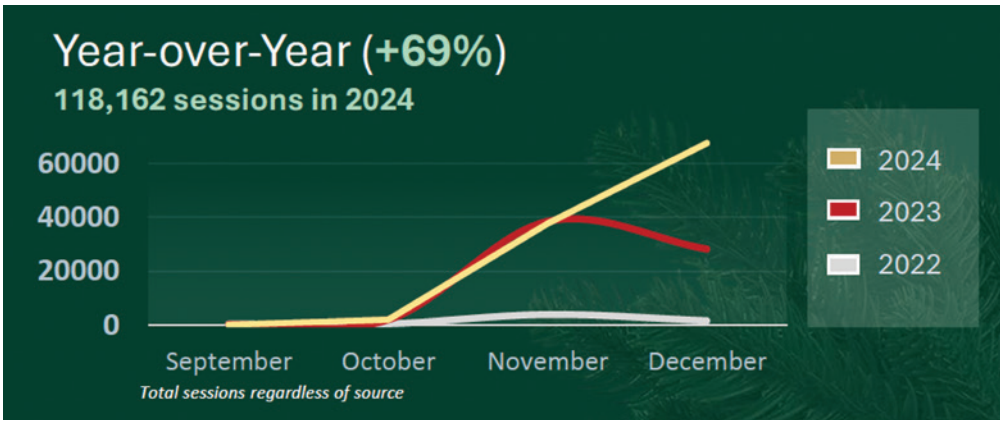
In addition, the survey indicated RCTB's sustainability messaging is gaining traction — with 75% of consumers now reporting that messages about 100% recyclable and biodegradable trees would make them more likely to purchase a real tree. Notably, younger respondents in



Cost-efficient search engine marketing *drives traffic to Retail Locator webpage: 9.6% click-through rate (above the 5% industry standard) at a $0.47 cost-per-click (2024 goal: $0.75) for a total of 118,162 visits*

Engaging and informative content *on Tree Guide webpage: 37,461 total sessions (2024 goal: 25,000) with 92% of visitors staying on the page for at least 38 seconds (industry standard to measure engagement) and an average 1 minute 14 seconds spent on the page*

RCTB's New Sustainability Icon



RCTB exceeded its goal of 75,000 visits *to the online retail locator and sustained (and grew) consumer interest in the locator throughout the holiday season.*

their 20s and 30s were more likely to think about the environmental impact of choosing a real tree. To capitalize on this growing messaging opportunity, RCTB created a new icon (see above) touting that real Christmas trees are 100% recyclable and 100% biodegradable that could be used on Christmas tree tags, point of sale promotions, websites and social media posts.

Further, to engage with this targeted audience, RCTB launched Virtual Farm Tours of real Christmas tree farms to engage educators, young students and parents prior to the start of the holiday-tree purchasing season. Both virtual tours — one in Michigan and the other in Oregon — showcased how trees are grown, harvested and trimmed to the perfect Christmas tree shape while touching on sustainability messaging that resonates with parents and teachers in this demographic.

Streaming audio and video channels are another cost-effective means of reaching RCTB's targeted consumers and engaging with them while they prepare for the holidays. To that end, RCTB became a sponsor of the #1 Christmas Podcast — Christmas Countdown. In the first of two episodes sponsored by RCTB, the RCTB logo was featured in the introduction and RCTB received a generous 11-minute showcase (having sponsored a 2–3-minute segment) in the YouTube video. The hosts also showcased one of RCTB's primary messages on Instagram by sharing that their number one reason for choosing a real Christmas tree is its fresh scent.

