

# *Christmas Tree Purchasing Habits of Greater Columbus, Ohio, Consumers - - 1956*

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**OHIO AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION**  
**Wooster, Ohio**

In cooperation with Central States Forest Experiment Station

Lit-  
tle con-  
sideration  
has been giv-  
en to the mar-  
keting of Christ-  
mas trees. A sea-  
sonal, once-a-year sales  
product appears unim-  
portant compared to products  
purchased by consumers 52 weeks  
a year. \* \* \* \* \*

However, Christ-  
mas tree marketing is a big busi-  
ness. In an area the size of Col -  
umbus and adjacent suburbs (over 500,  
000 population), more than 131,000 trees  
are marketed between December 1 and Dec-  
ember 24th. \* \* \* \* \*

Greater Columbus  
consumers spend in excess of \$293,000 each  
year for cut Christmas trees. To this we can  
add the amount spent for flocked, live and arti-  
ficially colored trees and greenery such as holly,  
mistletoe and loose branches. \* \* \* \* \*

A chain of men - the  
farmer-producer, buyers, truckers, brokers, wholesal-  
ers and retailers - are involved in making this product  
available to consumers. Consumers know relatively little  
about Christmas trees. They rely upon these men to produce,  
handle and market a tree acceptable for use in the consumer  
home. \* \* \* \* \*

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Christmas Tree Purchasing Habits of Greater  
Columbus, Ohio Consumers, 1956

By Glen H. Mitchell and Kenneth Quigley <sup>1,2/</sup>

Introduction

Christmas tree production and marketing is an important business in Ohio. It has been estimated that well over two million Christmas trees are used and over eight million dollars are spent on Christmas trees and greenery per year.

The production of Christmas trees is becoming a more common farm enterprise. <sup>3/</sup> Producers are interested in the buying habits of consumers in order to better satisfy consumer desires and maximize grower profits.

Purpose of this Circular

This circular reports a phase of a project on "The Growing and Marketing of Christmas Trees and Greenery in Ohio," a joint project between the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station and The Central States Forest Experiment Station.

The purpose of this circular is to explain the Christmas tree and greenery purchasing habits of consumers in a metropolitan center. As relatively little is known about Christmas tree marketing, this report should provide useful information to Christmas tree growers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers.

Methodology Employed

This study was conducted during the 1956 Christmas marketing season in greater Columbus, Ohio. A sample of three hundred consumer families was drawn from the greater Columbus area. Families were interviewed by phone, if they had a listed phone number, or in person. Response and cooperation were relatively high.

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<sup>1/</sup> Agricultural Economist, Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station and Forest Economist, Central States Forest Experiment Station, respectively.

<sup>2/</sup> The authors wish to express their thanks to Dr. O.D. Diller, Chairman of the Department of Forestry, O.A.E.S. and the regional committee of NCM-20. Thanks is also expressed to The Ohio Forestry Association for their cooperation.

<sup>3/</sup> The subject will be dealt with in a later publication on the production of Christmas trees in Ohio, by Quigley and Mitchell.

### Some Relevant Facts on the Greater Columbus, Ohio Market

Greater Columbus, as used herein, includes the city of Columbus proper, Bexley, Upper Arlington, Worthington, Westerville, Whitehall, Gahanna, Groveport, Grove City and Reynoldsburg, Columbus, the 28th largest city in the U.S., is the state capital of Ohio and has many diversified industries. The city proper in 1956 had an estimated population of 430,755 persons and greater Columbus, as used herein, would have a population in excess of 500,000. The 1950 U.S. Census indicated approximately 87.5 percent of the population in Columbus were of Caucasian race.

Income and employment at the time of the study were relatively high for this area according to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. Average income per consuming spending unit in May 1956, according to Sales Management was \$5,701 for Franklin County.

### Trees Purchased

Approximately 72 percent of the families either purchased Christmas trees or had trees given to them. An additional three percent of the families either purchased an artificial tree or had one from a previous year.

Almost all (96 percent) of the families having trees had only 1 tree. Only three per cent of the families purchased 2 trees. One family purchased 4 trees while another family purchased 5 trees. For every 100 households in the sample, approximately 75 Christmas trees were sold.

