

long history of excellence in the Christmas tree industry. Its trees are shipped to the New England and middle Atlantic regions including such large cities as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Areas in the US form the prime market for Nova Scotia's Christmas trees — especially its high quality balsam fir. Some trees travel as far south as Miami, west to Chicago and southwest to Texas; others are destined for the Caribbean and South America.

Competition, though, is fierce.

British Columbia exports to the mid and southwest United States and Mexico, bringing in about half a million dollars annually in export sales.

Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire produce the popular balsam fir — first choice for many Christmas tree buyers. Nova Scotia must compete with the eastern United States market.

Despite the competition, Nova Scotia producers receive about \$5 million a year in export sales.

#### Quality controlled

The production of quality Christmas trees in the Atlantic region is a serious business. Producer-formed associations work on improving production methods and tree quality. These associations also provide a forum to discuss the most recent developments in Christmas tree operation and act as co-operative marketing agencies. As well, they make a valuable contribution to ongoing federal and provincial government research programs aimed at developing better production techniques.

The quality of a Christmas tree is its biggest selling feature and determines the seller's profit. Atlantic Canada's tree farmers, with their specialized skills, crop management techniques and ability, have no trouble providing high quality trees that meet the exacting requirements of the US market.

Trees are classified according to density, taper, balance, condition of foliage and presence or absence of defects. Foliage density is based on the amount of visible stem between the lowest and uppermost branches.

After being separated into foliage density classifications, general appearance is most important to the grading. Cone spikes and lichens may be present as they are natural characteristics.

The Maritime Lumber Bureau, a non-profit organization, acts as the grading agency for the industry and is responsible for its administration. The Atlantic



*Christmas trees are compressed into bales for shipment to domestic and US markets.*

Canada grade has been adopted by the Christmas tree industry and is supported by each of the Atlantic provincial governments.

After the grading, the trees are marked with coloured Atlantic Canada grade tags denoting density and tree symmetry. Besides providing a standard for tree quality, it is descriptive, giving the dealer and the consumer a good idea of the appearance of the tree once it has been hauled home from the lot.

Like a Miss Canada bathing beauty, the Atlantic Canada grade select (centre) tree has to look good from every angle but since most buyers prefer to place the tree in a corner, the Atlantic Canada grade select (corner) tree need only look great from three angles and sport not more than two blemishes on its corner side. Centre and corner selects are of the

highest quality heavy density; fancy and choice are medium density.

Roadside sales bring in another \$1.5 million to Atlantic Canada. Provincial residents receive the bulk of this money as direct income in the form of wages and salaries and net income for producers. With consumer re-spending, more than \$2 million in direct income is created for provincial residents.

The remainder of the revenue from Christmas tree sales — about \$200 000 — is spent on basic inputs such as fertilizers and saws, thus creating income indirectly for other industries.

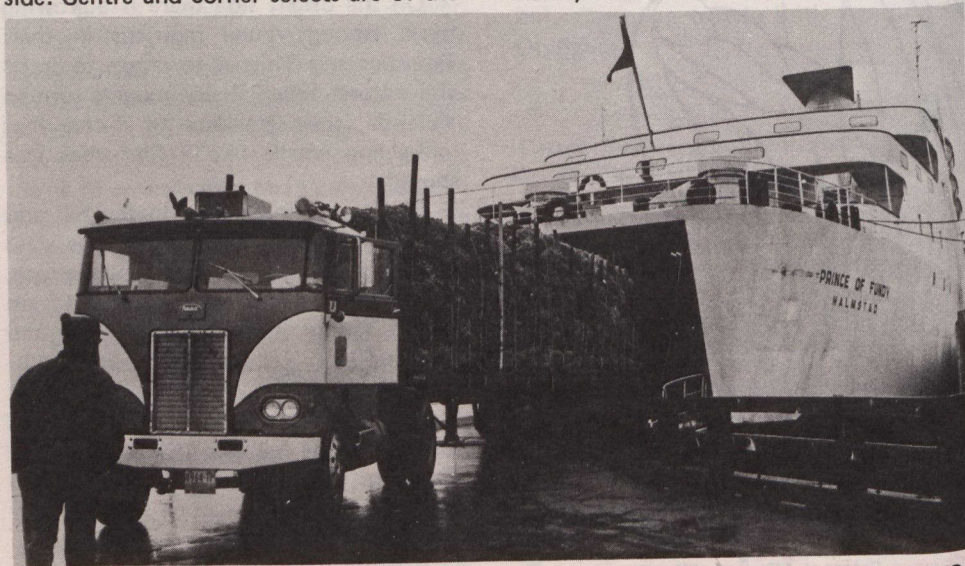
#### Select your own

There is scarcely an industry that has not been affected by rising energy costs and the Christmas tree industry is no exception. Especially the "choose and cut" operational arm of the industry. Excursions into the country "to bring home the tree" started about 15 years ago, when oil and gasoline were cheap and plentiful.

Says G. Myron Gwinner, a Hermann, Missouri retailer: "For all Christmas tree growers, the next few years may well be critical and only those who are well prepared and adjustable in their operations may be able to ride out these years. The energy situation is not likely to go away and it has the potential to become critical upon very short notice."

And yet, despite good times or bad, the Christmas tree and the Christmas tree industry will survive — as a symbol of warmth, love and goodwill. It will endure as long as there is roast turkey, plum pudding and tiny tots whose eyes light up to match a brightly baubled tree.

*(By Shirley Plowman in Canada Commerce, December 1981.)*



*Nova Scotia's Christmas trees en route to points south. Some travel as far as Miami, US.*