

2002 Minnesota Christmas Tree Customer Survey

**Conducted by:
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**In cooperation with:
Minnesota Christmas Tree Association**

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Improvement Program.*

Objective and background:

The primary objective of the survey was to provide growers with current market research specific to their customers. This information should provide useful in understanding their customers demographics and preferences. The customer survey was conducted at 12 different locations in Minnesota during November and December, 2002. Five retail lots and seven Choose and Cut farms distributed the surveys. A total of 249 surveys were returned, of which 70% were completed online and 30% were completed in written form and returned to the MDA by mail. Due to the low number of responses from retail locations, the summary results only include Choose and Cut locations.

Response Locations:

Choose and Cut	89%	222/249
Retail Lots	11%	27/249

Did your family have a real Christmas tree when you were a child?

Yes	75%	166/222
No	13%	29/222
It varied	12%	27/222

How many years have you purchased a real tree?

First year	3%	7/222
2-5 years	14%	29/222
6 to 10 years	18%	40/222
11 to 16 years	14%	31/222
More than 16 years	51%	113/222

Including this year, how many years have you purchased a real tree from this retail lot or chose and cut location?

First year	32%	71/222
2 to 5 years	41%	92/222
6 to 10 years	14%	32/222
11 to 16 years	4%	8/222
More than 16 years	9%	19/222

In the past five years, have you purchased tree(s) from other choose and cut or retail lot locations?

Yes*	54%	120/222
No	46%	102/222

*Most responses of yes were due to where people lived 5 years ago.

What is the single most important reason you chose this location?

62	Convenient location	28%
51	Traditionally good quality trees	23%
22	Other (shown below)*	10%
16	Saw/Heard an advertisement	7%
14	Good customer service	6%
12	Had the variety of tree I prefer	5%
10	Most competitive prices	5%
10	To use a coupon	5%
1	Location had a special event	--

*Other Reasons:

- Referrals and recommendations (5)
- Quality trees (2)
- To cut our own tree down (2)
- The tree farm we previously used, closed
- Chance to get away and relax
- Horses
- We want a 11 foot tree for a good price
- We have been going there since we were children
- Staff extremely helpful.
- Friends of owners
- The Hastings Tree Farm I usually went to was closed down so we were desperately looking for a tree farm that had 10 foot balsam trees, we did not want a sheared tree, but all of the tree farms we called shear their trees. I do not like sheared trees a...
- It was open on weekdays
- Coupon on Internet
- Person I was with has been going there for quite a few years now, and always likes to cut their own tree.
- Friend told me about wagon rides, hot cider and peanuts for kids
- I saw ad in the paper and we went to check it out. We like the cut your own trees, and the people were friendly.

Who came with you to buy the tree?

162	Spouse	73%
153	Children	69%
35	Other relatives	16%
13	Friend	6%
8	Came by myself	4%

Who in your household is most responsible for choosing your fresh tree?

107	Adult female	48%
84	Adult male	38%
18	Child/ children	8%
11	Group	5%
2	No response	---

How did you hear about this farm/lot?

85	Newspaper ad	38%
67	Recommendations	30%
65	Fliers, newsletters, or mailings	30%
41	Sign of billboard, or poster	19%
17	Listing in the MCTA's Choose & Cut Directory	8%
6	Listing in the Minnesota Grown Directory	3%
4	Radio ads	2%

For this farm/lot how would you rate the following? (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	NR	Avg.
a. The quality of trees?	1	3	13	75	128	2	4.5
b. The variety of trees?	-	3	20	78	118	3	4.4
c. The price of the trees?	3	1	50	93	71	4	4.0
d. The farm or lot atmosphere?	-	1	0	76	140	5	4.6
e. The helpfulness of staff?	-	2	9	56	150	5	4.6
f. The rest room facilities?	3	6	41	35	34	104	3.7
g. The parking facilities?	-	3	35	89	86	9	4.2
h. The equipment provided?	1	-	5	77	135	5	4.6
i. The overall experience?	-	3	5	65	147	2	4.6

Is there something this location could offer that would significantly increase your desire to buy trees here?

No	75.5%	166/220
Yes	24.5%	54/220

Suggestions for improvement:

- Bigger/taller trees (7)
- Hot apple cider and Hot chocolate (7)
- Pricing could be less (4)
- Continue to offer repeat customers coupons (3)
- More variety (Fraser and balsam) in taller trees(3)
- Petting zoo (3)
- Christmas music (2)
- Animals, more Fraser firs that you can cut yourself
- Availability of all trees advertised on website
- Bathrooms/ Heated indoor restrooms
- Being able to pay by credit card
- Better selection of cut your own trees (short needles) they were all short and tiny
- Black hills spruce, they are great trees!
- Email notification prior to Christmas

- Fewer spray painted trees!
- Fuller trees
- Have a program, if you buy a certain amount of trees you get one free
- I would like to see a section of balsam trees that are not sheared. Not everyone likes sheared trees.
- Just a general comment - we were thinking that you might want to tag each tree or somehow control that people are paying for the tree they did pick out, since it is totally based on honesty now. It seems like people would be able to leave without paying...
- I had to push a stalled tractor. Someone should have stepped forward with a discount.
- More reasonable tree prices
- More trees and lower prices (more comparable to other tree farms)
- More variety
- Nearly all the balsams I looked at were too narrow in the lower half giving them more of a rocket shape. Perhaps due to the lateness in the season, but i had to walk up and down the entire section to find one that I liked.
- White pine uncut

What is your favorite type of tree?

