

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
IN-PERSON BOARD MEETING
August 6, 2026

Hyatt Place, Verona, Wisconsin

Welcome and Roll Call: Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Central time.

Board Members in Attendance: Chuck Berry, Jane Neubauer, Chris Aldrich, JoLynn Stroda, Gary Thomas, Scott Powell, Sam Cartner, Sophia Stajduhar, Kari Puffer, Renee Beutell

Board Members not in Attendance: Jan Hupp

Board Members Via Zoom: Ryan Tyce

USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster

Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray and Jenny Tomaszewski

Staff via Zoom: Cyndi Knudson

Guest in Attendance: Barry Campbell

Agenda

Requested the addition of “Contract Agreement” under Staff Management.

It was **MOVED** by Scott Powell and **SECONDED** by Sam Cartner to approve the agenda as corrected.

MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes:

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to approve June 18, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman’s Report – Chuck Berry reported.

- Berry shared that the Board is still awaiting the referendum results. George Webster shared that ballots have been counted and are with the Under Secretary, Dudley Hoskins’ office.
- A question was raised regarding already approved contracts; Webster shared that within every contract, there is a written termination notice which can be utilized if the program should dissolve.
- Webster provided the Board with a detailed overview of the process should the referendum fail: The Board would vote on three trustees that would be tasked with determining where funds would be distributed and dissolving contracts. The staff and trustees would work together with USDA until the end. A final audit of the financials is conducted at the end.
- Board members shared their concerns and frustrations that the results have yet to be released and discussed sending a formal letter to the Under Secretary, Dudley Hoskins, addressing their concerns.

Committee Reports

Finance – JoLynn Stroda reported.

- a. **June 2026 Financials:** Stroda provided a detailed overview of the June 2026 financials.

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell and **SECONDED** by Scott Powell to accept the June 2026 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **Approval of Auditor** – Marsha Gray shared that Propp Christensen Caniglia, LLP, has submitted their letter of engagement to the Finance Committee for the annual audit. The estimate for a new audit is a slight increase from the previous year and is estimated between \$8,400 and \$9,500.

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell and **SECONDED** by Sam Cartner to approve engaging Propp Christensen

Caniglia, LLP, to audit the RCTB's financial records for the 2025-26 fiscal year. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Research Request for Proposals** – Knudson reported that we received twelve projects from eight different Universities. Committee members read and scored the proposals. At the committee meeting, the results were discussed and six projects, totaling \$122,920, were recommended to the Board; one of these projects is in its second year. The recommended projects exceeded the budget by \$7,920. It was suggested that the overage be taken from the \$68,116 remaining in the research reserve funds.

It was **MOVED** by Kari Puffer **SECONDED** by Sophia Stajduhar to approve the six research proposals for \$122,920, as recommended by the Research Committee, with \$7,920.00 to be pulled from the research reserve fund. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- Knudson shared that the Committee is working to coordinate a Webinar for September. Topic and date to be announced.

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich reported.

- Aldrich shared that the Committee would like to frame communications as more of an open channel: what can the Board do for you? Aldrich requested Board direction on how the Committee should proceed.
- Board members discussed different communication ideas: using the word 'fake' terminology and being able to use the word in the RCTB material, creating a survey for producers to provide their ideas to the Board.

Governance Committee – Jane Neubauer Reported.

- a. **Board Nominations Balloting** – The following nominees were submitted to USDA for recommendation on August 1, 2026: Central: Bev Keener, John Krueger; Western: Elaine DeGeorge and JoLynn Stroda; and Eastern: Jessie Davis, Lindsay Eshelman, Carrie McClain, and Peter Sweet. The Secretary of Agriculture will make the final selections.

The Board took a break at 10:11 a.m. Central Time and reconvened at 10:26 a.m. Central Time.

Compliance Committee – Marsha Gray reported in Jan Hupp's absence.

- Gray shared that one grower audit was completed, and the others are on hold until the results of the referendum are released. The Committee will be accruing June's contract, enough to cover the remaining audits.
- Gray presented a new compliance direction using satellite imagery. Jason Hanselman has begun a test map using Google Earth and other tools. At the September meeting, Hanselman will present this project to the Board.

Promotion Committee – Kari Puffer reported.

- a. **Planning for 2026 Campaign** – Puffer shared that the contract with FleishmanHillard has been signed. The scope of work will include:
 - Grower and Consumer surveys
 - Messaging and Media Authority (remains a priority)
 - Owned social, paid search, paid social
 - Industry engagement
 - Influencer partnerships – talked about hosting a TikTok tabletop Christmas tree challenge.
- b. **Consideration of Additional Program Activation** - Board members discussed at length the All-Access segment with Andy Garcia, "Farming for a Greener Future: Cultivating Christmas Memories."

Cost for the segment: \$25,900 for the underwriting fees, plus \$3,400 for a shoot location fee, totaling \$29,300. The production company is interested in shooting in North Carolina. No specific farm or retailer can be mentioned.

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve moving forward on the All-Access segment with Andy Garcia, using reserve funds totaling \$29,300 based on availability, timing, and not featuring competitive products. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- c. **November Virtual Farm Trips** – JoLynn Stroda shared that the Committee is looking to select an Eastern or Central time zone location, as well as a West Coast farm for the next two farm trips in early November. A suggestion was made to partner with the farm that will be providing the White House Christmas tree for the 2026 season.

Management Staff Updated - Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the report. As of July 27, 2026, we have received 1,178 reports through the lockbox, online portal, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs, totaling \$1,288,825.35.
- **Multi-State Specialty Crop Block Grant** – Gray shared that they have looked into this opportunity; application is due mid/late October. Cyndi Knudson and Timothy Richards would be writing the grant. Two groups, RCTB and NCTA, are interested in creating a tool or mechanism to determine how many Christmas trees are sold in the US. Gray requested Timothy Richards provide an estimated cost for the project. There is a 25% matching fund requirement.
- It was suggested to reach out to American Horticulture to see if they would be interested in contributing funds.

New Business:

- a. **Contract Agreement** – Steve Mortimore with Fishhook Development Contract, \$120 per hour for a maximum of 60-72 hours to provide ongoing maintenance and troubleshooting of the online reporting and payment system.

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell, **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda, to approve a contract with Fishhook Development for \$120 per hour for a maximum of 60-72 hours for the 2026-27 fiscal year. **MOTION APPROVED.**

USDA – George Webster reported.

- a. **Referendum Update** – Webster reported on the referendum under the Chairman's report but reiterated that as soon as the notice is pending to be published in the Notice to Trade, he would let the Board know.
- b. **Status – Non-Responding Importer** – Webster stated that they want to wait and see how the process continues with the Domestic non-responder producer, as the Treasury Department is less effective with Foreign Companies.
- c. **Status – Non-Responding Domestic Producer** – Webster stated that they remain with the Treasury's office. No update will be provided unless the Treasury's office receives payment or the producer appeals.

The Board recessed for lunch at 11:57 a.m. and reconvened at 12:15 p.m. Central Time.

For the Good of the Order/Announcement:

The Chairman, Chuck Berry, called the Board into Executive Session at 12:15 p.m. Central Time.

The Chairman, Chuck Berry, adjourned the Executive Session at 12:45 p.m. Central Time.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Next Meeting** – The RCTB’s next meeting will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.

Adjourn:

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 1:47 p.m. Central Time.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jenny Tomaszewski
Staff in Ryan Tyce’s absence