

New Entrant Kit

WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP STARTING A CHRISTMAS TREE FARM IN NOVA SCOTIA



Nova Scotia New Farmer (nsnewfarmer.ca) is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture and Perennia. This website full of resources for starting a farm in Nova Scotia. It will lead you through the prep work needed to start farming. There's information about farm registration, contacts of regional suppliers and experts, and funding programs available through Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP).



Perennia has specialists across the province for a multiple commodities. Jay Woodworth is the Specialist at Perennia for the Christmas tree industry. Regardless of the commodity you're interested in farming, there's a good chance you'll be able to find an expert or subject matter expert at Perennia to support you. These specialists actively engage in research and are available to help at your convenience.



The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) is the voice for farmers across Nova Scotia. They promote advocacy work and offer a multitude of services and programs.

The Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture (NSDA) is where you go for programs and partially through them for your farm registration. The Department has regional offices across the province to offer support on a day-to-day basis for new people entering the farming industry in Nova Scotia.



Christmas Tree Industry Snapshot

The Christmas trees grown in Nova Scotia either go to the export industry, brokers act as a middle-person for export, or they're sold to a retailer broker to be sold locally. Ninety percent of the Christmas trees grown in Nova Scotia are exported. The Christmas trees exported consist mainly of balsam fir. Exports total around seven million dollars per year and the four biggest export markets are listed to the right for your interest. This supports more than 300 growers in the industry, and in excess of 4000 full time and part time jobs. What's interesting about Christmas trees is that the demand is continually increasing right now. So, if there was ever a good time to get into Christmas tree farming in Nova Scotia, it is right now.



The Christmas Tree Council of Nova Scotia



The Christmas Tree Council of Nova Scotia (CTCNS) was incorporated in 1975 as a not-for-profit organization run by an elected board of directors. CTCNS focuses include promoting the Christmas tree industry, industry advocacy, offering programs and services, doing the levy legislation, and supporting industry development through research among a whole host of other things.

CTCNS acts as an umbrella organization for the three main regional associations. Being the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association (LCCTPA), the North Eastern Christmas Tree Association (NeCTA), and the Cobequid Christmas Tree Producers Association (CCTPA). Each of those covering a different region in the province. LCCTPA covers Lunenburg area, NeCTA which covers your Antigonish and Guysborough counties, and CCTPA occupying the more central area of the province.



Regional Associations

Lunenburg County's Christmas Tree Producer

Association operates under a board of directors is very active. They have an experimental lot where many different experiments are carried out on day-to-day basis. They work on this lot together as a members and harvest trees from this lot for sale. They host field days, an annual general meeting, various competitions, and support marketing of their growers throughout the year. It's a very good spot to join and learn.

Northeastern's Christmas Tree Association is fairly similar, although they have their own entity and a brokerage so Northeastern would purchase a lot of trees from their growers. They offer professional quality grading to their members' trees. They similarly have field days, general meetings, marketing and sales support similar to Lunenburg County region.

The Cobequid Christmas Tree Producers Association similarly offers technical field days, an annual general meeting, and ongoing annual grower support as it's needed. Cobequid is a smaller association, but they still offer many of the same services.

Balsam Fir

Balsam Fir is the focal Christmas tree that Nova Scotia is known for producing. Simply put, balsam fir is the smell of Christmas. Balsam fir grows abundantly across the province in natural stands as they are well suited to our climate. Given our favorable growing conditions, we're able to produce good balsam fir with minimal inputs. For this reason, NS balsams fir are competitive in export markets.



Christmas Tree Production Cycle

Because Christmas trees have such a long turnover time, we're talking between 8 to 12 years it is important you plan for the future before you start planting. The first step is site preparation which begins by selecting which style of tree lot you wish to start. You need to think about what kind of lot density you need. Usually that's going to depend on your markets, which are sometimes pretty hard to predict if you're almost a decade away from selling trees. An awful lot of planning has to go into this.