Households not purchasing trees gave various reasons, including: going away for the holidays, no children, illness, and old age (Table I).<sup>1/</sup>

Families that did not have a Christmas tree had 2.1 persons; those families that did have Christmas trees had 3.8 persons.

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<sup>1/</sup> Tables and figures appear in the appendix.

The family incomes tended to be slightly lower among households that did not have Christmas trees. The families that didn't have a Christmas tree, had a higher percent (59.8 percent) of persons over 51 years of age than did households purchasing Christmas trees (40.2 percent).

#### Time of Purchase

Christmas Day in 1956 was Tuesday. The majority of the trees were purchased in the Tuesday thru Saturday period preceeding Christmas (Dec. 18 - 22). Roughly one-fourth purchased their trees in the previous week (Dec. 11 - 17). Less than two percent of the persons purchased their trees previous to Dec. 11. About nine percent of the trees were obtained on the 23rd and 24th, (Figure 2).

On the slowest sales day of the week, consumers bought about ten percent of the total trees. Saturdays were the biggest sales days when approximately one-fourth of the trees were sold. This may be partially accounted for by the relationship of Saturday to Christmas Day.

#### Place of Purchase

As Figure 5 points out, over one-half of the persons purchasing trees bought them from a regular Christmas tree lot. Slightly over one-fifth of the consumers purchased from grocery stores. Independent grocers sold more trees than did chain grocers - 13.9 percent of the total compared to 7.7 percent of the total for chain grocery stores. About one-twentieth of the trees were sold by fraternal groups. Roughly one of every 16 families received trees as a gift.

When asked if the place of purchase was on their regular marketing route, the respondents were fairly evenly divided between affirmative (53.4 percent) and negative (46.6 percent) responses. The lot or place where they purchased trees averaged 1.5 miles from their residences. However, about 3/8 of the respondents traveled an average of 2.2 miles.

### Who Selects the Tree

In the majority of cases (95.1 percent), an adult was present at the time the tree was purchased. The number of adults present was almost evenly divided between one adult and two or more adults. In only about 40 percent of the cases were children present.

When asked who actually decided on the tree purchased, the father chose the tree about three out of eight times, the mother one out of four times, the children about one out of 12 times and the family jointly about one out of four times.

### Do Persons Shop Around for Christmas Trees

Two-thirds of the families purchased their trees at the first lot they visited. When asked why they didn't purchase elsewhere, most persons gave reasons of convenience, poor selection and variety and too expensive. Table II gives a complete breakdown of reasons.

Only one-fourth of the persons had purchased from the same lot the previous year. About three-fifths of these persons also had purchased at the same place two years ago.

Very few of the consumers had heard or seen Christmas trees advertised. Of the lots that did advertise, consumers remembered best those that advertised via newspapers.

### Price of Trees

The average consumer who purchased a cut tree paid \$3.10 per tree. The average price for all trees including live (balled and burlapped) trees was \$3.47. The average price of live trees was \$8.71.

The families in the higher income groups tended to pay more for Christmas trees than did families with lesser incomes. Table III also indicates that

families with smaller incomes tended to have a higher percent not purchasing a tree.

In Table III, families refer to individuals living together in the same residence and eating some meals together. It does not include persons in institutions. Of the families in the sample, over 46 percent had more than one person working in the family.

#### Size of Tree

The estimated size of tree varied from three feet to over eight feet in height. The most popular height was six feet. Figure 6 points out that the trees 6 feet tall were purchased by at least 10 percent more of the consumers interviewed than any other size of tree.

#### Location of the Tree in the House

Very few purchasers placed their trees in the middle of the room. The majority were placed near a window or in a corner. Due to the proportion placed in the corner or on the side of a room, indicated by Figure 7 suggests that all trees marketed need not be perfect or nearly perfect on all sides.

#### Knowledge of Tree

The average consumer's knowledge of Christmas trees is not extensive. See Table IV.

Approximately 65 percent of the consumers did not know whether the tree was locally grown or imported from another state. About one-fifth said the tree was imported and approximately one-sixth stated their tree was locally grown.

