

Customers Seek Yule Trees At Elliott's Nursery

(Continued from Page A1)

you can figure on burning it," Elliott says.

Considering the amount of work it took to bring that tree from a seed to the Christmas tree lot, Elliott doesn't want to burn many trees.

Elliott and his sons, Doug and Bill III, work fulltime at the business. It's a year-round job. "You never get caught up, especially with this many acres," Elliott says.

The Elliotts plant Scotch, white and red pine, three types of Douglas fir, concolor fir, and blue, white and Norway spruce seeds by hand in raised beds. They spray the seedbeds with Round-up and Princep before planting.

The tiny plants are top-dressed in April and June with 10-10-10 and

irrigated when necessary. Elliott rigs snow fencing over the beds to protect the tender plants from the direct sunlight.

In autumn, he mulches then with sawdust. While the sawdust does not prevent freezing and thawing, it keeps the 1½-inch high plants from heaving out of the ground. When the seedlings are two years old and stand between 4 and 24 inches tall, they are transplanted by hand to other raised beds.

Many of the seedlings are sold at the two or three year old stage to other Christmas tree growers. In the spring, Doug and Bill III are kept busy grading and bundling the seedlings for shipment.

The rest of the seedlings are planted in the Elliotts' fields. They own 300 acres in scenic Path Valley and another 133 in nearby Burns

Valley, much of it woodland. About 150 acres are in Christmas trees.

How long it takes a tree to reach Christmas tree size varies from 8 to 15 years, depending on the type of tree. Scotch pine is faster, Douglas fir and blue spruce are slower. "I started doing this in 1956," Elliott states, "and I haven't gotten two crops off any one field yet."

"This isn't a business for a young couple to get into if they have no other income," he adds. "Your first check is a long way off."

When he and Patricia started the Christmas tree business, he worked at Letterkenny Army Depot and she worked at a store in Chambersburg. Neither was raised on a farm.

"I worked at Letterkenny, but I thought that I'd like to be outdoors and that trees would be a good business, so I started looking for a farm. I got this one, and I've been at it ever since." At that time, his parents ran the motel and Patricia was free to help him with the trees while the boys were in school. Now, Patricia operates the motel and restaurant with help from daughter Candy, 14.

The Elliotts got into the wholesale seedling business several years ago when they had trouble getting a steady supply of good-quality seedlings.

"Every time I found a good supplier, he would either die, sell out, or quit." A supplier who wanted to quit encouraged Elliott to grow them for himself, and seedlings are now a large part of the business.



This perfectly-shaped Douglas fir has never been trimmed. Elliott says he plans to use its seeds to raise additional trees.

Tomato Grower Meeting Set

The Northeast Regional Tomato Growers meeting will be held on Thursday, January 8 from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Thompson's Dairy Bar on the Newton Ransom Boulevard at Newton in Lackawanna County.

Attorney John Becker, Penn State Extension specialist in farm law, will explain the farmer responsibilities under the "right to know" legislation. Other topics on the program include the value of foliar fertilizers; management practices for disease control; federal crop insurance; the "sod buster" program and new

regulations for private pesticide applicator certification.

The speakers are Dr. Cyril Smith and Dr. Alan MacNab from Penn State University, also William Foose, Federal Crop Insurance Corporation; James Garrahan, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Ed Sokoloski, Soil Conservation Service.

Reservations for the meeting must be made by sending \$6.50 with your name and address to the Lackawanna County Cooperative Extension, 200 Adams Avenue, Scranton, Pa. 18503 by Tuesday, December 30.

Production

Rises,

Profits Shrink

BY

C. WILLIAM HEALD

Average milk production for DHIA tested cows increased 704 pounds to 16,475 pounds per cow this year. Average reported milk income per cwt dropped \$1.03 to \$11.82. That verifies what farmers have been saying "gross income per cow is down."

DHIA data shows a drop in income of \$79.23 per cow despite the large increase in production. Lower feed costs helped some, changing from \$827 last year to \$779 this year for a \$48 drop in yearly cost but this was not enough to offset lower milk prices.

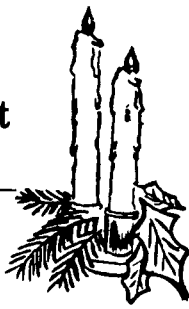
Income over feed cost fell from \$1,199 to \$1,168 per cow. Dairy farmers responded by adding to herd size going from an average of 59.0 to 60.6 cows per herd.

More cows and more milk mean more pressure on dairy farmers to balance supply and demand for milk.

Herd management problems also increase with size. With lots of good home grown heifers, it is easy to increase herd size but would dairy farmers be better off to cull herds more closely, increase their herd average, and obtain a higher income-over-feed cost?

Re-calculating a herd average after hypothetically removing a percentage of the herd is not difficult. Those interested can request a one page worksheet from Bill Heald, 8 Borland Lab, University Park, PA 16802.

May the peace and Joy of Christ fill your hearts during this Christmas Season and throughout the New Year!



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