

Managing Christmas Tree Pests—Cliff Sadoff

Demonstrated and discussed the smart phone app available to Indiana growers to identify insect pests of Christmas Trees. He also displayed the printed USDA Christmas Tree Pest Manual. The manual is also available as a PDF for your computer.

Sadoff described the difference in the appearance of a plantation when affected by biotic pests or diseases compared to a plantation affected by abiotic damage, such as herbicide or other chemicals or, perhaps, temperature extremes.

Plantations of cloned trees will react differently from plantations of seedlings from an “open pollinated” seed source. When damage is found, especially on needles of new growth, is the bud at the branch tip healthy?

In a planting, pine bark beetles are attracted to dying or dead trees. They will go on to cause damage to healthier ones. Remove dying trees before the spring flight of borers. Spray the remaining trunks with pyrethroid insecticide. AND spray the stumps in the plantation. Damaged trees smell different from healthy trees. They produce more alcohols. The alcohols carry the aromatics more readily than water.

Our climate is changing. Weather is more chaotic. 19 of the last 20 years have been the warmest average temperature of record. There are both human-caused and natural causes of these climate changes.

How long are dying/dead trees attractive to borers. Depending on species of pest and species of tree: up to a year (at least a year). The stumps are attractive to pests. After the choose and cut season. Many grower put fertilizer on the stump. (One farm used “1/2 a soup can” per stump—in a pile on the stump!)

Zimmerman pine moth attacks the top of Scotch Pine. These larvae overwinter as early instars. About April 15 these larvae start of move. Aacelepryn does not kill bees but is new and “pricey”. Pyrethroids can be used “away” from bees, but....

White Pine Weevil. >50° F these weevils start to “move” and to lay eggs. With climate change we may have to judge by heating degree days. Walk the fields in May. Imidacloprid can be applied. Removal of the “shepherd’s cook.”

The pine root collar weevil has a 2 year life cycle. This pest does truly girdle the tree. Spray the trunk.

The pine sawyer beetle carries the nematode that causes pine wilt disease. Stressed trees are very attractive to these insects.

European pine sawfly and some of the other sawflies cause “lion tail” branches. The larvae eat mature needles. Spinosae is also sold as Captain Jack’s dead bug. BT does not work on sawflies because they are wasps not lepidoptrids. White pine sawflies are larvae in the late summer/early fall

Indiana Christmas Tree Research: 34e year follow-up and finale: James Farmer. Research focused on farming and food systems with an eye to sustainability and resilience.

There has been a 40% decrease in # of farms in the last 3 years of surviving growers having available customers in their selling areas. Weather, including flooding, has caused severe loss of

recently planted seedlings.

Consumer perceptions have a high influence on the purchase of real trees. Unfortunately many consumers believe artificial trees are healthier for the environment. The age bracket of the tree buyer influences whether or not there will be a tree at all. The firs and spruces seem to be gaining in popularity over pines/"long needled" real trees.

The speaker will be at the small farms conference in Feb. 2020. He invited ICTGA members to join him at the conference and lend a hand,

Next steps: the study in Indiana is done. The speaker challenged all growers to "pick up the ball," apply for a grant, and do their own studies. The USDA has funds for block grants, work on it "in house" Both organizations were urged to keep on surveying and knowing their markets and, incidentally, other areas of this industry better, more creatively, and in a more positive light. All growers were urged to attend conferences, invite classes to visit or to be guest instructors. Don't forget 4H, women's clubs, Rotary. Participate in your community!

"Oh, and please fill out the survey for me."

BEYOND TREES: Getting People to Your Farm Outside of the Tree Season—Lucas Dull and Ashley & Ashley Ratkovich

Working year round: adult Easter Egg hunts that included other activities; partnered with a brewery, wreath classes—decorating which included b.y.o. wine and light refreshments.

A winter market, flea markets on occasion through the summer remembering the available space of the farm. Car count? \$5 per car. There was a food vendor. Market lasted 1 day. 30 vendors per show. 100 applicants. Handmade. One-of-a-kind

Both farms' people attended conferences.

Is there a metric of some sort for adding an event to a farm? Does it sound "good?" Would we pay to do that? Do a test run.

What things have you learned?

Insurance? [Is this provider-specific?]

Are you providing food during tree season? Yes, on one farm that actually has a certified, commercial kitchen. The other farm has a food truck come out during the flea markets.

There were also descriptions of how each farm operate during the Christmas Tree selling season. By the way, hot dogs and donuts are the most popular food at the farm with the commercial kitchen.

A YEAR AT TIMBER LANE CHRISTMAS TREE FARM—Bill Holesinger

The season starts with grinding stumps. Bill's farm interplants so grinding stumps is especially important because concolor fir actually do have a tap root. Everything is hand planted. In 2020 they'll plant approx. 6,000 trees. Some of the areas on the farm are constantly wet. There are 22 acres of trees. Bill is giving serious thought to how many more acres of trees he wants to plant.

