

White House Christmas Tree Grown In The Mountains Of N.C.

—By Bob Cairns—
 This Christmas the White House has something in common with more than a million American homes—a Christmas tree grown in the mountains of North Carolina.

The 18-foot short-needed Fraser fir in the Blue Room was supplied by Hal Johnson of Ashe County. Johnson is the 1982 winner of an annual contest sponsored by the National Christmas Tree Association.

A second tree was provided by Johnson for the Reagan's living quarters.

"Johnson typifies the Western Carolina farmer who has helped make Christmas trees a full-fledged agricultural crop in the state," said William T. Huxster, Jr., a N.C. State University extension specialist in the School of Forest Resources.

Johnson's 1982 harvest, planted approximately eight years ago, includes more than 8,000 short-needed Fraser firs—trees cut from mountainous acreage once used for less profitable crops.

He is one 1,500 North Carolina farmers who allotted acreage for Fraser fir Christmas trees in 1982.

The short-needed Fraser firs harvested in Western Carolina this year will account for more than 60 per cent of the state's \$23 million Christmas tree harvest.

Back in the 1950s the N.C. Forest Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the N.C. Agricultural Extension Service began a cooperative effort to identify a more practical crop for the small landowners in Western North Carolina, Huxster said.

"We were looking for a labor intensive crop, one that would generate a high income for small farmers," he said.

The short-needed Fraser fir, North Carolina's only native fir Christmas tree, fit the bill. The bluish-green tree has horizontal branches, an attractive crown and a pleasant fragrance.

"It has all the essential characteristics that consumers look for in a quality Christmas tree," Huxster said.

The warm days and cool nights, the high-organic, porous soil and the short growing season found in the state's high elevation areas (2,000 feet and up) make an

ideal environment for growing firs.

"Counties such as Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, Jackson, Transylvania, Haywood and Macon all produce large annual crops of Fraser firs," Huxster said.

The Christmas tree crop has an approximate growth rotation of 15 years from sowing to cutting, and it isn't raised without risk. "But, if all goes well and there's no problem with weather or disease, a farmer can gross in excess of \$30,000 per acre per cutting," Huxster said.

North Carolina, which ranks eighth nationally in Christmas tree production, has come a long way since NCSU and other state agencies began assisting the industry.

"A gross production income of \$3-million in 1973 had doubled by 1978," Huxster said.

Now in 1982 the state's growers of firs, pines and cedars are expecting an income which should exceed \$23-million.

The pricing of the trees in any given year is based on a variety of factors, Huxster

said.

"The cost of labor, maintenance, shipping and the 14-year investment of time by the farmers must all be considered," he said.

This year N.C. trees are retailing for approximately \$4 to \$6 per foot and are being shipped as far as Los Angeles and Caracas, Venezuela.

According to Huxster, the state's high national ranking in production hasn't stopped the N.C. industry from setting its sights on an even greater share of the country's Christmas tree market.

N.C. State University forest geneticists, the N.C. Forest Service and the state's Christmas tree growers believe genetically improved trees could play a major role in attaining the goal, he said.

"We're still a generation away from a real tree improvement but selecting firs and crossing the superior stock would eventually supply is with genetically improved seed in great quantity," Huxster said.

Through this selection and breeding process the growers will be able to raise Christmas trees faster, with

better natural shape, more density, longer needles and a more consistent blue-green color.

If N.C. State scientists, foresters and extension specialists are able to continue their quest for a better Christmas tree, by the year 2000, the mountainsides of North Carolina could be covered with thousands of superior Fraser firs—Christmas trees equal in quality to the trees decorating the White House this holiday season.

Weight Watchers Offer Help For Holidays

Christmas is a magic word that means different things to different people. For some, it conjures up the image of roaring Yule logs and sleigh rides; for others, warm weather and a picnic at the beach. But whatever your personal customs are, Christmas probably includes a big family meal.

Shirley and Art Weiner, Area Directors for Weight Watchers of Delmarva, Inc. say, "If you are conscious, the holidays may present certain challenges, Weight Watchers can help, by offering some

good advice and a Christmas menu so delicious, it's hard to believe it's part of a weight control plan."

Start the day off right by following this advice from Dr. Reva Frankle, Nutritionist for Weight Watchers International: "Plan on eating three balanced meals to 'save calories' for special holiday foods and end up overeating. Be forward, and arrive at the holiday table in control and able to enjoy the festivities."

This year, Weight Watchers suggests you start off your meal with very special stuffed artichokes. Then, enjoy

roast pork with apple-raisin sauce and a colorful mixed vegetable medley, accompanied by a loose-leaf lettuce salad. Top it off with a "Noel Log", a dessert so delightful it could easily become a family favorite.

To obtain Weight Watchers Christmas recipes, write to: Weight Watchers of Delmarva, Inc., Public Relations Department, Janaf Office Building, Suite no.116, Norfolk, Va. 23502

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