



ECA NEWS

Quarterly Publication of Exotic Conifer Association

Vol. 1: No. 1

ANNUAL FIELD DAY AT FRANKE FARMS, LLC

Election Of New Officers — Guest Speakers Rick Bates and Brian Eshenaur

Good News For Exotics

ECA thanks Kendra Franke of Franke Farms LLC of Marian NY, for hosting our ECA's Annual Field Day on Sep. 10 2016. Franke Farms, LLC pioneered the way for exotic Christmas tree production.

Leland Franke, Kendra's grandfather, introduced Exotics to the farm with help from the Geneva Agricultural Experiment Station. These introductions of King Boris fir, Arizona Cork-bark fir, Firma fir, and Cephalonica fir have developed into mature trees and seed orchards.

The weather cooperated. Kendra's tour and explanation of Franke Farms operation were fascinating. It was wonderful to see, touch and smell so many exotic varieties.

Franke Farms finds a growing interest among current wholesale customers for exotic trees and brush. "Retail customers are beginning to ask for the exotics by name," says Kendra. Other ECA members, from around the country, noted the same strong and optimistic trend.



Ken Franke with his Turkish x Balsam

ECA Meeting Minutes

Sept 10, 2016, Host Kendra Franke, Franke Farms Marion NY

Rick Bates was a guest speaker talking about exotics and the national trials that are ongoing. Brian Eshenaur was a speaker in the field talking about pests and diseases.

Field tours were given in the AM due to expected bad weather in the PM. Pres. Larry Downey opened the Business meeting at 3 pm. Bob White took the minutes for Marlene Downey. All present members were given a copy of last year's minutes to review. No issues were identified. Mike Lane made a motion to suspend reading the minutes, second, Randy Caster, motion approved.

A discussion about membership and the web site followed. Bob White and Larry explained our current situation and past history back to Bob Girardin's days. Randy Caster made a recommendation that a study group be formed to look for ways to expand membership. Motion made by Randy Caster to form this group, second Matt Mongin. Motion passed. Larry asked Randy to lead this effort.

Bob White explained that the Web site host was expensive but generally included any updates that we ask for at no additional charge. No motions were made on this topic.

Cynthia Curtis spoke of making a email Newsletter. She volunteered to publish some type of newsletter, if members would share their experiences. Discussion followed. The membership felt this would make an impact and be helpful. The group indicated they would support the effort. There was no vote on this. The de-

cision was made to just move forward. Info can be sent to Cynthia at curtistreefarm@gmail.com. Put ECA in the subject line. Larry or Cynthia will ask permission to use Bob's old posts and publish new ones he may write.

Bob White gave the Treasures report and it was discussed. Current balance was \$9269.88 before the meeting. Matt Mongin made a motion to except the treasures report, second Randy Caster. Motion passed.

Discussion followed on options for future 'Research Dollars,' Rick Bates indicated he was ok for now. Bob White spoke of potentially supporting Rick Cowles sulfur research. Dave Beck felt that money would be better spent on actual exotic research. No action taken.

Larry Downey graciously thanked ECA for allowing him to serve and indicated he and Marlene were not available to continue as the President/Secretary. Larry indicated Bob White was also ready to be replaced as Treasure.

Larry indicated that he felt the positions of Secretary and Treasurer could be combined into with 1 person. Matt Mongin indicated he would be willing to accept the Secretary/Treasure position. Randy Caster nominated Matt Mongin, no other nominations were made. Nominations were closed. Matt accepted the position.

Mike Lane agreed to take over the president role. Milt Yakley nominated Mike Lane, Randy Caster, second, no other nominations came from the floor. Nominations were closed. Mike accepted the position.

Discussion followed on where a 2017 meeting could be and when, etc. Potentially we might line up with the MACT

meeting in the Midwest area. Other sites were discussed in the Midwest.

No site or date was chosen. Mike Lane will investigate further. He thought it would take a few weeks for the locations to be determined.

Bob White will email Randy Caster the membership lists so he can contact members about looking for methods to approach new members. Meeting adjourned at 4:20.

New Officers Elected

Mike Laine, Pres.