He has switched off from using ammonium sulfsate to liquid thiosol. The ammonium sulfate promotes coning.

He only plants about 100 Scotches per year. The trees—all—are pruned with a Benekey powered pruner. [Oops, need to check the spelling and see if Benekey is correct.]

They are open 6 days a week. Bill purchased much of his equipment from Dean Huising when Dean retired.

Very tall trees are ordered from Wisconsin. About 80 trees are ordered from Wisconsin every year. The shortest are 10 feet and a couple as tall as 20 feet.

Pre-school kids get tours. Before they get back on the bus there is a small, decorated tree, and each child is allowed to choose one ornament to take home.

One winter ended with all the concolor with winter burn on the concolor. The buds did survive and so did most of the trees.

Bill's first trees were pre-cuts from Huising's near Fulton and from Proeger's —Sherwood Forest—at Prophetstown. He hauled his first pre-cuts on a 16' low-boys. All were firs from Huising. The pines came from Sherwood Forest. Trees from Wisconsin are hauled on a semi that Holesinger's own.

Nearly all tree farms need to start from scratch. Often the people who choose not to be active growers choose to stay on their farms. Their trees are a supply of cut trees, but.....

Scott Hensler is ill with the flu. DISCUSSION SESSION

*With the tree business being 1 or 2 months, how do you support yourself the rest of the year?

For many Christmas Trees are supplemental income. "Don't quit your day job." Others have retirement income for which the trees are a supplement to other income. In some ways Christmas t Trees are almost a public service.

*How do you keep a good color in pines and other Christmas Trees?

For firs, spring fertilizing helps. Fall fertilizing for trees that will likely sell during the season—especially firs. Painting pines well before first frost on Scotch and Red Pine.

*How do you manage social media when you are open?

Most farms have a person—usually family—who does social media often several times a day. Questions need to be answered promptly. One grower recommended referring to something already posted when a questions is asked. You might even have a F.A.Q. section.

There was considerable discussion of dealing with inaccurate information.

*What is your mark-up on pre-cuts?

In some cases you have to end up with an average profit sometimes. One grower had to pay more for the tall pre-cuts that he had sold them for the year before. How does he price them? Cost plus 10%?

*How do you calculate wages for the owners? Do you profit-share?

Kids get a wage if they work. If there is the business is in the black, the grower can take part of that profit.

*Does anyone have security cameras or other kinds of security?

You can see some surprising human actions on recorded images. Let people know with a sign that there are live security cameras, however.

For some the closest thing to "security" is the person who is doing the parking in the lot. Most growers recommend going to as much "plastic" as possible.

DAY 2 Saturday January 25, 2020

NCTA UPDATE

Tom Dull gave the report on 2019 response to the website and the response/interest of the press—national and local.

Dull also reported on the White House and Blair House Christmas Trees. The competition is very stiff. Any grower wanting to compete has to be a member of both the state organization and the national.

The national meeting will be at the Dull farm in conjunction with the MACT meeting this summer.

There is now a 5 year contract with the management group allowing for better continuity in the operation of NCTA.

Trees for troops was very successful in 2019. Indiana sent trees to Afghanistan, Guam and Alaska. The inspectors were extremely stringent. Their standards exceeded USDA standards. "They have to be perfect for our troops."

ICTGA WEBSITE UPDATE—Vicki Cassens

Cassens worked for 30 years. She started with main frames and 1½ day downloads. She took one of the first classes in internet security.

How do you put together a website? 1. Hire a professional. 2. Use a "drag and drop" website creation online service. 3. Code it yourself.

One of the services is wix.com. If you pay for their services: to use your own domain name and to have a posting service. They have excellent templates. A good platform and template give you lots of options in creating your own website.

Websites need be responsive to all devices, changing the format of the page for any device. You need to figure out "how to set the hook." Good visuals are an absolute must. Have good promotion features for your farm or for your organization. Keep information updated. Your dates for a previous year are little or no help.

Have contact availability. Have location availability. For an organization, especially tree farms, mailing addresses and tree farms may not be the same. Phone numbers! Yes, remember that first 4 seconds.

The activity calendar of an organization or of a farm advertises you all year. For a farm, have your products listed.

Give thought to adding blog capability. This can be available to members of the group and sometimes tree farm customers will likely find a blog worth reading.

CHRISTMAS TREE PROMOTION BOARD UPDATE—Marsha Gray

There is a 9 minute video of the past season.

There is a board of 12 members. Through a rotating system, board members are renewed nationwide on a 3 year basis [at least it seems that way.]

The video itself gave a summary of the 2019 campaign. Well done video. The promotion board works hard to keep the concept of a real tree and that connection with family, social and environmental involvement in the public consciousness.

CTPB also funds research to improve the trees we grow and how we grow those trees.

There is an e-newsletter that comes out monthly for CTPB. That newsletter lets growers know about all the activities through the year.

