

# It Wouldn't Be Christmas Without One

The afternoon is cold and hazy. The air is moist, and it feels as if tiny ice crystals are suspended in the quiet winter afternoon. In the distance the sporadic buzz of a chainsaw rips the silent air. The low light heightens the greens of the perfect rows of trees. Nearby a stack of cut, neatly wrapped trees awaits shipping. The tangy scent of cut evergreens is everywhere. The crates of festive holly and mound of trees make the quiet countryside seem a bit like Santa's workshop. This is where they grow Christmas.

Oregon's abundant forests are known nationwide for more than their lumber. The country's largest supply of Christmas trees is grown here, and Oregon is second only to England in holly production. Oregon-grown trees and holly are shipped all over the United States.

Spring Creek Holly Farm, located along the McKenzie River just east of Leaburg, grows both holly and Christmas trees. The quaint white buildings of the farm are set off beautifully by the 15 acres of berry-laden holly and the surrounding 35 acres of Christmas trees in various stages of growth. There are even a couple of acres where you can choose and cut your own tree.

Spring Creek specializes in a slow-growing but truly magnifi-

cent tree: the Noble Fir. Where the more common Douglas Fir will grow to five feet in height in about five years, the Noble Fir may take 10 to 12 years to reach the same height. But the results are worth it. The tree is a perfect shape, the type only dreamt of in a Dickens tale. Each branch is full and balanced, inviting ornaments and gifts to be layed on its deep green boughs.

Pete Campbell has been manager of the farm for the last 13 years. He is a wiry man with an outdoor vigor and a twinkle in his gray eyes; proof that tree farmers are not a bunch of Scrooges, counting the money with each swing of a chainsaw. There is an affection for the land, for the crop and for the season that seems to permeate their heavy seasonal work load.

Campbell and his crew begin the harvest when other farmers traditionally end theirs: Thanksgiving. Like elves, their faces are rosy from the exertion and the icy air. They work their way through the fields, cutting trees that have been carefully chosen for harvest and tagged with blue ribbons. Then they pile the trees gently onto a wagon where they are taken to be baled and shipped.

Trees are selected for harvest by their appearance. If a tree looks perfect, it will be tagged and cut. After the cutting is

done, new trees will be planted to take their place. The Noble Firs grow slowly, especially the first two or three years, says Campbell, reaching only about two feet high in those early years. After that the growth speeds up. This is when farmers start pruning and shaping the trees, forming a shape that will eventually adorn someone's

home. The trees are trimmed so that their branches are bushy and balanced. They top the trees to keep them from becoming too tall. After about 12 years of this pruning and fertilization, they are ready for Christmas.

Spring Creek's holly trees were planted in 1954.

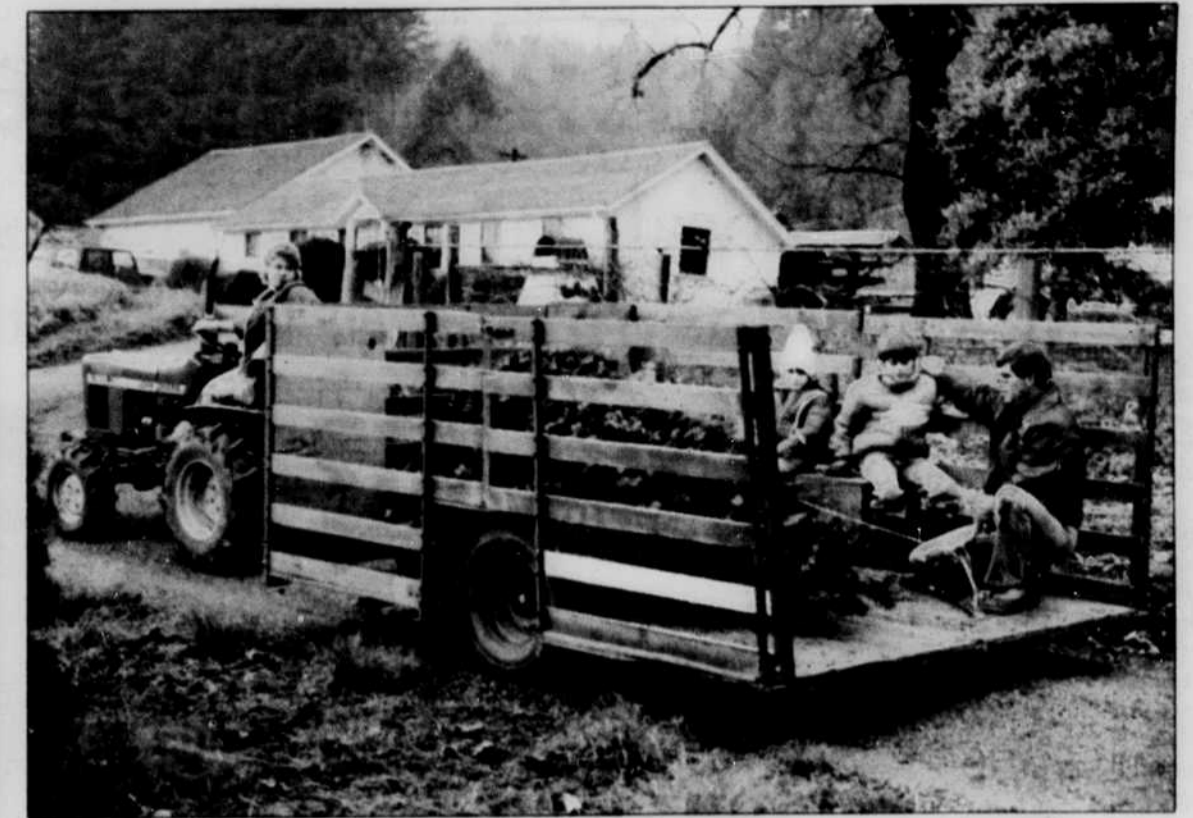
Tree farms all over Oregon will be abuzz with the sound of

chainsaws until the last few days before Christmas. By Christmas Eve people all over the country will have Oregon trees to set their gifts under. Then Pete Campbell and all the others who work so hard to harvest Christmas can celebrate their own special connection to this holiday season.

— ALYSON SIMMONS



Photos By  
Maria Corvallis



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