

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
February 18, 2026

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, Jan Hupp, Jane Neubauer, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich, Ryan Tyce, JoLynn Stroda, Gary Thomas, Scott Powell, Sam Cartner

Board Members not in Attendance: Sophia Stajduhar, Renee Beutell

USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster

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

Guests in Attendance: David Cartner, Adam Cowart, Travis Lejune, Matt Bowmen, Josh Dawson

Agenda

Chris Aldrich requested the addition of C. Tool Kit under the Industry Relations Committee.

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to approve the agenda as corrected.

MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes:

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to approve the January 15, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report – Chuck Berry reported.

- Berry and Marsha Gray thanked Board members who have presented at State Association meetings.

Committee Reports

Finance – JoLynn Stroda reported.

- a. **January 2026 Financials:** Stroda provided a detailed overview of the January 2026 financials.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by Jan Hupp to accept the January 2026 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee - Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Webinar Series Results** – Knudson shared with the Board, results from the recent Webinar series, stating that 315 people registered for the January series, which included representation from 32 US States, and 5 Canadian provinces. The next two webinars will take place in September - dates and topics to be announced.
- b. **Research Interest Survey** – Knudson shared that the survey is now available on the Research Page of the .org (realchristmastreeboard.org) website, and every grower is encouraged to complete the survey to share what type of pests or other production issues they are experiencing. Marsha Gray shared that this information was announced in the February 18th e-newsletter.
- c. **International Research Meeting** – will be held next in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, on June 7-12, 2026. Many of the international and national researchers will be present. Knudson will update as more information becomes available.

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich Reported.

- a. **Winter Meeting Presentation Schedule** – Marsha Gray shared the upcoming winter meeting

- schedule and encouraged all Board members to be visible at local State Association meetings.
- Pacific Northwest – February 20th – Gray will present in-person.
 - North Carolina – February 20th - Chuck Berry, Cyndi Knudson, Renee Beutell, and Sam Cartner will attend the meeting.
 - Minnesota – February 20th – Gray will be presenting via Zoom.
 - Ohio – February 20th - Jane Neubauer will present in person.
 - Michigan - February 27th – Gray will be presenting in person.
 - Quebec – February 27th – Gray will provide a pre-recorded video to Quebec, as they are concerned with the technology via Zoom.
 - Connecticut – March 7th – Gray will be presenting via Zoom.
 - Pennsylvania will host a short course, and Gray will be presenting via Zoom.
- b. **Annual Report** – Gray shared that Michelle Rothmeyer has completed writing the first draft of the 2025 Annual Report. It is currently in review and should be sent to the printer within the next couple of weeks.
 - c. **Tool Kit** – Aldrich would like to assemble a mini electronic tool kit that would engage the industry, give them specific channels, and key messages.
 - Board members discussed different ideas to connect with producers.

Promotion Committee – Kari Puffer reported.

- a. **Presentation by FleishmanHillard Team** – Marsha Gray welcomed FleishmanHillard. Jake Ferguson introduced the FH Team: Emma Stevens, Shelly Kessen, Carli Million, and Tyler Andersen, who provided an overview of their agency’s work for the 2025 season and entertained questions from the Board.

After their presentation, Jake Ferguson, Emma Stevens, Shelly Kessen, Carli Million, and Tyler Andersen left the meeting.

- a. **Possible Partnership with NCTA on Retail Locator** - Marsha Gray shared that the National Christmas Tree Association is considering hosting the RCTB Retail Locator on their website if agreeable with RCTB. It would be the identical locator that we host on the .com website (realchristmastreeboard.com). The NCTA is reviewing the cost of hosting and uploading the locator to their site, as they would be responsible for the additional fees.

Governance Committee – Jane Neubauer Reported.

- a. **Update on Recommended Changes to the Order** – George Webster shared that they are awaiting the publishing date. The language is all set, just waiting for it to be published. Webster will update the Board when the publication date is set.
- b. **Referendum** – George Webster shared that a referendum notice will be published in the Federal Register at least 30 days prior to the referendum. The tentative referendum dates are May 4th through May 15th. The ballots will be mailed via USPS at the end of April. Producers will be able to submit their ballot electronically with the unique number provided in their ballot packet.

Compliance Committee – Jan Hupp Reported.

- Hupp reported that he, Chuck Berry, Derek Ahl, and Marsha Gray met last week and reviewed the Compliance budget and discussed various ideas on how they would like to spend the budget. Hupp recommended working to connect with larger non-compliant/under-reporting producers.

Management Staff Updated - Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** – As of February 17, 2026, we have received 901 reports through the lockbox and online portal and \$873,780.30 in assessments, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs for \$185,665.30, totaling \$1,059,445.60.

- Question was raised as to why Canadian provinces are not identified in the Import line and itemized as the US States. Marsha Gray shared that there is no easy way to break it out. When RCTB receives the report from US Customs, it states the port of entry, not the location where the trees were harvested.

New Business:

- a. **Virtual Farm Trip Discussion** – JoLynn Stroda and Marsha Gray shared data results received from the completed five virtual farm tours, and the positive feedback received from those watching, and the partnership with Shiftology. These tours were primarily targeted to pre-K through fifth grade. All credits with Shiftology have been used. The committee would like to suggest funding an additional five farm tours for \$19,000. Gray shared that the Promotion Committee budget should come in under budget for the 2025 campaign, pending the final bill from FleishmanHillard, and could accommodate the \$19,000 expense.

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to approve a contract with Shiftology for five new virtual farm tours not to exceed \$19,000. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **Industry Data Review** – Jane Neubauer and Marsha Gray shared that this is a topic that comes up a lot. Neubauer is trying to quantify the market size to develop a methodology for analyzing trends. Neubauer has agreed to start looking into all existing data sources.

USDA – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status – Non-Responding Importer** – Webster shared that they are still waiting on whether an Importer can be sent to the Treasury Department. Since it is a Canadian Importer, it is unclear whether the Treasury would have the same authority over a non-US company.
- b. **Status – Non-Responding Domestic Producer** – Webster shared that if no response is received by February 27th, which is 60 days following the delivery of the letter, the debt will be sent to the Treasury Department to pursue.
- c. **Status – Recommended Order Changes** – Webster reported on the Order Changes under the Governance Committee report.

For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:

- Chuck Berry wished those traveling to State Association meetings safe travels.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Next Meeting** - The RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.
- b. **Summer In-Person Meeting** – Will be held near Madison, Wisconsin, on August 6th in conjunction with the National Christmas Tree Association meeting. Board members should plan to arrive on Wednesday, August 5, in time for a group dinner.

Adjourn:

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

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 1:20 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan Tyce
Secretary