Results from the *2024 Consumer Survey* also indicate that RCTB messaging resonates differently across age groups. By utilizing a variety of social media platforms, RCTB can engage with consumers on platforms such as TikTok, which skew toward younger consumers, and Meta, which resonates with older consumers, and adjust the messaging accordingly. To broaden its reach, RCTB partners with trusted influencers who share RCTB messaging with their followers. To ensure RCTB remains the go-to resource for real Christmas tree content and information, RCTB secured 2,070 media placements

VIRTUAL FARM TOURS

- 851 classrooms in 44 states participated in the live event, with an additional 1,855 YouTube views of the tour recordings.
- 98% of viewers reported being "very or somewhat interested" in watching another RCTB field trip
- 93% of viewers were "very or somewhat interested" in visiting the RCTB website

Paid Social
(Meta & TikTok)

23M
Total Impressions

2024 Goal: 20M
2023 Actual: 14.9M

RCTB's paid social placements exceeded expectations *with 23 million impressions for a $0.72 cost-per-click (coming in under the goal of $0.75 cost-per-click)*

6.3M+
Total Impressions

4.5M+
Total Plays

RCTB's influencer partners garnered more than 6.3 million impressions. *Videos also were popular with consumers, securing more than 4.5 million plays.*

showcasing real Christmas trees in targeted media outlets such as Real Simple, USA Today, CBS News, CNBC and Good Morning America. RCTB's online newsroom also secured 20,758 visits, exceeding its goal of 20,000.

SUPPORTING GROWER OPERATIONS

RCTB also plays a role in helping growers ease the pressure of their day-to-day responsibilities by providing communication, reporting and research tools that can assist their productivity and minimize operational tasks. For example, to help East Coast growers impacted by drought RCTB prepared a communications guide with talking points helpful when addressing customers and the media. To drive consumers to real Christmas tree retailers, RCTB continues to promote the Online Retail Locator that allows consumers to search for retailers by location and filter results by preferred retailer type. Further, RCTB's popular online Tree Guide provides growers and retailers with a digital tool that helps consumers select their tree. In 2024, the guide secured 37,461 sessions, exceeding the set goal of 25,000. RCTB plans to expand the guide based on grower feedback and current consumer purchasing trends.

To streamline record-keeping and ensure growers have easy access to their farm's reporting and payment history, RCTB developed an online grower portal that launched in December. The portal also provides growers with a safe and simple means of paying assessments online and filing exemptions.

Optimizing Grower Productivity

RCTB invests in webinars and research aimed at addressing growers' greatest challenges. This year, in partnership with Michigan State University, RCTB hosted webinars concerning deer management and repellents, how to effectively use RCTB marketing resources, weed control, the Christmas tree genome project and Elongate Hemlock Scale.

In addition, RCTB's Research Committee, comprised of diverse growers from across the U.S., invested $235,000 in the following research projects for 2023-24.

North Carolina State University's Christmas Tree Genetics Program worked on identifying genomic resources to **develop novel pest management tools for Phytophthora root rot and Elongate Hemlock Scale** — two major biotic threats. By developing genomic resources, the researchers hope to mitigate the current labor-intensive pest management efforts that are not viable for large-scale production. The goal is to develop a comprehensive set of transcripts/genes for the most significant Christmas tree pests using Fraser fir and adapt those strategies for other Christmas tree species.

Damage from winter deer browse and fall buck rubbing has increased on Christmas tree farms. To address this challenge, **researchers conducted controlled side-by-side comparisons of the lanolin based No-Does and sheep-fat-based Trico repellents.** The lanolin-based formulation can easily and legally be manufactured for on-farm use by growers. In addition, this formulation is inexpensive and less toxic. This project will help determine the efficacy of using the lanolin-based product.

Mississippi State University evaluated the viability of several cultivars of Leyland cypress grown within the Gulf Coast region to **develop cultivars that require less fertilizer, less irrigation, and are more pest and disease resistant.** Researchers conducted in-field trials to evaluate the productivity and success of the Leyland cypress across a variety of growing conditions. This project aims to establish and evaluate the growth and performance of cuttings through a greenhouse study, facilitating an investigation into sustainable propagation methods that will improve Christmas tree production.

Michigan State University researchers continued working with growers to expand on-going research to **reduce coning impacts on Fraser fir and improve understanding of factors controlling coning in Fraser fir and other true firs.** The project seeks to operationalize post-emergent cone control, reduce cone formation via plant growth regulators, select Fraser fir for delayed coning trees and better understand control of coning in true fir Christmas tree species.