GETTING TO A SUCCESSIONS ROADMAP—Maria Marshall, PhD. 30% of family business survive to the 2nd generation intact. Only 12% make it to the 3rd generation. The more inheritors the more complications.

It takes about 6 years to pass on the succession. There is the question of family members perhaps having management but not ownership.

Exit expectation and desire: desire does not line up well with what really happens.

This is a managerial decision involving once-in-a-lifetime events/decisions. These are long term processes. A broad set of competencies are necessary. Few owners or advisors have the skills to do all this a succession team is necessary.

A wide selection of stakeholders is affected. Not only are the business holders stakeholders, employees, clients, capital providers, and even the neighbors are affected and affect the business.

Options: 30%-50% of family firms are transferred from 1 generation to the next. Parallel transfer of ownership and management is only one option.

Ownership stake does not necessarily imply that there is enough profit to provide a “good middle class income.”

Exit options” Transfer control to employees, management buyout, management buy-in. And it would have been nice for the lady to SLOW DOWN!!!!

Sources of complexity: Transfer of the firm, especially in intra-family succession. Multiple stakeholders, role complexity, multiple successions, technical complexity, imperfect capital market, information asymmetries, long and often uncertain timeframe complications.

Succession framework: with a slide you cannot read.

Clarify goals and priorities

There were also options and scenarios.

Your farm and your tree business are often combinations of separate entities.

The goals of the incumbent and the successor will not be the same, no matter how similar they may be.

Whatever any of this is, everyone involved has to be ready to make mental shifts and stay with those shifts. Everyone must also be ready to accept that rewards will not be immediate.

A YEAR AT CASSENS TREES—Dab Cassens

Cassens is owned and operated by Dan and Vicki Cassens and has been in business for the past 40 years. The farm, located near West Lafayette, is primarily a choose-and-cut operation, but also has pre-cut trees. Cassens was an early producer of fir trees in Indiana and one of their early Fraser firs was the state grand champion in 1996.

Where for your farm: geographic importance—population and economic vitality of the area. Physical considerations: soil type and terrain (drainage and the microclimate that does not encourage early bud break).

Cassens stressed soil testing overall, annual spot testing, micronutrients, A good soil test

company

He discussed experimenting with different species to see how they grow for you, but do your homework first. At least choose something that has “needs” that pretty much matches your growing conditions. Also, growth rates on firs: how much is actually known about the growth rate of some of the firs in their native areas.

Cassens recommends purchasing 2-2, 10”-16”. Plant late March when seedlings are available. Root prune. The pruning aids in using a mechanical planter. His planer lets him ride backwards on the planter.

Weed control is a true battle. He has used a ManKar brand glyphosate spreader but, did not always find it satisfactory. There is also increasing resistance to glyphosates.

There are companies that have sales people on site who are trained in the label use of herbicides that can be used in Christmas tree plantings.

Insect control: he has some scale in his Scotch pines. The brand name of the control agent is “Distant.”. Bag worms are hand harvested.

He hires a professional shearing crew for Scotches, whites and Canaan fir in that order beginning in mid-June.

Participating in national meetings after entering in the state fair lets you meet other growers and keeps you familiar with the quality trees our industry produces.

Promotion is through websites, Facebook, email, radio advertising. Mall signs. [For other growers, signs in “good places of opportunity” will likely be worth the investment.

Pricing is on the tree in the field. Untagged trees are MUCH more expensive. Pines are much less expensive than firs. Purchased pre-cuts and priced by species and size and are the same as choose and cut.

Each tree gets a fresh cut when sold, baled for a fee and drilled for a fee.

There is a gift shop. There are wreaths from \$18 to \$150—average \$32. Roping \$/ft. Misc. items. Grave blankets, grave pillows are by custom order: \$45, \$95, and \$125.

ICTA CORPORATE MEETING –January 25, 2020

The treasurer's report is attached and will be filed for audit. [page 2 of these minutes]

Minutes for the August 2019 meeting were read and filed as corrected. Motion to approve was made and seconded. Motion carried.

The Scholarship to SIU was discussed. \$1,000 had been approved for the scholarship has been approved. Those present stated "aye" to add the handling fee for the scholarship. The last fee was \$60.00.

President Richardson read the report from NCTA rep. Wendy Richardson. Interestingly, the Illinois Trees for Troops for Great Lakes came from Nova Scotia.

We have talked about a Spring Field Day for several years. Stahl's discussed having a Field Day at their farm. They will contact us with a Saturday date sometime in June. The hours will likely be 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on a date to be announced.

We were reminded to send our CTPB assessment before February 15.

Check the website to make sure your information is up-to-date. When a grower logs in, the information goes to Carol as well as to Tom Wright who manages the website.

Stahl: can we invite prospective members to a field day. Of course we will also invite our new grower members.

Harold moved to accept the officers and board of directors for another year. Patrick Grady seconded. Motion carried.

MACT meeting 2020 will be at Dull's Tree Farm, Thornton, Indiana.

The meeting was adjourned by the president.