Northern Minnesota Nursery

12017 Eagle Rd

Floodwood, MN 55736

Email: mikelaine@northernminnursery.com

Phone: 218-476-2162

Matt Mongin Sec. Tres.

Spring Valley Tree Farm LLC

2462 Cook Road

Spring Valley, OH 45370

Email: monginmatt@gmail.com

Phone: 937-429-1717

Gratitude to Larry and Marlene Downey and Bob White for serving out their terms as Pres. and Secretary.

Congratulations and thank you to our new officers.

From Mike Laine, Pres.

www.northernminnursery.com

Hello to all of our Exotic Conifer members. At our last meeting at Ken Frankes' farm in New York, Larry Downey expressed his desire to step down as president from the organization. I was nominated and accepted the job. I do not have the expertise on growing fir as Larry but I share his passion for trees.

I started Northern Minnesota Nursery in 1987. I grow mostly fir trees and have tried a few different exotics.

Where I am located it is classified as zone 3 so I am limited to what I can grow. I have had good luck with Korean, Veitch, Siberian and Manchurian fir. The

Manchurian Fir is generating a lot of interest up here. It is similar to the Siberian fir but has a faster growth rate. I have tried Nordman, King Boris, Bornmueller and Turkish fir and have not had much luck. I have done some grafting with balsam fir, and currently trying to set up a Korean fir seed orchard near balsam and Fraser to obtain a cross.

At the Exotic meeting Cynthia Curtis said that she would be willing to work on getting an online newsletter for us. What we would like to do is get back to what Bob Girardin did with his newsletter on a quarterly basis. She is already doing a fantastic job and I am looking forward to working with her.

What I would like to do is work on finding out how and when to shear Korean fir. I have a block of about 500 that I will dedicate to this project. During the course of how long it takes to get them to maturity I will take pictures of results and progress and post in the newsletter.

We would like to have members share any information whether it is fertilizing or herbicides that are being used, and add them to our newsletter. It is not always easy to come up with new things to write about because the results from working with trees take time.

Thanks and I look forward to working with everyone to keep this organization going.

From Matt Mongin, Sec., Tres.

www.springvalleytreefarmllc.com

Jane and I own and operate a 20 acre choose and cut Christmas tree farm in South West Ohio near Dayton. We started this project in 1986 while I was employed as a government auditor and Jane was a registered nurse. We finished out our professional careers in 2012 and now spend most of our time in retirement growing trees. We grow or try to grow most conifers suitable for our climate as well as some exotics that may someday prove to be well adapted.

I enjoy propagating our best trees and hybrids of ours and others. We have long followed the exotic conifer movement and look forward to advancing it further.

Koreana Trimmings

Larry and Jimmy Downey



Larry Downey explaining his method of trimming Korean fir

Koreana's are fairly new to the Christmas tree industry. Their tolerance to certain diseases represents fewer pesticide applications and better tolerance to soil diseases which is beneficial for us; the producers. However we discovered that this species responds differently to the trimming techniques that we perform presently. Leaders were not straight and the tree started to grow more horizontally. We were able to correct this by changing the pruning techniques. We therefore would like to share this information to avoid this side effect, since this species has many beneficial attributes.

Here at Downey nursery's we have learned that Koreana's bud break and top selection do not occur at the same time as other species. This means that the timetable for trimming needs to be adjusted. The following is our timetable with steps that acts as a guide for us. When we followed these steps, we have improved by 90 percent the Koreana's form and leaders.

First, we start to prune the tops very early in the season. We start late June before trimming the balsam firs, depending where you are situated and the season, dates may vary. So we chose our leader and remove competition growing upwards by pruning them at the base. This



will give a chance to the true leader to straighten and gather energy for next year's top growth. If the leader has reached 12 inches in length, it must be cut. We find that 12 inches is a good height since the tree has a tendency to fill easily. However, if the leader is not straight, it must not be cut even if it is longer than 12 inches. As soon as the leader is

bend or straighten.

