REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
June 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, Jane Neubauer, Chris Aldrich, Ryan Tyce, JoLynn Stroda, Gary Thomas, Scott Powell, Sam Cartner, Sophia Stajduhar, Jan Hupp, Kari Puffer
Board Members not in Attendance: Renee Beutell
USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster
Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

Agenda
Requested to move the Governance Committee report following the Finance Committee report.
It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to approve the agenda as corrected.
MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes:
It was **MOVED** by Kari Puffer and **SECONDED** by Sam Cartner to approve the May 21, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report – Chuck Berry reported.
Chuck Berry thanked Gary Thomas for chairing the Board meeting in May. Berry also thanked the Board for their hard work and dedication leading up to the referendum.

Committee Reports

Finance – JoLynn Stroda reported.

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

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

Governance Committee – Jane Neubauer Reported.

a. **Board Nominations** – The following nominees have been received: Central: Bev Keener, John Krueger and Mike Stoffel; Western: Elaine DeGeorge and JoLynn Stroda; and Eastern: Jessie Davis, Lindsay Eshelman, Ray Gilbert, Carrie McClain, and Peter Sweet. Ballots were mailed on Monday, June 15th and are due July 15th.
b. **Approve revised Bylaws** – Neubauer shared that the Board received the recommended revisions to the Bylaws via email prior to the meeting.

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to approve the revised Bylaws as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

c. **Approve revised Policies** – Neubauer shared that the Board received the recommended revisions to the Policies via email prior to the meeting.

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Sophia Stajduhar to approve the revised Policies as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Cyndi Knudson reported.

a. **Research Request for Proposals** – Knudson shared the RFP was announced, and proposals are due back on or before July 3, 2026. The Research Committee will make their selections and present their recommendations at the in-person Board meeting in August.
b. **International Christmas Tree Research Meeting Report** – Knudson shared that the International Christmas Tree Research meeting was a very good, productive meeting, with representation from the United States, Germany, Denmark, South Africa, and Canada. Two good days of farm tours and the Upper Mountain Research Station.

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich reported.

a. **Contract with Gingerroot, LLC.** – Marsha Gray shared that the work of Gingerroot, Michelle Rothmeyer, has been effective. Rothmeyer's current contract includes: producing two e-newsletters per month, writing four industry articles per year, creating twelve social media posts, and providing content for the annual report. The Industry Relations Committee would like to continue the contract with Rothmeyer, with a few revisions: producing fourteen e-newsletters annually, four industry articles, up to four industry social posts, an annual report, and reviewing industry communications. Gray Management will reduce their contract by $4,000, which will be applied to the Industry Relations Committee line item to offset a portion of the contract cost.

It was **MOVED** by Scott Powell and **SECONDED** by Jan Hupp to approve a contract with Gingerroot, LLC, as outlined for $9,500. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Compliance Committee – Jan Hupp reported.

- Hupp shared that the auditor, Jim Lantz, is struggling to connect with several of the audit candidates. Waiting for the referendum results before pushing forward.

a. **Contract with Jason Hanselman** – The committee recommends $50 per hour with a maximum of $5,000 per year.
b. **Contract with Jamie Hanselman** – The committee recommends $50 per hour with a maximum of $20,000 per year.

It was **MOVED** by Kari Puffer and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to renew contracts for Jamie Hanselman for a maximum of $20,000 per year, and Jason Hanselman for a maximum of $5,000 per year, totaling $25,000, effective August 1st. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Promotion Committee – Kari Puffer reported.

a. **Planning for 2026 Campaign** – Puffer shared that the Committee has received the proposal and recommendations from FleishmanHillard for the 2026 campaign. The committee met and provided feedback on the presentation. Puffer, Marsha Gray, and Sophia Stajduhar will meet next week to determine the priorities. FleishmanHillard will then provide a scope of work and the associated budget. The scope of work will include:
    - Grower and Consumer surveys
    - Messaging and Media Authority (remains a priority)
    - Owned social, paid search, paid social
    - Industry engagement
    - Influencer partnerships

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Ryan Tyce to approve entering a contract with FleishmanHillard, not to exceed $765,000, to develop and execute the 2026 campaign, including the consumer survey. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- Marsha Gray reminded the board that the $35,000 Research-Market Development budget is also used to fund the FH contract because it includes the Consumer Surveys.

b. **Off-Season Social Posts** – Puffer shared the Committee has been working to assemble off-season social posts; has hired a college student, Alley Taylor, who has agreed to make eight social posts for $200. The Committee will provide content and images for Taylor to select from.

Management Staff Updated - Marsha Gray reported.

a. **Assessment Collection Report** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the report. As of June 17, 2026, we have received 1,178 reports through the lockbox, online portal, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs, totaling $1,288,825.35.

b. **Multi-State Specialty Crop Block Grant** – Gray shared one possible project to submit: developing better sales and harvest data for real Christmas trees. RCTB would potentially partner with NCTA on this project, and Economist Timothy Richards at Arizona State University is interested in participating. Gray mentioned that it has been at a standstill, but will proceed with reaching out directly to Richards, asking him to assemble a plan and provide a dollar amount.

New Business:

a. **Approval of Attorney Retainer** – Marsha Gray shared the retainer letter from Watkinson Miller, PLLC, who serves as the RCTB's legal counsel. Gray shared that the rates for partners, associates, and administrative fees increased by $10 per hour.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by Jan Hupp to approve Watkinson Miller, PLLC, as RCTB's legal counsel. **MOTION APPROVED.**

USDA – George Webster reported.

a. **Referendum Update** – Webster shared that the voting period ended at midnight on June 2nd. USDA will wait three weeks before counting the ballots. The official ballot tabulation will take place on Tuesday, June 23rd. The results will be shared when available, hopefully at the end of next week or early the following week.

- Question was raised about referendum ballots not being received in time. Webster shared that there was a fair amount of industry outreach requesting ballots.

b. **Status – Non-Responding Importer** – Webster stated that they want to wait and see how the process continues with the Domestic non-responder producer, as the Treasury Department is less effective with Foreign Companies.

c. **Status – Non-Responding Domestic Producer** – Webster stated that they remain with the Treasury's office. No update will be provided unless the Treasury's office receives payment or the producer appeals.

For the Good of the Order/Announcement: No new items to report.

Meeting Schedule:

a. **Next Meeting** - RCTB's next meeting will be the Summer in-person meeting held in Verona, Wisconsin, on August 6th in conjunction with the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Association meeting.

b. **Review Schedule for Wisconsin Meeting** – Marsha Gray provided an overview of the schedule. Board members should plan to arrive on Wednesday, August 5, in time for a group dinner. On Thursday, August 5th, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., the Board will hold their in-person meeting.

Adjourn:

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

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:05 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan Tyce
Secretary