

## DeLong Christmas Tree Farm Marks 50 Years

**SINKING SPRING (Berks Co.)** — A Berks county holiday landmark, DeLong Christmas Tree Farm, marks its fiftieth anniversary last year. Located in Brecknock township, it is one of the oldest, continuously operating Christmas tree farms in the state.

Started in 1941 by Charles Aubrey DeLong, the farm is owned and operated today by his son, Tom DeLong. "My father had incredible foresight. This was a run-down, abandoned old farm when he bought it," DeLong comments. "He saw the potential in plantation grown Christmas trees. Back then, 95% of all evergreens cut for Christmas trees simply were cut out of the wild."

Tom grew up just a few miles from the farm on what is today the Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center. His father was the forester for the Nolde family. "Back in the 30s, my father began experimenting with shearing Christmas trees on the Nolde estate to produce a consistently shaped, but natural looking tree. It is the appearance we still strive for today," DeLong says. C. Aubrey DeLong began clearing the land on the farm in 1941, and planted his first scotch and white pine seedlings in 1942. He and his family moved to the farm in 1947, and by 1949, sold their first trees. Ten years later, Tom, his wife Ann, and daughters Jean and Nancie moved to the farm when he took over the operation.

By then, Douglas fir was gaining in popularity as a Christmas tree so it replaced scotch pine as the number one tree planted on the farm. Tom also began experimenting with Fraser fir, a tree he became familiar with while getting his PhD. degree in Forestry at Duke University. As Tom explained: "Fraser fir was not used as a Christmas tree to any great extent then, but I thought it had potential. I'm glad we began experimenting with it so long ago because it has taken a number of years to learn how to grow it right."

Time is one thing Christmas tree farming definitely requires. On average, Douglas fir takes 14 years to reach eight feet, and it is not 14 idle years. Tom says many people have the mistaken idea that a Christmas tree seedling is planted and then cut as a full-grown tree 14 years later. "We wish it were that way, but there's a lot of activity in between if you want to grow a premium tree."

Quality is something in which they clearly excel at DeLong Christmas Tree Farm. Their trees have been displayed at The Smithsonian Museum, Longwood Gardens, The Naval Academy at Annapolis, and locally at the Berkshire Country Club. Last year, one of their Douglas fir was featured in a national ad for Ford New Holland.

There are two things DeLong mentions that people sometimes overlook when choosing Christmas trees. First, trees always look smaller in the field and on the lot than they do when you get them home. He suggests knowing what width, and especially, what height limitations are before selecting a tree. Secondly, it is very important to make a fresh cut across the butt of the tree before putting it up. Conifers sap over in a short time and the sap prevents them from absorbing water. If a fresh cut is made and the tree always has water, it will stay fresh indoors well through the holidays. Mrs. DeLong mentioned she kept last



Three generations are keeping the DeLong Christmas Tree Farm a family affair. From left: daughter Jean with husband Stephen, son Robert Thomas Custer, and parents, Ann and Thomas DeLong.

year's tree up until February 15. One other thing DeLong suggests is to use nothing but plain tap water in the tree holder. Tests con-

ducted by the National Christmas Tree Growers Association have proven nothing works better than water alone.

As Tom and Ann DeLong look ahead, they see the possibility of the farm seeing another fifty years. Their daughter Jean, and

son-in-law, Steve Custer moved to the farm three years ago. Steve now manages day-to-day operations and in 1990, Steve and Jean became parents to a son.

DeLong Christmas Tree Farm is located south of Reading off 222 or 625 on Gouglersville Road. You can easily follow their big yellow signs to the farm. They have a wide selection of cut Douglas fir, Blue Spruce, Fraser fir and white pine, from tabletop trees to thirteen feet. This year, the farm will be open to the public November 30 to December 24. Hours are 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.



### Now, More Than Ever...

## Membership in Dairylea Cooperative Means More

#### More Ways to Increase Your Profitability

- ✓ Highly Competitive Premiums
- ✓ Quality and Production Incentive Programs
- ✓ Member Loan Program
- ✓ Energy Loan Program
- ✓ Milk Check Direct Deposit
- ✓ Top-Rated Insurance Coverages
- ✓ Flexible Benefits Program for Farmers and Farm Employees

## Dairylea Cooperative Inc.

# MEMBERSHIP MEANS MORE

### Build For The Future!

Call Shirley at 1-800-654-8838