

WORKING WITH YOUR GROWER FOR INCREASED \$ SALES

Growers and retailers share a mutually dependent relationship as they each work to provide consumers with high quality Christmas trees. Retailers depend on growers for fresh trees of the quality and grade they paid for. Growers depend on retailers to maintain tree quality until the trees are sold with the hope that satisfied customers will come back next year. If consumers have positive experiences both on the retail lot and with the product, it translates into increased sales for all of us. If sales are good, the retailer and grower will, in all likelihood, develop a long-term relationship. There are a number of ways we can work together to make that relationship more profitable.

Just like any other important relationship, communication is key. Both parties should be clear about their expectations and the details that need to be planned. Numbers of trees by grade and size, delivery dates, transportation, deposit and full payment dates all need to be spelled out. It doesn't hurt to have it in writing or even formalized as a contract. Be sure to talk about contingencies that could arise such as winter weather or transportation problems. If you can help it, don't wait until the middle of harvest season when growers are already in crisis management to change your order. Planning is so much easier if it is done ahead of time. A farm visit can give you a chance to talk through a lot of this and see the trees in person.

Growers know their product. Rely on them for good educational information about the trees they grow and how to keep them fresh. Most will tell you to keep the trees in the shade and watered. Many will encourage you to order your trees in multiple deliveries so that they can cut them later and store them on the farm in cool mountain conditions longer. Most growers have connections with trucking firms that can get the trees to you in the freshest condition. Many growers operate or have operated retail lots, so they know a lot about that end of the business too.

Retailers have a unique connection to the consumer. You know what they bought. Surveys sponsored by the National Christmas Tree Association tell us that consumers want convenience, less mess, less weight, a product that holds up well (is fresh), and one that is environmentally friendly. If you are worth your salt as a retailer, you heard their requests, their complaints, and know who they are. Use a written survey or card, a suggestion box, or an informal exit interview to find out what customers really think. Ask about tree quality, freshness, tree species mix, customer service, or other needs that they have. Share this information with your grower so that he can also adjust his practices to meet your customers needs. The whole point is to find out what will make your customers come back to your lot year after year.

For most customers, the closest they come to a Christmas tree farm is the row of trees on your retail lot. Give them the best possible experience. For some that will mean convenience. For others, make it feel like a traditional Christmas. For all of them, make sure the real tree you sell them is in the best possible condition. Shake your trees to dislodge needles that naturally shed each fall. This can be done on the farm or at the lot. Use tree bags or netting so customers won't have to vacuum their vehicle or their house. Be sure to make a fresh cut on that tree trunk before it leaves the lot. Do what it takes to make the Christmas tree buying experience exciting, convenient, and full of tradition.

Always remember, Christmas tree growers are depending on you and your employees to represent them favorably to the individuals who buy your (and their) trees.

Points to Discuss With Your Grower

Tree numbers by size & grade

- Height standards?
- Grade standards?
- Presence of handles?

Other products

- Wreaths, roping
- B & B trees

Written contract

- Delivered quality?
- Retail tree care?
- Death of either party?
- Legal venue?
- Arbitration?

Payment

- Certified check?
- Percent down?
- Schedule?

Transportation

- Arranged by?
- Number of deliveries?
- Shipping dates?

Customer Service

- Tree care literature?
- NCCTA retail materials?
- Tree shaking?

Contingencies

- Weather?
- Transportation