


KENTUCKY CHRISTMAS TREE PRODUCTION WORKBOOK

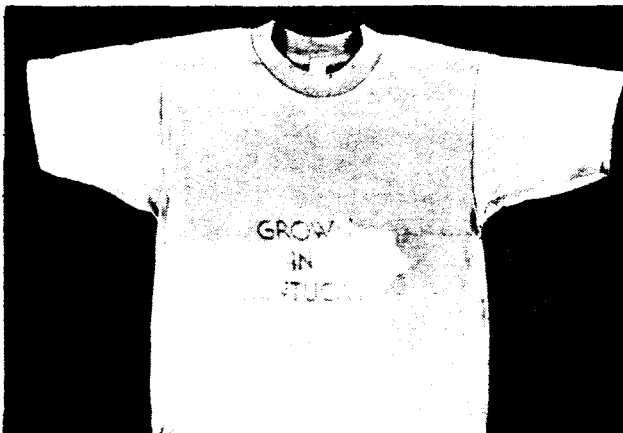


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MARKETING CHRISTMAS TREES

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Marketing real Christmas trees has some unique pluses and minuses. You have a guaranteed annual market, and "built-in obsolescence", that is, fresh-cut Christmas trees have a reasonable life expectancy of only two to four weeks and must be replaced each year. On the plus side is the appeal of Christmas. Perhaps more than any other holiday in American culture, Christmas is steeped in tradition, which for most families includes bringing home the Christmas tree for decorating, thus transforming the house for the holiday season. On the minus side is the popularity of artificial trees. However, just as their manufacturers can harp on the lack of messy needles and recyclability, growers of real Christmas trees can extol the virtues of a fresh conifer smell. They can also emphasize both the family tradition of selecting and purchasing their own unique tree for that year, and can educate consumers that local, quality-grown trees will not drop their needles and will stay fresh and pungent (with some simple care) throughout the holiday season.



Use T-shirts and caps for advertising.



Newspaper articles provide visibility.

Ways to Market

Christmas trees are sold in several basic ways. One of the most common, particularly in Kentucky where most growers have small scale (less than ten acres) plantations, is the "choose-and-cut" operation. Choose-and-cut brings you the greatest cash return because the grower has more control over all aspects of the sale. A successful choose-and-cut operation needs easy accessibility from major and minor highways, as well as easy accessibility within the plantation for tractor and wagon. Steep slopes are often not suitable for such marketing because the soil is often saturated with rain or covered with snow and ice between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when you sell your trees. Other requirements for a choose-and-cut include the grower's commitment to work with the public. The grower sets hours and days for sales and decides whether the consumer or staff cuts the tree. You must have good liability insurance.



Logos and slogans

have to do it all in one season; do different organizations each year!

- Provide a free tree to the mayor's office, the governor's office.
- Hire labor from the local high schools.
- Type up simple brochures and either xerox or mimeograph them for distribution through local stores or banks. Information includes species grown, cost of trees, a map to the farm, hours available and a phone number for further information. Tree safety and/or care instructions can also be included.
- Use a state logo or develop a logo for your own operation and consider tagging your trees so that people learn to depend on your trees as reliable, quality products.
- Join regional Christmas tree growers' associations and advertise in their directories.

Special services when selling your trees may also help with their marketability. Baling the trees, particu-

larly with one of the plastic netting products, makes the trees far easier to transport for individual consumers and for wholesale buyers. Many operations have shaking machines which shake the old dead needles out of the tree. Some growers also provide hot coffee or cider for their customers, which on a raw November or December day can be a strong selling point. Emphasize the family outing aspects of choosing the annual Christmas tree. Really dedicated growers get into wreaths, roping, other conifer green displays, ornaments and specialty baked or canned goods. The spinoffs from selling Christmas trees are virtually endless, limited only by your own imagination.

Planning ahead is still the most crucial aspect of successful Christmas tree marketing. Knowing what your options are, utilizing the media to your advantage, and advertising creatively can make the Christmas tree selling season a most pleasant experience and you can go "ho-ho-ho" all the way to the bank.



Baling a tree with plastic netting

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