One-third of the consumers stated they bought a tree with long needles in clusters; 3.8 percent stated their tree had medium needles and 62.9 percent had trees with single short needles.

### Live Trees

Eleven live trees were purchased by households in the sample. Average price paid was \$8.71. The most popular species was blue spruce. Average family income for families purchasing live trees was not significantly different from the average family income of the entire sample.

### Other Greenery

Approximately one-fifth of the families purchased Christmas greenery other than trees. Approximately half of the one-fifth purchased loose branches. Other greenery purchased included wreaths (27 percent), mistletoe (10 percent), cones (4.1 percent) and others (9.5 percent).

Families who purchased greenery had generally higher incomes than the rest of the sample. Over three-fourths of the households purchasing greenery also purchased trees.



Some Observations Regarding the Future

Increases in population and in per capita income should improve the future demand for Christmas trees. These trends in population and income should operate in favor of the Christmas tree grower and seller.

Ohio Christmas tree growers and sellers may profit by the use of tags, markings, leaflets, education and advertising. Freshness of cut is one of many factors that could be publicized. Since many Ohio grown trees are marketed within the state, consumer's loyalty to their state might be used as an advantage in merchandising.

Market expansion may result from promoting the use of Christmas trees over a longer period (thus interesting families going away for the holidays) and appealing to every family to have a tree. The latter promotion could be aimed particularly at older persons and small families.

Special attention should be given to market expansion of various specialties such as live trees, painted trees, boughs, cones, grave blankets, holly and wreaths.

Due to the time and expense involved in production, individual producers would do well to analyze their own markets and consumer preferences therein.

Christmas tree sellers should be mindful of delivering a consistently good product to the consumer at the time and place desired while also attaining efficiency in production, assembling, transportation and various marketing functions.

Table I - Reasons Given for not Having a Christmas Tree, Greater Columbus, Ohio Consumer Survey, 1956

Reason	Per Cent of Families Interviewed
Going Away for Holidays	28.4%
No Children	23.0%
Illness in Family	8.1%
Too Old	6.8%
Too Much Bother	5.4%
Personal (includes death)	4.1%
Misc. (includes religion)	9.5%
Gave No Reason	14.7%

Table II - Reasons for not Purchasing Christmas Trees Elsewhere, Greater Columbus, Ohio Christmas Tree Purchasers, 1956

Reason	Per Cent of Families Interviewed
Convenience	31.3%
Poor Selection and Variety	31.3%
Too Expensive	18.1%
Personal Friends	10.9%
Habit	3.6%
Misc.	4.8%
	100.0%

