

# GUILT TRIP???

Are you feeling guilty about buying a “live” (cut) Christmas tree? Lots of folks seem to be. The following material is quoted from Digger magazine, the publication of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. The article was written by Elizabeth Peterson of West Linn, Oregon.

“We need to convince the public that real trees are not only safer than fake trees, but that they are a much better choice for the environment”, according to Tom McNabb, president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries Christmas Tree Chapter.

Many Oregon Christmas tree growers belong to the non-profit Coalition of Environmentally Conscious Growers. The coalition works to certify the environmental practices of Christmas tree farms through a rigorous auditing process. Member growers commit to environmental compliance for riparian and wetland management, soil and water conservation, nutrient management, site selection, pest management, worker health and hygiene, biodiversity, and consumer outreach.

Complete field inspections occur every three years with annual follow-ups.

The coalition recently developed hangtags to mark trees that have been certified as grown under these stringent environmental criteria. This year more than 200,000 trees will bear the tag, taking the message directly to the consumer.

According to McNabb, even without the certification, real trees are a conservation crop. Real trees are both renewable and recyclable, and growing them benefits the environment as well as the U.S. economy in a number of ways.

For instance, Oregon Christmas trees often are planted on ground that is poor for other farming. Their presence stabilizes the soil and provides wildlife habitat. While growing, real Christmas trees help the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and other gases and emitting oxygen.

One acre of Christmas trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people. Most Christmas tree farms use little supplemental water and practice responsible, sustainable farming practices that contribute to healthy watersheds. When Christmas is over, communities recycle trees by turning them into mulch, which is used to benefit future plants.

On the other hand, fake trees are neither renewable nor recyclable, and the vast majority are imported from China. In 2006, some 9.8 million trees were imported from China, according to reports from the U.S. Dept. of Commerce. What's more, fake trees generate toxins when they are produced, and again when it is time to dispose of the PVC that they contain.

**Happily, you may now relinquish the guilt!**