



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Did Summer Drought Decimate Tennessee's Christmas Tree Crop? Not Yet

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Most customers who visit local Christmas tree farms in the coming weeks won't notice, but growers without irrigation this summer saw significant losses in seedlings planted over the 2011-12 fall and winter.

According to Kyle Holmberg, marketing specialist with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, some growers reported new seedling losses up to 80 percent. Losses of mature trees ran between 10 and 20 percent in areas subjected to significant drought combined with excessive heat.

Since a typical Christmas tree variety takes between six and seven years to reach 6 feet, however, most customers won't notice much difference this year. Larger, mature trees can withstand more extreme weather conditions and are ready now for cutting or transplanting.

This season, the only noticeable effect of the summer's drought and heat on farm direct trees may be slightly higher prices for some tree varieties, says Holmberg, since farmers may choose to cut fewer small trees, compensating for the summer's seedling losses. Those smaller trees may be saved to shore up supplies four or five years from now, when the lost seedlings would have matured.

Most losses have been reported in White Pine and Leland Cypress trees, varieties grown primarily in Middle and West Tennessee.

All field grown Christmas tree varieties are a completely renewable, 100 percent biodegradable and recyclable resource which contains no petroleum products and leaves a negligible carbon footprint. While they grow, natural Christmas trees absorb carbon dioxide and other gases and emit fresh oxygen. Christmas trees are often grown on soil that doesn't support other crops, and their root systems serve to stabilize soil, protect area water quality and provide refuge for wildlife. Grown on local farms, one to three new seedlings are planted for every tree harvested to ensure a constant supply.

Artificial trees are made from plastic, which is made with petroleum products. Lead, an ingredient in PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic and other metals, are also important parts of an artificial tree. These trees don't biodegrade, and travel a long way to get to U.S. stores, leaving a huge carbon footprint. About 85 percent of artificial trees start in China, but eventually end up sitting in U.S. landfills for centuries.

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TENNESSEE'S CHRISTMAS TREE CROP

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Natural trees can be brought to area parks after the holidays to be turned into mulch for local trails. Some people also like to place their old trees in their ponds or favorite fishing spots to serve as fish habitats.

Balled and burlapped live trees are replanted once the holidays are over. Buying a live tree from a farm close to its new home is a guarantee that the variety can grow well in that area, and the growers at tree farms will explain how to plant and care for the transplanted tree.

Find Tennessee Christmas trees at www.picktnproducts.org. Always call ahead and confirm hours of operation and activities. Follow Pick Tennessee Products on Twitter or Facebook @PickTnProducts.

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Editor's Note: A QR code is attached that can take users directly to the Pick Tennessee Products Christmas Tree directory.