Mortality of seedlings and transplants continues to be a major concern when establishing conifers for Christmas trees. To improve tree establishment, Michigan State University researchers established field plots with cooperating nurseries to **investigate two approaches to improving plantation establishment: managing seedling quality and cultural treatments at planting.** The project examined a range of seedlings and tracked their survival and growth and investigated the effects of below-ground treatments and above-ground treatment on growth and survival of Fraser fir seedlings.

The University of California-Davis and the North Carolina State University Christmas Tree Genetics Program worked on developing genomic resources for accelerating precision breeding of resistance and consumer-preferred quality traits in fir. The project aims to identify advanced breeding strategies to generate trees that can withstand future climate pressures, while meeting consumer preferences. The project will identify key genes that play critical roles in conifer pest and pathogen defenses, deter browsing deer, and define tree aroma characteristics. The project will **generate a detailed knowledge of tree stress-resistance mechanisms and provide gene targets for precision breeding to mitigate the impacts of climate change on Christmas tree production and improve productivity and profitability** for growers.

Management of Phytophthora root rot in highly susceptible species of Christmas trees, such as noble and Fraser fir, is a major challenge for growers. Despite the availability of select chemical alternatives and cultural control methods, practical options for reducing PRR losses in Christmas tree farms are scarce, and their utilization may be limited by expense or feasibility of execution. To **optimize and streamline the screening process of other firs with resistance to PRR, Washington State University assessed the possibility of inoculating seedlings using a Peristaltic Dispensing Pump** to significantly reduce the time required to produce inoculum and inoculate seedlings.

www.realchristmastreeboard.org

Meet the Board:

Eastern Representatives:
Chuck Berry, Georgia
Reneé Beutell, North Carolina
Charles Fowler, North Carolina
Gary Thomas, Maryland

Central Representatives:
Derek Ahl, Wisconsin
Jane Neubauer, Ohio

Western Representatives
Chris Aldrich, Washington
JoLynn Stroda, Oregon
Mike Jones, Oregon
Jan Hupp, Oregon
Kari Puffer, Oregon

Importer Representative
Ryan Tyce, Ontario, Canada

Meet the Staff

The RCTB is managed by Gray Management, LLC:

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Beth Kohn – BAK Bookkeeping - Bookkeeper

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2023-2024 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 seventh audit of RCTB/CTPB was completed in October of 2024 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 2023-2024 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, 2024 and 2023

Revenue:	2024	2023
Assessments	$1,544,754	$1,573,091
Donations	1,393	2,760
Interest Income	19,283	16,660
Total Revenue	$1,565,430	$1,592,511
Expenses:		
Promotion Committee	$917,722	$950,733
Research Committee	235,000	292,716
Industry Relations Committee	29,835	27,716
Special Projects		36,000
Professional Services	241,998	230,746
Education	7,000	7,000
Board Meetings	34,804	19,151
Compliance Auditing	45,040	46,780
Bank Fees	3,741	5,027
Insurance	4,000	2,116
Office Expenses	4,594	4,023
Other Administrative Costs	2,990	5,543
USDA Fees	96,019	68,420
Total Expenses	$1,622,743	$1,695,971
Change in unrestricted net assets	($57,313)	($103,460)
Net assets without donor restrictions, beginning of year	1,470,625	1,574,085
Net assets without donor restrictions, end of year	$1,413,312	$1,470,625

STATEMENTS OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS – MODIFIED CASH BASIS
July 31, 2024 and 2023

ASSETS

Assets:	2024	2023
Current Assets:		
Operating Cash	$1,460,477	$1,656,466
Cash Reserves	204,669	204,668
Total Assets	$1,665,146	$1,861,134

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities:		
Accrued Expenses	$251,834	$390,509
Net Assets without donor restrictions:		
Designated by the Board for cash reserves:		
Reserve for future projects	87,318	87,318
Reserve for Research	117,351	117,350
Undesignated	1,208,643	1,265,957
Total Net Assets	$1,413,312	$1,470,625
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	$1,665,146	$1,861,134

TREES FOR TROOPS

For the 8th year, the Real Christmas Tree Board proudly continued its sponsorship of the Christmas Spirit Foundation's Trees for Troops initiative, a non-profit that provides free, farm-grown Christmas trees to U.S. military members and their families — bringing the feeling of home to those who sacrifice so much.