Depending on the seed source, rainfall, and soils, the selected leaders might have to be tied up to a straight stick. We attach the leaders when no apparent vertical growth is seen. This could happen to 10% to 20% of the Koreans depending on the season and the age of the tree. We noted that these trees need more attention between 4-6 feet and afterwards they seem to correct themselves for the leaders. We use bamboo sticks as they are rigid. This will aid the tree in keeping a straight leader that grows vertically, and over the years, a straight trunk. The stick can be removed the following year.

We perform a second pass 10-14 days later to cut the terminal leaders that were not cut either because they were not 12 inches or because they were not straight enough. If the leader still has a tendency to grow horizontally, we initiate a new leader by removing the old at the base. So we cut in the previous years growth ("old wood") removing completely the top. This will initiate a new growth from dormant buds in the following year. By doing so, we might lose height from that growing season but we keep a straighter trunk for the following years



Quarterly Publication of Exotic Conifer Association - Winter, 2017 - pg. 3

Koreana will frequently produce what we call "lama's growth." This occurs when the leader and/or terminal bud will break a second time in the same season given rise to a second growth. This usually occurs after cutting the leaders at 12 inches. This lama's growth must not be cut as it contains potential leaders for the following year.

We pass a third time to trim the rest of the tree in mid to late July. Passed late July to early August we do not cut any leaders since they contain the chosen leaders of the next year's growth. Finally we have observed that the koreana crossed with lasiocarpa are much easier to get straight leaders and are disease resistant like the true koreana. As usual if you have any questions concerning the trimming information, you may contact Larry.

Plant Profile: Serbian Spruce (*Picea omorika*)

**Dr. Rick Bates, Assist. Prof. Ornamental
Horticulture Penn State University**

There is no perfect tree. However, there are many little known trees with superior characteristics that merit our attention. Considered by many to be the most handsome of the spruces, Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*) deserves wider use.

Introduced to cultivation in the late 1800's, Serbian spruce is native to a small region of limestone mountains along the upper Drina river of Bosnia and Serbia, in Southeastern Europe.

Description:

In cultivation, variation in form does occur from seed. While I have observed some broadly pyramidal specimens, most have a very slender trunk and short ascending or drooping branches forming a very narrow, graceful, spire-like habit. The tree has a moderate growth rate of up to 12" per year and generally will attain a height of 50-60' by 20-25' spread.

Serbian is one of the few spruces with flat needles like a hemlock, not the four-sided needles of most spruces. The short, ½" to 1" long needles are lustrous dark green above while the underside has two broad stomatal bands. These bands collectively stand out, creating a unique silvery contrast that is very effective when the upswept branches move in the wind. Cones are egg-shaped to 2½" long and pendulous, blue-black when young, cinnamon when mature.

Culture:

Hardy to USDA Zone 4, it grows well in full sun to partial shade on sites protected from winter wind. While Serbian prefers a rich, moist but well-drained soil, most sources indicate it will tolerate a wide pH range, drought-prone soil, and urban conditions. It is considered to be one of the most adaptable spruces; quite a claim given the "toughness" of the more commonly planted Colorado and Norway spruce.

Pests:

Few, if any, diseases bother Serbian spruce. Some sources list aphids, mites, scale and budworm as potential insect problems, however there are few reports of these pests significantly affecting the tree in Pennsylvania. The notable exception is White Pine Weevil. This pest can seriously disfigure Serbian spruce if not controlled on a routine basis.

Landscape Value:

An elegant specimen, this species deserves a prominent place in the landscape. It can be used in groups, as a single specimen, or even as an evergreen street tree. It has utility as a natural screen and its narrow habit makes it suitable for even small residential landscapes. Serbian represents a welcome alternative to the all-too-common Norway and Colorado spruce. Perhaps Dr. Larry Kuhns summed it up best when he commented, "Serbian is as under-planted as White pine is over-planted".



Serbian spruce represents a welcome alternative to the all-too-common Norway and Colorado Blue spruce.

Common Cultivars:

'Nana' – The Dwarf Serbian spruce makes a rounded to conical, irregular dome of dense foliage to 12' in height. A very beautiful specimen plant for the small to medium sized garden.

'Pendula' – A graceful, slender tree with drooping, slightly twisted branches. Grows more slowly than the species; may need staking when young to develop a leader.

