

Trees

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In North Carolina, Blue Ridge Christmas Trees sells 3-foot-tall tabletop Christmas trees via Amazon and larger trees through another online company, Wayfair.

“Shipping cost is still a big issue,” Blue Ridge owner Xavier Iglesias said. “We originally partnered with Amazon in 2015. We chose to begin selling online because that’s where the consumer now shops.”

“Times are changing, and we do not want to be left behind,” he said.

Americans still flock to choose-and-cut farms and chain stores such as Walmart for their real trees, but many prefer artificial trees that can be stuffed away and reused year after year.

Christmas tree growers also are grappling with hot summers that are causing more die-off than usual for their younger plants.

More artificial trees on display last year

More than 27 million real trees sold last year compared to 21.1 million new artificial trees, according to the latest National Christmas Tree Association projections.

However, 81 percent of Christmas trees displayed in U.S. households last year were artificial, while 19 percent were real, according to American Christmas Tree Association estimates.

Tree shoppers paid an average of \$75 per real tree in 2017, up 30 cents from the year before, while artificial trees cost \$107 on average, or about \$8 more year-to-year.

Still, Christmas tree growers continue to suffer a tight supply of trees, which contributes to climbing prices. “The shortage this year is a little worse than last year,” Hupp said.

This year, the farm raised its wholesale prices by some 10 to 15 percent.



Alejandro Rios of Silverton harvests a Christmas at Hupp Farms near Silverton on Nov. 5. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hupp Farms plans to harvest roughly 10 to 15 percent fewer Christmas trees than 2017, he said.

Despite the tight supply of trees, O’Connor said that customers who want real Christmas trees have been able to get them.

Still, O’Connor said it’s going to be another four to five years before the industry sees an increased number of trees available for harvest.

Warm summer fuels tree ‘die-off’

Farmers have another concern to

contend with: weather.

“The long, hot summer was hard on newly planted trees,” said Chal Landgren, a Christmas tree specialist with Oregon State University.

Manager Casey Grogan of the Silverton-area Silver Bells Tree Farm said his farm has experienced more “die-off” than usual the past two or three summers because of noticeably drier conditions.

That means farmers have to go in and replace the trees, he said. When that happens, costs rise because farms have to buy and plant the tree twice.

Even so, “if we stressed out about every little seedling that died on our farm, we probably wouldn’t still be in business,” Grogan said.

At Hupp Farms, “the heat of the summer didn’t affect the trees as much as some other growers,” Hupp said. “Sometimes if it gets too hot and dry, some of the current seasons’ needles can get a little sun burned.”

—The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Aumsville

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or race with 18.6 percent of the vote, incumbent Councilor Della Seney was second with 15.6 and Ceja was third with 13.2. The top three vote getters win the three City Council seats up for grabs.

Incumbent city councilors Gabe Clayton (10.9 percent) and Brian Czarnik (9.0 percent) were fifth and sixth in the Wednesday tally.

Aumsville Community Action members Walter Wick and Ed Blakesley were fourth and seventh.

A group called The Friends of Aumsville PAC — largely funded by Rex A. Lucas — spent \$3,229 to fight the Aumsville Community Action’s candidates in the election.

“I know certainly the negative attacks didn’t help any of the incumbents,” Casarez said.

The median age in Aumsville is 37.9, and 49.5 percent of Aumsville households have children 18 or younger. Salem, by comparison, has a median age of 34.6.

There are fewer millennials who live in Aumsville, 12 miles east of Salem and surrounded by farms in Marion County, than in larger communities.

But the young people became a symbol for something greater.

“Honestly, I don’t think it’s that I got the people in those older age brackets to believe in me, it was too much of the same for so long,” Clevenger said.

“They didn’t necessarily like me, and some of them disliked me, but they disliked the current administration more,” he said. “They disliked the status quo, and they wanted to see something different.”

How did the movement start?

The root of the movement was how the Aumsville City Council voted to add a monthly \$12 public safety fee in December 2017, and the wording of the ordinance that allowed the city to foreclose on a person’s home if they didn’t pay the additional bill.

The Aumsville Community Action group was formed as a closed Facebook group and triggered a recall election of city councilors Kevin Crawford, Trina Lee and Lorie Walters in July.

All three were voted out of office.

The remaining Aumsville councilors appointed Larry Purdy, Jim Case and Gus Bedwell. None were part of the Aumsville Community Action group, event though four members of the group had applied for the positions.

Of the people who applied for the city council, only Casarez had previous experience after serving on the Aumsville City Council from 2008 (at age 20) to 2015.

“Maybe I analyze things too much, but when I look at this, it shows a pattern to me,” Clevenger said. “The city government does not critically analyze things, they don’t think about the big picture.”

Clevenger and Casarez said addressing the public safety fee was important, but they don’t intend to repeal it.

Clevenger said he wants to change the language of the fee, which is already underway, and wants caps placed on fees like it.

“Overall, a conversation has to take place and I’m going to do my best to be a part of that,” Casarez said. “Are we going to put in some sunset and say in two or three years we have to look at this situation and evaluate where that’s at?”

“I personally would like to see it referred to the voters.”

After the initial returns came in Tuesday, Aumsville Community Action Facebook page founder Chris Chytka changed the privacy from a closed group to a public group.

“Making it an open group is a fantastic way to wrap everything up,” Clevenger said. “That’s the bow on the present.”

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