

Production of Christmas Wreaths in Newfoundland and Labrador

Overview

In the Maritimes and in New Brunswick in particular, the production of Christmas wreaths is a multi-million dollar industry. New Brunswick produces approximately three million units annually worth an estimated wholesale value of \$13.5 million dollars. A major portion of this production is exported to the U. S. and all indications are that there is room in this marketplace for expansion.

Opportunities

Newfoundland and Labrador has an abundance of balsam fir which is the species of choice in the wreath industry. The removal of tips for wreath production, if done in the correct manner, has no measurable impact on the production of wood fiber that would raise concern for other forest industries.

The production of Christmas wreaths is a labour intensive economic activity requiring limited capital investment. Given that Newfoundland and Labrador has an abundance of labour, an abundance of a renewable resource (balsam fir) and under-utilized facilities, it seems logical that a wreath industry could be developed in this Province.

Production

The production of wreaths is a two part operation which involves first the harvest of balsam fir tips and secondly the actual tying of the wreaths.

Collection of tips

The collection of tips is a separate operation involving persons properly trained in the selection and harvest of tips. Quality tips are essential as it is impossible to produce top quality wreaths from poor tip material.

When collecting tips the following is a checklist of items to keep in mind:

- Collect only when the trees are dormant
- Collect only healthy dark green tips, preferably with rounded foliage
- Tips should be no longer than 14" in total length
- Tips may only be harvested from the lower two-thirds of the tree and no more than 1/3 of the trees total foliage should be removed
- Avoid tips with visible insect damage

Generally, bush is purchased from tip collectors on a per pound basis. The price paid per pound may vary depending on availability and quality, but 15¢ per pound is considered average.

It is important that tips not be collected too early in the season as they will not hold their needles through the Christmas season. The harvest period will vary in different regions of the Province and is dependant on weather conditions. A general rule of thumb is to begin harvest after an accumulation of 20 days beginning September 1, in which the temperature has dropped below 5° C.

Tips are collected and transported on sticks or tied in bundles. They should be stored in a cool shaded area with protection from the wind.

The harvesting of tips for commercial purposes requires a permit which can be obtained at your local Forestry Services Branch.

The collection of wreath tips in a proper manner will not damage the trees and will ensure the long-term sustainability of this forest resource for future generations.

Wreath tying

To produce a Christmas wreath requires only wire rings, tie wire and balsam fir tips. The rings and wire are available from a number of suppliers in the Maritime area. The art of tying wreaths must be learned through practice. Consult with your local Agriculture Office to obtain a list of suppliers and a copy of the wreath makers manual. The standard in the industry is wreaths tied on a 12" ring which will produce a 22"-24" wreath weighing approximately four pounds.

Wreaths can be tied manually or by machine. Average production for hand tiers ranges between 40-60 units per day whereas a person on a machine can tie 80-120 units, but requires a second person to arrange the brush into bundles ready to be tied. There does not appear to be a real advantage in using tying machines except in cases where workers prefer the machines over hand tying.

Markets

As with many products the markets for Christmas wreaths is diversified. The largest market opportunity appears to exist for the green undecorated wreaths which are sold into the U. S. wholesale market.

In addition to the wholesale market, opportunities also exist in the retail and mail-order sectors but to a lesser degree. This is a new initiative in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and it will take some time to explore all potential market opportunities.

For further information contact your local Agricultural Representative or Development Officer.