



CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION KICKS OFF CHOOSE AND CUT CHRISTMAS TREE SEASON



Spirit of Giving is Ceremony Theme

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(WHITE TOWNSHIP) - As part of the Christie Administration's fifth annual 'Season of Service' initiative, New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher today cut a Christmas tree at Wyckoff's Tree Farm in White Township, Warren County, ceremonially kicking off the choose and cut Christmas tree season. Secretary Fisher also thanked growers for their generosity in participating in a new program, "Christmas Trees for New Jersey Military Families."

Governor Christie proclaimed November 30 as Jersey Grown Christmas Tree Day, encouraging New Jersey residents to support the state's farmers and visit choose and cut Christmas tree farms, as well as showing appreciation of our military during the holiday season.

"As we enter our 'fourth' season of New Jersey agritourism, we encourage people to visit choose and cut Christmas tree farms to find their perfect tree and enjoy the experience with their families, making lasting memories," said Secretary Fisher. "This also is a time of giving, so we applaud the Christmas tree growers for their generosity and hope state residents will remember to help those in need this holiday season."

Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm won the 2015 New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association Christmas annual tree contest with a Fraser Fir. It has been a long-standing tradition that the kick-off of the choose-and-cut Christmas tree season takes place at the Grand Champion's farm. The 172-acre farm in White Township, outside of Belvidere, has been owned by the Wyckoff family since 1839 and is now being farmed by the sixth and seventh generations of Wyckoffs. They have 65 acres of Christmas trees with 5,000 trees available this season. They offer Fraser, Douglas, and Concolor Firs, Norway and Blue Spruces and White Pine.



Laura DePrado of the NJ Agricultural Society; Col. Mark Piferski of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; Tim Dunne, VP of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association; John Wyckoff; Warren County Freeholder Ed Smith and Secretary Fisher with the Douglas Fir tree cut by Secretary Fisher

The Wyckoff family has won the New Jersey tree competition numerous years and in 2013, they competed in the National Christmas Tree Association's tree contest and became the first in New Jersey to be named national champion. They delivered several trees to the White House that year.

"Trees are what we do - trees are not our sideline or part-time hobby," said John Wyckoff. "We work diligently throughout the year maintaining and grooming the crop. We pay attention to detail...the most important part."

Wyckoff also participates in several charitable causes, including Christmas Trees for New Jersey Military Families. His family will donate the tree cut by Secretary Fisher to that cause, which is a joint program of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association and the New Jersey Agricultural Society. The goal is to donate 100 trees that will be presented to New Jersey National Guard members and their families at a ceremony on December 14 in Bordentown.

"Military members and their families representing all branches of service make tremendous sacrifices to safeguard our traditions and way of life," said Brig. Gen. Michael Cunniff, The Adjutant General, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "These trees are certain to lift the spirits of our troops and confirm to their families that their sacrifice does not go unrecognized."

The Wyckoffs also will host a Trees for Troops weekend trailer drop on December 5 and 6. This is the fourth year they have hosted a trailer drop supporting the Christmas Spirit Foundation and National Christmas Tree Growers Association's program, which delivers donated trees to military families throughout the country.

In addition, the Wyckoffs will join other Christmas tree growers in the state, collecting funds for Farmers Against Hunger, which gleans and distributes donated produce from New Jersey farmers to food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens around the state. The New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association has collectively raised over \$14,000 for the program since 2011.

"This funding helps support the collection and distribution of over 1.3 million pounds of fresh produce from New Jersey farms, grocery stores and wholesale produce suppliers for New Jersey residents in need," said New Jersey Agricultural Society Executive Director Kristina Guttadora. "When recipients receive fresh potatoes, cabbage, and greens for the holidays, they are so grateful to be able to provide a healthy meal for their families. Providing access to fresh produce by recovering food that may otherwise go to waste, is such a simple, effective solution to hunger, food insecurity and food waste."

Almost 69,000 trees are cut in New Jersey each year. The 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture ranked New Jersey seventh in the nation in the number of Christmas tree growers, with 809 farms that grow more than 4,600 acres of Christmas trees in the state.

Christmas tree growers in New Jersey may participate in the *Jersey Grown* program, which allows farmers to tag their trees with the *Jersey Grown* brand to easily identify that their Christmas trees are grown in New Jersey. *Jersey Grown* includes quality standards and is similar to the well-known Jersey Fresh branding program for produce and other agricultural products.

The New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers' Association, organized in 1950, is a statewide organization of growers, professionals and industry leaders dedicated to the promotion and marketing of Christmas trees and related products. A listing of farms consumers can visit is available at: www.njchristmastrees.org/where_find_christmas_tree.html.