

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Another selling season has come and gone. And it was gone earlier than usual this year. We closed for the season on December 9, the earliest for quite some time. While we are grateful that we sold what we wanted to sell so quickly, we feel bad that we weren't able to stay open longer. We had many phone calls from customers looking to cut their tree after we had closed.

So why did we have to close so soon? We thought about that for a while and came up with several factors that may have affected us: shade, drought, competition, insects, fungus, plague, pestilence, famine... Okay, so the last three not so much. But it seems like we get hit with one thing after another from early spring to late autumn!

Did anyone notice blue paint on some of the trees surrounding the plantations this year? It wasn't because we had a major paint-ball battle. To address the issue of too much shade on our Christmas trees, we have decided to push back the edge of the forest 20 – 30 feet. The blue paint marked the path for the loggers to follow. Ideally, if the surrounding forest is comprised of 70' tall trees, you would leave 70' feet between the edge of the forest and your first row of trees. We might have enough to drive a pick up through in most areas, never mind 70 feet! And we don't even have that much in other areas. By pushing back the forest a bit, we hope to let more sun shine on our trees, allowing them to fill out more and grow more quickly. That is one way we can have more trees available for sale in the coming years.

Another issue we faced in 2016 was the drought. We fell way behind our average annual rainfall this year. It started with very little snow last winter, and was exacerbated by a dry spring, summer and early fall. While the drought didn't kill our larger trees, the lack of rain may have slowed their growth. Unfortunately, the trees we planted in April were less fortunate. We lost an estimated one seedling out of every three to four we planted.

The drought affected some of our competitors, too. In fact, we were told some tree farms didn't open this year because of the effect the drought had on their trees. So while competition normally negatively affects our sales, this year we had many customers who came to us because their usual tree farm was closed.

As for insects and fungi, they are always present. But we use an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system to minimize the damage they cause while limiting the need for spraying. All of these things tend to limit the size and number of trees we have available.

When you come back to see us next year, the farm may look a little different. We will begin the process of pushing the borders back as soon as the ground is frozen. And we will be praying for a good snow cover this winter and a steady amount of rain this spring to help our trees rebound from the drought of 2016. And we do both in order to make more trees - and better trees - available to you, our loyal customers!