

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
March 19, 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, Jane Neubauer, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich, Ryan Tyce, JoLynn Stroda, Gary Thomas, Scott Powell, Sam Cartner, Sophia Stajduhar, Renee Beutell

Board Members not in Attendance: Jan Hupp

USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster

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

Guests in Attendance: David Cartner, Jerry Moody, Blake Williams, Will Kohlway

Agenda

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to approve the agenda as presented.
MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes:

It was **MOVED** by Scott Powell and **SECONDED** by Sam Cartner to approve the February 18, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report – Chuck Berry reported.

- **Referendum** - Berry noted that the referendum is tentatively scheduled for the beginning of May.
- **Nominations** - Berry shared that there are four open seats: two Eastern, one Western, and one Central. USDA requires two names per open seat. All nominations must be submitted by June 1st

Committee Reports

Finance – JoLynn Stroda reported.

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

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Sophia Stajduhar to accept the February 2026 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Research Interest Survey** – Knudson shared that the survey is now available on the Research Page of the .org (realchristmastreeboard.org) website and was shared in the most recent e-newsletter.
- b. **International Christmas Tree Research Meeting** – Knudson shared that the meeting will be held in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, on June 8-11, 2026. Many international and US researchers will be present. Knudson estimates her cost to attend at roughly \$2,200. Marsha Gray shared that \$1,000 is available in the Research budget and that \$1,200 can be drawn from the Research Reserve Funds.

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to fund Cyndi Knudson's attendance at the International Research Meeting for \$2,200. \$1,000 from leftover Research funds, and \$1,200 from the Research Reserve. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich Reported.

- a. **Annual Report** – Gray shared that Michelle Rothmeyer has completed writing the 2025 Annual Report. It is currently being reviewed by Marsha Gray and will soon be sent to the designer,

followed by the printer. It will be mailed in early April.

- Aldrich personally created an RCTB toolkit that he will share with Board members.
- The Wisconsin Association meeting in August offered the RCTB a booth space at the trade show.

Governance Committee – Jane Neubauer Reported.

- a. **Board Nominations** – Neubauer restated that there are four open seats: two Eastern, one Western, and one Central. Chuck Berry, Jane Neubauer, and Renee Beutell will term out. JoLynn Stroda has an additional term to serve, if she chooses to run again. All nominations must be submitted by June 1st.

Compliance Committee – Marsha Gray reported.

- Gray shared that five farms were selected and received a notice for audit. Jim Lantz will contact each farm to schedule their in-person audit. Gray shared a detailed overview of the audit process.
- A question was raised about whether the Welcome letter and reporting form is also available in Spanish-language translation. Gray agreed to creating a Spanish-language version of the letter and adding a line at the top of the English letter notifying the recipient that the Spanish-language version is available. Board members discussed and agreed to the addition.
- Gray will email Board members the welcome letter/introductory letter that Jamie Hanselman uses for newly identified growers.

Promotion Committee – Kari Puffer reported.

- a. **Feedback from Promotion Committee** – Puffer shared that the Promotion Committee met in February and reviewed and discussed the results from the 2025 campaign. The Committee was very pleased with the results and the work of FleishmanHillard.
- b. **Appointment of Agency Partner** – Puffer recommended that the Board approve FleishmanHillard for the 2026 campaign.

It was **MOVED** by Kari Puffer and **SECONDED** by Jane Neubauer to renew the contract with FleishmanHillard for the 2026 campaign. **MOTION APPROVED**

- Jane Neubauer shared that the Promotion Committee is looking for a couple of individuals to join the committee, particularly those with marketing, digital, or social media experience.
- A question was raised whether the post-campaign survey data provided by FleishmanHillard could be shared outside of the Board. Marsha Gray responded that it is entirely possible, however there may be several market strategy items that we would remove first.

Management Staff Updated - Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the report. As of March 18, 2026, we have received 1,138 reports through the lockbox, online portal, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs, totaling \$1,269,314.85. Gray also reported that 325 producers have paid via the ACH process, and many more are doing their reporting online and sending a check afterward.

New Business:

- a. **Virtual Farm Trip Discussion** - JoLynn Stroda shared that they are in the process of scheduling an Arbor Day tour to show the start of Christmas trees, which will be held at Northern Pines Nursery/Dutchman Tree Farms. Once the Arbor Day tour date is confirmed, they will begin scheduling two Christmas tree harvesting tours for November. Gray shared that the contract with Shiftology has been signed.
- b. **Industry Data Review Update** – Jane Neubauer shared that the effort is to collaborate with NCTA to solidify what the market size is, so that they can be one voice on what is happening in the industry. Neubauer, Rick Dungey with NCTA, and Marsha Gray met to discuss a proposal submitted

by Timothy Richards, who produces the RCTB Independent Evaluation and assists NCTA in interpreting the results of their Harris Poll. A question was asked if Research funding could be available for data review. Marsha Gray shared that Research funds could be used if the Board chooses to do so.

USDA – George Webster reported.

- a. **Referendum** – 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. As of Monday, the Office of General Counsel sent over the initial feedback on the notice. Webster accepted their edits, as they were simple changes. To hit the 30-day window, the notice would need to be published by Friday, April 3rd. If the date is not hit, the referendum would be pushed back to support the 30-day Federal Register window.
- Webster shared the detailed process in the event that the referendum should fail. In the RCTB Order, Sections 1214.82 and 1214.83 outline the requirements and process of the referendum.
- b. **Status – Non-Responding Importer** – Webster shared that he received feedback on whether an Importer could be referred to the Treasury Department. Initial feedback indicates that the Treasury Department is less effective with Foreign Companies - they want to wait and see how the process with the Domestic non-responder goes first.
- c. **Status – Non-Responding Domestic Producer** – Webster shared that the official referral notice, and package of the producer's information were submitted to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which is another agency within USDA. They have provided Webster with the pre-approved legal template to complete. Currently, awaiting a response to see if there are any concerns or questions before it is submitted to the Treasurer's office.
- d. **Status – Order Posted to Federal Register** – Webster shared that the final rule was published and goes into effect on April 8th.

For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:

- Scott Powell shared with the Board a recap of items discussed at the National Christmas Tree Association's meeting.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Next Meeting** - RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 16, 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 Renee Beutell to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:31 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan Tyce
Secretary