THE TWIN CITY METROPOLITAN AREA AS A MARKET FOR NORWAY PINE CHRISTMAS TREES

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A study made in December, 1956, of the residential consumption of Christmas trees in the Twin Cities and suburbs emphasizes the importance to Christmas tree growers of a planned program of market diversification and market development.

This study was based on a random start, systematic sample of non-business listings in the telephone directories of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Interviews were conducted by telephone. Sixty retail sales lots also were surveyed in person to furnish data on 1956 Christmas tree sales.

Of the 30 residential informants providing consumption data, 223 (74 percent) used 1 or more trees and 77 did not use any. Nineteen persons contacted refused to give any information to the interviewers. Consumption of 1 tree was reported by 208 respondents; of 2 trees by 14 respondents; and of 3 trees, by only 1 respondent. This represents an average of 0.797 trees per residence.

The estimated number of urban residences in Anoka, Dakota, Ramsey, and Hennepin counties was 345,132 as of January 1, 1956. Total Christmas tree consumption for urban residences in these counties, therefore, is estimated at 275,070 trees for 1956.

Since balsam fir and the various species of spruce are not grown as rapidly in plantations as are the several species of pine, and since Norway pine has been the most popular of the pines on the Twin City Christmas tree market, special attention has been focused on this species.

Three estimates show that Norway pine made up approximately 15 percent - 41,261 trees - of the number of Christmas trees used in the Twin Cities and suburbs in 1956. These estimates are based on:

1. The surveys mentioned in this paper were conducted in connection with the North Central Regional project NCM 20.
2. Assistant Professor and Professor. School of Forestry. University of Minnesota.
3. The study did not attempt to collect data on the consumption of trees by stores and other business establishments.

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1. The consumer survey reported above -- 17 percent Norway pine.
2. The survey o- retail yards reported above -- 14 percent Norway pine.

There is also some evidence that the relative numerical importance of Norway pine has been increasing. In the St. Paul YMCA lots in 1951 no Norway pine were sold; in 1952 this species made up 1 percent of the sales; and in 1956 it made up 15 percent of the sales.

Population change is another major factor affecting the consumption of Norway pine Christmas trees. The practicability of predicting population changes for the purposes to be served by this paper is questionable. However, to give some dimension to the population picture, it can be mentioned that the U. S. Bureau of the Census reported the total population of the 4-county area at 1,116,509 in 1950, and that the total population as of January, 1956, was estimated at 1,247,600.

Recognizing that the upper limits of the Twin Cities market are set, to a large extent, by population increases and changes in the amount of Norway pine purchased relative to other species, the plantation owner should realize that he has alternatives to the Twin Cities Christmas tree market:

1. Expansion of market area - Rather than centering marketing plans on the Twin Cities area, plans should be considered for shipping to other population centers.
2. Product diversification - Producers should seriously consider the possibility of producing additional products such as fence posts and pulpwood. Cultural operations to improve the quality of Christmas trees should be directed only to those trees showing the prospect of producing premium quality trees. Time spent in shearing and other relatively expensive cultural operations is wasted if applied to trees which are finally sold as fence posts.

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6/ A Christmas tree marketing study currently under way in the North Central Region and in which the Minnesota School of Forestry is cooperating should provide valuable information on markets in the North Central region in general. Research Note No. 44, of the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Ogden, Utah, presents interesting statistics in regard to market expansion on Christmas tree shipments from Montana to other states.
7/ A forthcoming issue of Minnesota Forestry Notes will deal with the possibilities of using overgrown Christmas tree plantings for fence posts.