In Nova Scotia, the majority of Christmas tree lots are natural regeneration or natural regeneration with stand interplanting. This means that most of our lots began as wild

stands. Over the years selectively culling trees results in balsam fir becoming the dominant tree species in a lot, which are maintained to produce Christmas trees.

Another style of Christmas tree lot is plantation, which is what you usually see from photos coming out of the United States. In plantation lots trees are planted and maintained in a row system. Plantations requires a lot of planning and preparation. You'll have to decide which style of Christmas tree lot is right for you depending on your land, access to equipment, and market. An associated risk with a plantation is that you are required to source seedlings. We recommend that you try to get on the list early with a local nursery so that you'll have enough seedlings for your spring planting. You can find more info on establishing a tree lot on the [CTCNS YouTube channel](#).

Annual maintenance is what takes up the most amount of time. It will take around a decade to grow a tree, but this can be shorthanded or lengthened depending on certain factors. The three big factors in a tree's life are:

- **Proper pest/disease management**
- **fertilizing**
- **quality of the sheering**

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That's what's really going to help produce a tree in a faster amount of time which is ultimately the goal. Every year your tree is costing you money. Other factors include the characteristics of your site, your soils, and what pests and diseases do you have in the first place to be managed. Usually, we recommend starting to shear mid-July through late August and go into the fall until you're finished. That's the ideal time, but a lot of it is going to depend on your individual schedule.

Finally, after a decade it's time to harvest. Ideally, you've outlined your market well before you've started harvesting. Though, it is likely markets would have changed overtime, so you need to think about what your market is going to be. This encompasses what height, what density, and what grade the trees are. This will be reflected in your management practices, so you'll know what you'll have to end up with. Sales must also be considered. This takes a significant amount of consideration given there's a lot of different options. Are you going to be selling directly to a brokerage, selling them from a retail lot, a u-pick, or you going to export them?



The vast majority of farmers use balers to package the trees they sell. For instance, if you have u-pick lot the ability to bail a tree for somebody to put on top of their car. Balers as well as shakers are necessary for international export. So that's another input costs to consider when you're planning your production cycle.

Finally shipping, if you're going to be exporting or even shipping to another retail lot, you need to think about how you're going to go about doing that. You need to locate a shipper that you trust and can work with annual basis. In short, there is a lot of planning and skill required for a tree to go from sapling to money in your pocket.



CTCNS New Entrant Online Resources

CTCNS has put together an extensive collection of resources on their website in the New Entrant Kit. In the kit, there is information concerning how to use various online tools that facilitate the planning process for your Christmas tree lot. There are links to provincial soil survey maps and the Provincial landscape Viewer. These resources enable you to understand your soil morphology as well as the biotic and abiotic characteristics of your land. The other resources include information on best practices, the export levy, business planning, safety information, human resource management practices, grants and financing, as well as the Christmas tree journal.

We highly encourage anyone thinking about starting a Christmas tree farm to consult these resources! In addition to the contacts available on the New Entrant web page please find other key contacts below.

Resources & Contacts

Application	Platform	Contact
Site Assessment, Recommendations, Diagnostics, Field Support, Research	Perennia	jwoodworth@perennia.ca
Association membership, Levy compliance, Newsletters	CTCNS	outreach@ctcns.com
Research Projects	CTCNS/Perennia	jwoodworth@perennia.ca research@ctcns.com
Technical Videos	YouTube: Christmas Tree Council of NS	outreach@ctcns.com
Real Trees, Real Talk Podcast	Podcast Platforms	resource@ctcns.com
Balsam Fir Forum Virtual Technical Conference	www.balsamfirforum.com	learning@ctcns.com
Certification in Christmas Tree Grading	www.ctcns.m5i.com/courses/grading/	jwoodworth@perennia.ca

ADDITIONAL LINKS

CTCNS New Entrant Kit Resources: <https://ctcns.com/association/new-entrants-kit/>

CTCNS New Entrant Kit YouTube Video with Q&A:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix001QeLUEU&t=37s>

