

# Research aids Christmas tree industry



Plumas-Sierra County Director and Farm Advisor Art Scarlett has devoted 20 years to the development of improved cultural and management practices at Christmas tree plantations.

**T**he production and marketing of Christmas trees in California can be described as a "growth" industry in more ways than one.

Industry sources estimate annual sales at \$55 to \$60 million, up 50 percent from 5 years ago. California itself supplies trees for about 25 percent of this market; the balance comes from growers in Oregon, Washington, and the Midwest.

Some 600 Christmas tree plantations in the state, many in Southern California, offer customers "choose and cut" trees. The bulk of the trees sold, however, come from natural stands, located mostly in Northern California's high altitude regions. Most of the pictures shown here were taken by Jack Kelly Clark in the high Sierra counties.

Industry sources attribute much of the continued advance of the Christmas tree industry to the research and extension programs of the University of California. M. L. Levy, executive secretary of the non-profit California Christmas Tree Growers, describes the University's assistance in basic research and in the development of improved cultural and management techniques as "invaluable."



The Sierra redwood (*Sequoia gigantea*) has a natural growth pattern that makes it an excellent mountain Christmas tree. Shown with this tree at Meadow Valley is Sandy Pricer, manager of the UC Forestry Camp there.



"Choose and cut" tree plantations can be found near most population centers in the state. The fast growing Monterey pine, which reaches marketable size in 3 to 4 years, is the favorite of plantation owners.



Sandy Pricer checks a white fir in an experimental plot at Baker Forest, site of the UC Forestry Camp.



A well-shaped tree is the result of care and attention to good cultural and management practices. Some trees have to be sheared to promote compact, symmetrical growth as they near market age.



Premium quality Christmas trees—mostly white fir (*Abies concolor*) and red fir (*Abies magnifica*)—come from high altitude natural stands such as this one near Mineral owned by Fred Beresford. Cultural practices have improved the quality and yield of these trees. A premium mountain-grown tree takes 14 years or more to reach marketable Christmas tree size. Harvesting Christmas trees from these natural stands provides an interim income until timber reaches harvesting size.



Natural-stand, mountain grown trees are loaded on special pallets for storage and shipment to market. Developed by Farm Advisor Art Scarlett, the pallets reduce breakage 30 percent by eliminating multiple handling.