

Growers Are Set For Yule Tree Season

Christmas trees will be available this year in a "serve yourself" market for about 1000 Santa Cruz district families as the first trees of an experiment in Christmas tree growing on the part of county farmers come to maturity.

Farm Advisor Henry Washburn said members of the California Christmas Tree Growers association, a cooperative venture of a number of farmers in Santa Cruz county who have banded together in an attempt to produce Christmas trees on a commercial scale, will have about that many trees ready for market next month.

"This is the first year that we have been able to get trees mature enough for use," Washburn said in discussing the activities of the association. "The project of growing Christmas trees is a long range one and a number of years are needed for the trees to attain the proper size.

Members of the association, which is headed by Howard A. Nielsen whose Crest ranch is on the Empire grade in the Ben Lomond district, have been working closely with a number of state agencies including the agricultural extension service of which Washburn is the Santa Cruz county representative, in doing research on the commercial growing of Christmas trees.

"We practically had to start from scratch on the growing of Christmas trees," Washburn recalled. "No one knew much of anything about the type of soil that was needed, the irrigation which the seedlings should have, the length of time the seedlings should be left in the seedbeds and the transplant beds, and the pruning which could be done to improve the appearance and the commercial value of the trees.

"Some work had been done in a small way in Oregon and Washington, but many of the things which farmers learned in those areas did not strike us as being applicable to our soil conditions, growing period and other matters which affected Santa Cruz county production of Christmas trees. So we just went on experimenting and learning what we could and with the help of the research activities which have been carried on by other state and federal agencies, we have been able to make vast strides which are paying off this year for the first time."

Washburn noted particularly the assistance given the Christmas tree growers by the California Forest and Range Experimental station in Berkeley, of which Stephen N. Wyckoff, an uncle of the Santa Cruz attorney, is the director. The organization, through Dr. F. I. Richter, geneticist, and J. W. Duffield, the research forester in charge of the Institute of Forest Genetics in Placerville, helped the growers considerably, as did the University of California Forestry school and the state division of forestry.

All three agencies are aiding in the work which is being done to bring about the experimental state arboretum on land adjoining the state forestry division nursery on land leased from the Santa Cruz Portland Cement company. Between 20 and 30 acres of land in the company's holdings of nearly 3000 acres between Davenport and the Empire grade is under consideration for Christmas tree experimentation.

"This need for such a vast amount of research was evident early," Washburn said. "And the growers have worked hard and cooperatively with the geneticists and forest scientists in developing every possible angle.

"When the idea of raising Christmas trees was broached first to Santa Cruz county farmers, they all were enthusiastic and many of them wanted to plant as many as 50 acres each to the holiday trees. But we were able to hold their enthusiasm in check and got them to plant only about a couple of hundred trees each. We didn't want them to get involved too deeply until we were more sure, through research, what we could do."

Washburn said the trees found most suitable for production in the Santa Cruz area are Douglas firs, the Monterey pines (which he noted grow more successfully here than they do on the other side of Monterey bay) and the Scot's or Scotch pines. Each of these varieties is considered a good Christmas tree, and each is being grown successfully in the county.

"This year, we will have about 1000 trees ready for use," Washburn said. "The association wants to let families of the Santa Cruz area know about the trees which will be ready for harvesting this year and then allow families who

want trees to go out to the Christmas tree plantations, select their tree, write their name on a tag attached to the tree and cut it whenever they want it. In that way, the consumer can be sure of having a truly fresh tree."

The farm advisor pointed out experiments of a different nature than those being conducted in Santa Cruz county have indicated in the Northwest that poor or marginal soil produces the better grade Christmas trees, adding that the production of the Yule trees thus offers another source of revenue to the farmer whose land may not produce top quality crops of other varieties. The local experiments have shown the farmers also that they may improve the quality of their trees by pruning them carefully to increase the bushiness of the tree and eliminate the scraggly, scrawny branches which are so prevalent in most wild Christmas tree selections.

Among the other things which members of the association have learned locally from their research programs are that deep planting of the seedlings is advisable and that irrigation of the trees is not required after their final planting.

By deep planting is meant scooping out dirt enough so all of the roots of the fir or pine seedlings can be placed about eight inches below the surface of the soil with none of the roots in the topsoil. Experiments have shown, Washburn noted, that topsoil dries out rapidly under normal evaporation and heat, but that the ground does not dry out much below six or eight inches deep. "So if we dig a hole and plant the seedlings in the hole, it has a much finer chance of surviving and becoming a strong and vigorous tree," he added.

Irrigation is important in the production as long as the seedlings are in the seed bed for the first year or two of their life and the year when they are in the transplant bed. When they are removed from the transplant bed after one or two years, they virtually can stand on their own roots and become healthy, vigorous trees.

The value of Christmas trees as a commercial product for Santa Cruz county farmers may be judged from the fact that only about 10 per cent of the nearly 3,500,000 trees used in California last year were grown within the state. The remainder were shipped in from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana. On a price competition basis, Santa Cruz county producers would be able to merchandise their product at far less cost because of the freighting costs for importing Christmas trees from other states. The San Francisco bay area and San Jose are two exceedingly good potential markets for Santa Cruz county Christmas trees when the growers of this area are producing the trees in commercial quantities.

Washburn pointed out the principal reason behind the interest of Santa Cruz county farmers in the holiday tree crop is an economic one since the trees can be produced on land which might be termed submarginal. Surveys by Washburn's office reveal that in the past only four per cent of the county's return from agricultural commodities is produced annually by farmers who operate 41 per cent of the agricultural holdings. This out of line percentage of returns and holdings is brought about by the fact many of the county's farms do not have sufficient water and are unable to irrigate which reduces them to the status of submarginal holdings. The Christmas tree crop, which requires substantially less water than most other agricultural production, and which growers have found will do well on land which is not the best, thus solves two of the problems which have faced the farmers.

Another factor which has induced Santa Cruz county growers to turn part of their land into Christmas tree "plantations" is their hope of producing almost a 100 per cent crop of Grade 1 trees when the seedlings are given the proper care. This compares with an outsize production of Grade 3 trees, the undesirable almost unmerchantable trees which must be burned when Christmas tree cutters attempt to obtain trees in a reforested stand of so-called "natural" growth.

There have been attempts in some parts of the state, particularly areas near the Sierras where the forest land practically adjoins residential districts, to allow families to go into the forests and cut their own trees. But this has resulted only in waste, because sometimes a family will select several



Howard A. Nielsen, the president of the California Christmas Tree Growers association, poses in the top picture with some of the Christmas trees on his Crest ranch holdings on the Empire grade. The ten acre plot planted to Christmas trees, holds several thousand trees, many of which are coming to maturity this year and will be available for the holiday season. The plot is the first planted to the holiday trees by Nielsen who refers to the land as the "Miracle Acres," adding, "we thought it would be a mir-

acres, cutting each one and then discarding it as they find another tree which suits them better.

Under the plan of the Christmas Tree Growers association, each family will go to a plantation and select "the tree they want," Washburn said. "They will write the family name on a tag, designating the tree as theirs, and they can watch it grow until they want to cut it. There will be no waste of trees, and the tree they choose will be as fresh when they take it home as vegetables from their garden."

SHOW CAUSE ORDER FILED

An order to show cause has been filed in the case of George Bassi against Florence Santora.

KERRICK LAUNDRY and DRY CLEAN
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