75	Fraser Fir
54	Balsam Fir
30	Scotch Pine
17	Unsure/don't know
13	Colorado (Blue) Spruce
13	White Pine
9	Norway Pine
9	No response
3	Black Hills (White Spruce)
3	Other (specify)

Which type of tree did you purchase today?

75	Balsam Fir
49	Fraser Fir
40	Scotch Pine
18	White Pine
10	No response
9	Unsure/don't know
7	Black Hills (White Spruce)
7	Colorado (Blue) Spruce
6	Norway Pine
1	Other (specify)

How many weeks will you keep the tree in your home?

1	One	----
27	Two	12%
83	Three	39%
88	Four	39%
13	More than four	7%
8	No response	3%

Do you also own an artificial tree?

48	Yes	22%
167	No	75%
6	No response	3%

If yes, complete this statement. In most years we...

have displayed both types tree	21%
have displayed only a real tree	58%
have displayed only an artificial tree	12%
no response	9%

How much did your household spend today on real Christmas trees?

3	Less than \$10	--	21	\$41 - \$45	9%
1	\$11 - \$20	--	18	\$46 - \$50	8%
77	\$21 - \$30	35%	12	\$51 - \$60	5%
39	\$31 - \$35	18%	5	\$61- \$70	2%
29	\$36 - \$40	13%	10	More than \$70	5%
			11	No response	5%

How far is this farm retail lot from your home?

42	0 -5 miles	19%
43	6 – 10 miles	19%
20	11 – 15 miles	9%
34	16 – 20 miles	15%
26	21 – 25 miles	12%
12	26 – 30 miles	5%
36	More than 30 miles	16%
9	No response	4%

Demographics:

148 Female (71%)	60 Male (29%)
174 Married (87%)	26 Not married (13%)
125 Children at home (67%)	61 No children at home (33%)

Education:

18	High school graduate	8%
48	Some post high school	22%
31	2 year degree	14%
67	4 year degree	30%
15	Graduate school	7%
23	Masters degree	10%
8	Doctorate	4%
12	No response	5%

Age:

0	Under 20 years	--
5	21 to 24 yrs	--
12	25 to 29 yrs	5%
30	30 to 34 yrs	14%
50	35 to 39 yrs	23%
38	40 to 44 yrs	17%
21	45 to 49 yrs	10%
29	50 to 54 yrs	13%
12	55 to 59 yrs	5%
14	60 to 64 yrs	6%
0	65 to 69 yrs	--
2	70 yrs and over	--
9	No response	4%

What is your household income?

5	\$0 to \$24,999 per year	2%
30	\$25,000 to \$49,999 per year	14%
51	\$50,000 to \$74,999 per year	23%
42	\$75,000 to \$99,999 per year	19%
28	\$100,000 to \$124,999 per year	13%
12	\$125,000 to \$149,999 per year	5%
7	\$150,000 to \$174,999 per year	3%
4	\$175,000 to \$199,999 per year	2%
0	\$200,000 to \$209,999 per year	--
33	No Response	15%

Marketing Conclusions:

- Over 75% of consumers had a tree as a child. Marketing to recently married families is incredibly important. It is during the first few years of marriage, often the first year, that a family decides which tradition they will follow.
- Over 50% of consumers have purchased a tree 16 or more years. This reinforces the need to market to young families. Once they make the decision to have a real tree they stick with that tradition.
- Over 30% of consumers completing the survey visited the location for the first time this year. This elevates the importance of providing information at the point-of-sale. Never assume that the customer knows your store, unless you know them personally. Provide customers with adequate signs, maps, directions and assistance. It is important to make sure their first experience is pleasant so they are more inclined for repeat visits.
- A convenient location ranks high on the list of most important factors in deciding where to make a purchase. Consider investing in signage and in creating a visible parking area.
- Nearly 24% of consumers chose locations because they believe the location traditionally has had high quality trees. It is important to differentiate yourself in the market, because **consumers expect high quality**. It is the extra added-value items such as Santa, animals, gift shops, clean restrooms and other features that entice consumers to patronize one location over another.
- 89% of consumers brought at least one family member with them to purchase a tree. Choosing a tree is a family event. Make it a special occasion for them to remember and you will ensure future visits from them and a tradition that children will adopt as adults.
- Direct mailings are a great way to keep in touch with your customers. If you have not started a database of customers, we highly recommend you start.

- Recommendations are among the top ways customers find out about your farm. One suggestion is to use the current mailing list of customers and create an incentive for them to tell a friend, family member or neighbor about your farm.
- Overall weighted average of all the rated aspects of locations is 4.39. This means that on the aspects of quality, variety, price, atmosphere, rest room, equipment, staff, and parking the average customer rated the industry between good and excellent.
- Price satisfaction was rated 4.0. Such a high degree of satisfaction may be a sign that there is room to increase prices without losing too many customers.
- Satisfaction with rest room facilities rated 3.8. This may be one area that can be improved, especially if you have women and children visiting your location (67% of customers brought children).
- Nearly 47% of customers will keep a tree four weeks or more. Provide tree care tips and stress the importance of making a fresh cut before putting the tree in water. Make sure customers understand which varieties last the longest and which are better suited to a shorter period of display.