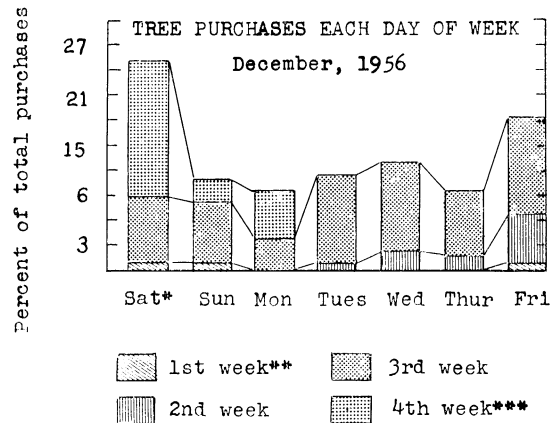
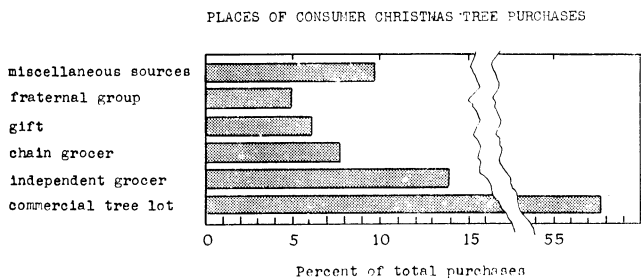
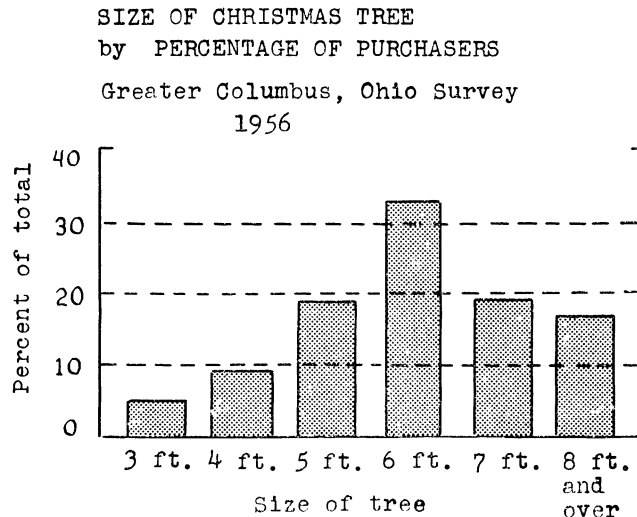
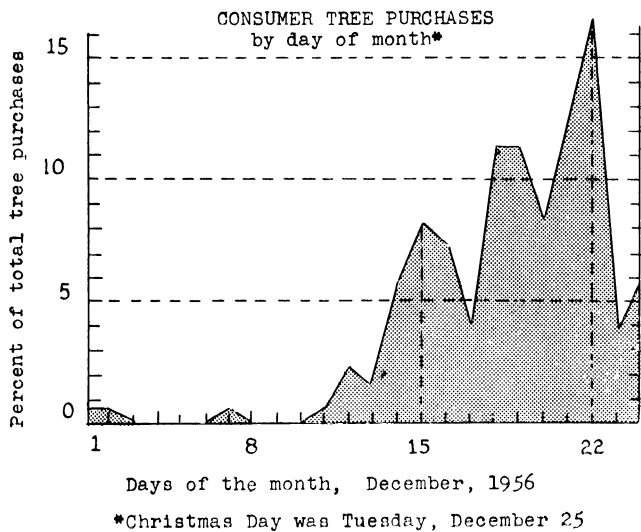
Table III  
Family Income Groups Differentiated by Percent Purchasing  
Christmas Trees and also by Prices Paid for Trees

Family Income Group (Annual)	Per Cent of Total Pur- chasing Trees	Per Cent of Total Not Buying Trees	Average Price Paid	
			All Trees	Cut Trees Only
Over \$10,000	8.3%	4.8%	\$4.60	\$4.15
\$7,001-10,000	19.3	13.1	3.89	3.33
5,501-7,000	28.2	15.5	3.28	3.06
4,001-5,500	20.4	15.5	3.09	2.98
2,501-4,000	19.4	23.8	3.06	2.80
1,001-2,500	2.9	24.9	3.96	2.28
Under 1,000	1.5	2.4	2.00	2.00

Table IV  
Consumer Identification of Christmas Trees  
and Average Prices Paid as Stated by a Three Hundred  
Family Sample, Greater Columbus, 1956

Species <sup>1/</sup>	Per Cent	Average Price	Species	Per Cent	Average Price Paid
Don't Know	30.8	\$2.97	Red Pine	0.9	\$3.25
Balsam	25.0	3.02	Evergreen	0.5	1.75
Pine	13.0	2.76	Ohio Pine	0.5	2.00
Spruce	8.1	3.65	Nova Scotia Balsam	0.5	4.25
Scotch Pine	7.7	4.33	Gray Bark Balsam	0.5	1.00
Blue Spruce	2.7	4.13	Norway Spruce	0.5	3.00
Canadian Spruce	2.3	3.00	Blue Scotch	0.5	5.00
Cedar	2.3	2.03	Sprayed Tree	0.5	1.49
Fir	1.8	2.58	White Pine	0.5	2.50
Balsam Spruce	0.9	1.29	Red Spruce	0.5	4.00

<sup>1/</sup> Species, as used herein, is the name by which the consumers identified the tree.



\*December 1 was a Saturday  
 \*\*Includes all purchases prior to December 1  
 \*\*\*Sales on 3 day only, Christmas 4th day

