

**REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD**  
**BOARD MEETING**  
August 21, 2025

Via Video Conference

**Welcome, and Roll Call:** Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. Eastern time.

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

**Board Members Not in Attendance:** Mike Jones and Kari Puffer

**USDA Representative in Attendance:** George Webster

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

**Agenda**

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to approve the agenda as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Meeting Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve the July 24, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Chairman's Report** – Chuck Berry reported.

- Berry thanked Board members for attending the Michigan State Association meeting and Board members who presented at various State Association meetings.

**Committee Reports**

**Finance Committee** – Marsha Gray presented in Mike Jones' absence.

- a. **July 2025 Financials** – Gray provided the Board with a detailed breakdown of the July 2025 financials.
  - Question was raised if funds need to be allocated in next year's budget for Stripe and bank fees? Gray shared that she will be reaching out to the bookkeeper to see if the Stripe fees will come out of the bank fees or be broken out individually.
  - Question was raised about Fishhook Development (online payment portal) and the yearly maintenance fee. Gray shared that she recently received a quote and will share it with the Board via email following the meeting.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to accept the July 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **Appointment of Auditor** – Gray shared that Propp Christensen Caniglia, LLP, has submitted their letter of engagement to the Finance Committee. A slight increase in fee from the previous year – the estimate for a new audit is \$8,100 to \$9,200.

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve engaging Propp Christensen Cangiglia, LLP, to audit the RCTB's financial records for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Research Committee** – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Update** – Knudson shared that the research contracts have been written and approved by USDA.
- b. **September Webinars** – Knudson shared that in September, the RCTB will host two webinars:
  - o **September 16, 2025**, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern. Dr. Bert Cregg, from Michigan State University, will present Transplant quality and seedling survival during planting.
  - o **September 23, 2025**, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern. John Armato with Armato Barber Communications Consulting and Coaching will present on Intentional Communications: How to make the most of the moment.

**Industry Relations Committee** – Chris Aldrich reported.

- a. **Update** – Aldrich thanked Board members who worked the booth at the Michigan State Association meeting. Aldrich shared that he attended the Pacific Northwest Association meeting.
- Marsha Gray and Board members shared their feedback on State Association meetings that they presented at and provided the Board with feedback that they have received while in attendance. Jane Neubauer shared that it would be great to provide a breakdown to the industry to highlight what NCTA and RCTB do and the differences between the organizations.
- Board members discussed the upcoming referendum and the possibility of requesting a ballot directly from the USDA.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to direct Marsha Gray to draft a letter to USDA, requesting information on anyone who applies for a ballot through the USDA. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Governance Committee** – Charles Fowler presented.

- a. **Order Changes** – George Webster shared that USDA will continue to keep the Board posted on the final decision and the next steps on the Order.

**Compliance Committee** – Derek Ahl had nothing new to report.

**Promotion Committee** – Jane Neubauer reported.

- a. **Update of Campaign** – Neubauer shared an update on all the current moving projects for the current campaign, touching on:
  - o The current grower survey, which was emailed out on Monday, August 18.
  - o The consumer survey results will be available next month, in September.
  - o FleishmanHillard is reaching out to the media.
  - o First-time buyers' guide is in the works.
  - o sweepstakes to collect a variety of images and videos of real people and their real Christmas experience.
- Neubauer thanked Marsha Gray for advocating for the RCTB and spending their money in the best way possible.
- b. **Virtual Farm Tours** – JoLynn Stroda reported that the Committee is looking for a grower in the Pacific Northwest and the eastern or central time zones for the next two Virtual Farm Tours. By the next Board meeting in September, Stroda hopes to have secured two farms for tours, which will take place in November, pre-Thanksgiving.

**Management Staff Update** – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Independent Economic Evaluation** - Gray shared that Timothy Richards has completed the evaluation, and it has been submitted to USDA for their final approval. Once approved, it will be shared with the Board and published in the e-newsletter.

**New Business:** No new items.

**USDA** – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status - Non-responding Importer** -Webster shared that he has a meeting with Leadership tomorrow, August 22. It was requested by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) to look at a translation service for the correspondence to ensure the Importer can understand it.
- b. **Status – Producer Collection Issue** - Webster shared that the initial step is for the Director's Office to send a letter. If no response is received, USDA will move the case forward to the Office of General Counsel.
- Question was asked about the producer response timeframe. Webster shared that in the first letter, a response is requested within ten days after signed receipt. If there is no response, a second letter is sent with a 10-day response time. If there is no response to the second letter, a package is submitted to the Office of General Counsel for further action.

**For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:** nothing new to report.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- a. **Future Meeting Schedule** - The RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, September 18, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.
- b. **Limited Agenda Meeting** - The RCTB will have a limited agenda meeting in late September or early October to approve the Finance Audit.

**Adjourn:**

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Jolynn Stroda  
Secretary