

NEWS RELEASE

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N.C. Christmas Tree Crop Looking Good for 2006 Holiday Season

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

After several recent years in which climate concerns had growers worried about their crops, this year looks to be an excellent one for both Christmas tree growers and Christmas tree buyers in North Carolina, as the state's harvest of more than 4.5 million trees will soon be distributed to stores and lots in the state and around the southeastern United States. The wholesale value of this year's harvest will again exceed \$100 million.

"We really couldn't have asked for better weather – I can't think of a year in the last three or four where we've been in better shape," says Jeff Owen, North Carolina State University area extension forestry specialist who is located at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center in Fletcher.

The Fraser fir, which comprises 95 percent of North Carolina's Christmas tree crop, thrives in cooler, moderate weather, which the mountains had plenty of this year. Both droughts and excessive rain can wreak havoc on Fraser firs, neither of which dominated weather patterns in 2006. "The weather means that the color and quality of the trees being harvested should be excellent," Owen says.

Tree buyers can expect retail prices to be about the same as last year, averaging from \$5-\$8 per foot. Growers have already begun harvesting the trees, which will be arriving at retailers in time for Thanksgiving. Christmas tree farmers take great pains to cut, store and ship their trees in ways that preserve freshness for the customer, Owen adds.

Buyers who want to find a really fresh tree can perform a few simple tests as they shop. "The needles should be flexible, not stiff and dry," Owen says. "The stems of twigs should look smooth, not wrinkled. The foliage on fresh trees will feel colder to the touch than on a dry tree given the same shade conditions. Shake the tree thoroughly before bringing it into the home to remove old needles and odds and ends that may have lodged on lower branches. Finally, make sure you get a fresh cut taken off the base of the tree you buy, and keep the tree in plenty of water."

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