

QUEBEC CHRISTMAS TREES

Despite strong competition from artificial Christmas trees, the growing of real ones is gaining ground in Quebec, where a number of farmers in the Eastern Townships have gone so far as to abandon all other crops in favour of the Christmas tree. Their fields are gradually being transformed into evergreen plantations, with good yield prospects. Since Quebec alone cannot provide a market for the entire crop, growers must turn to the United States, where, although the sale of genuine Christmas shows a tendency to decline, owing to the sale of artificial trees, there is still enough demand for natural ones of top quality to ensure producers a good income.



Artificial Christmas trees are growing in demand but Quebec farmers are still doing good business from the sale of natural ones.

SIZE AND COLOUR

Producers have to consider the requirements of the U.S. buyer, who is no longer content with trees of all sizes and colours taken at random from any woodland. The height, for example, must vary between two and three feet for trees that will stand on tables, with others to reach an average of six feet. The most popular colours are blue or dark-green rather than light green. Finally, the trees in most demand are heavily needled, fresh and healthy, well-developed, bushy and well-shaped.

The most popular species are the Scotch pine

(27 per cent), Douglas fir (22 per cent) and balsam fir (12 per cent). The distance from the market is important to the Quebec producer, since long trips will mean a loss of needles for certain varieties. Almost half the exported Christmas trees are from plantations near the U.S. border. Market trends indicate that cultivated trees are gradually replacing wild ones (trees cut down at random in the woods).

Scotch pine and balsam fir are best suited to the Quebec soil and climate for the growing of Christmas trees. The fir, in particular, offers certain advantages: it does not grow as well in the United States as it does in Quebec, hence there is less competition; the fir is also less cumbersome than the Scotch pine; the growing areas could be converted to pulp or timber forests if the market declined.

On the average, Christmas trees take no more than ten years to grow to marketable size, which means that the producer must set up a rotation on his farm for the planting, pruning and harvesting of trees.

A piece of land may yield about 1,000 trees an acre. But under the ten-year rotation system, a farmer with 20 acres of land will only plant and harvest the equivalent of two acres each year.

Certain growers in the Eastern Townships are already aiming at an annual production of 10,000 to 20,000 Christmas trees. In 1970, Quebec exported some 1,300,000 Christmas trees to the United States, more than half of which came from the Eastern Townships.



Dressing up for Christmas.