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Christmas Trees and the Economy

(Chesterfield, Mo.) – The National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) recently released results of Christmas tree purchases for the 2008 holiday season. The industry group commissions an annual consumer tracking poll with Harris Interactive, Inc.

Poll results show that consumers in the U.S. purchased 28.2 million farm-grown Christmas trees and 11.7 million artificial trees in 2008. Both are declines from 2007, with the fake tree category showing the steeper decline of 35%, while real trees were down about 10%.

"It was a tough year for some, but overall the farm-grown Christmas tree industry is still healthy," said Mark Steelhammer, NCTA President. "We heard from many of the small Choose & Cut farms especially, that that segment had a strong year in spite of the overall decline."

Both product categories saw consumers spending less than they had on individual trees purchased. Average amount spent on a farm-grown tree was \$36.50 while consumers spent \$60.63 on average for the fake kind. This is a 14% combined decline from the previous year. Consumers simply spent less money on Christmas trees than they did in 2007.

"It's hard to point to a specific cause for the decline," said Steelhammer. "While many will just blame 'the economy,' our agricultural product's retail value is naturally volatile once it hits the retail level because of the condensed sales season."

Industry experts point out that many factors can influence sales from harvest conditions, weather conditions, number of consumers traveling for the holidays and even to number of days between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"The good news for us family farms growing Christmas trees," said Steelhammer, "is the same poll asked what they (respondents) plan to do for Christmas in 2009. And 35% said they planned to buy a farm grown Christmas Tree, so we should be very busy this year."

It is estimated that Christmas tree farms in North America planted about 42 million new tree seedlings in 2009 to replace harvested crops and meet future increased demand.

For more information, visit www.realchristmastrees.org.