Significance for Christmas Tree Growers:

Many Christmas tree growers also produce an assortment of conifers for the B & B landscape trade. Growers should consider adding Serbian

spruce to their species mix. The production cycle is similar to that of Norway and White spruce and Serbian is easy to transplant. It is extremely adaptable and has an excellent ability to re-establish in the landscape. In addition, as more landscape architects, landscape contractors and homeowners become aware of this gem, demand should continue to increase.

Use of Serbian spruce as a cut Christmas tree is limited. This is due primarily to postharvest quality characteristics such as poor needle retention. Growers wishing to venture into the "live tree" or "table top" tree niche market, however, may find a place for Serbian spruce. It is well adapted to containerized production, has an acceptable growth rate, requires minimal shearing, and often develops a great deal of "character" at an early age.

Quarterly Publication of Exotic Conifer Association - Winter, 2017 - pg. 4

\$45M In Grants For Value-Added Producers

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA is providing more than \$45 million to help farmers, ranchers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs nationwide develop new product lines. USDA is investing in 325 projects through the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program.

"Value-Added Producer Grants are one of USDA's most sought-after funding sources for veteran and beginning farmers, and rural-based businesses," Vilsack says. "These grants provide a much-needed source of financing to help producers develop new product lines and increase their income, and keep that income in their communities. Economic development initiatives like this one are working – the unemployment rate in rural America is at an eight-year low and incomes rose 3.4% last year. Small business entrepreneurship, which Value-Added Producer Grants support, is a major reason why rural America is making a comeback."

VAPG grants can be used to develop new product lines from raw agricultural products or promote additional uses for established products. Veterans, socially-disadvantaged groups, beginning farmers and ranchers, operators of small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches, and farmer and rancher cooperatives are given special priority.

USDA has awarded 1,441 VAPG awards since 2009, totaling \$183 million. Congress increased funding for the program in the 2014 Farm Bill. The grants are a key element of USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative, which coordinates the Department's work on local and regional food systems. Secretary Vilsack has identified local and regional food systems as a key component of rural economic development.

Promotion Board Unveils Campaign Logo and Design!

In recent weeks, Christmas tree growers were introduced to the Promotion Board's new campaign logo. In fact, Concept Farm has created two iterations of the logo, each featuring the campaign theme; It's Christmas. Keep It Real., as well as incorporating traditional Christmas green and red. The circular version includes the more graphic elements of the tree, stars and banner while the horizontal, text-only version emphasizes the straightforward message and cleverly references the Christmas tree by replacing the "A's" in the text.

IT'S CHRISTMAS. KEEP IT REAL.

These logos will be incorporated in the Christmas Tree Promotion Board's promotional campaign this season and all Christmas tree growers have been encouraged to include them in their own promotional and marketing efforts. The logos can be downloaded from the CTPB website. At the site, growers can

also access a downloadable catalog of logo images, banner designs and suggested uses for the new campaign logos. The logos and banners are one part of the Growers Toolkit that will be constantly updated with material for grower use.

Because much of the success of the campaign will be realized on-line and through social media, the toolkit will soon include simple, step-by-step instructions for growers to set up their own social media accounts for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and more. Also, over the next number of weeks, growers will have access to memes, gifs and creative material to post on their sites and create consumer interest.

The logos and other items posted on the website are just the beginning. Growers are encouraged to check back regularly for fresh content.

<http://www.christmastreepromotion-board.org/2016-campaign/>

<https://itschristmaskeepitreal.com/>

Nature/Nurture

Message from Bob White

We were at Weir tree farm this weekend, like many others Jay has been struggling with areas that have problems after multiple rotations, and looked for answers with exotics. Years ago we had an ECA meeting at the farm, they had many types of exotics in the ground then. They still have several different types of crosses etc growing.

For years a good percentage of their sales has remained the Balsam (pollen) X Fraser (cone).

The tree that Jay likes for the future, and we saw years ago at his farm is the Balsam (Pollen) x Korean (cone).

I noticed this had a very pleasant aroma not the Korean smell, Jay says it grows anywhere and likes his harsh climate. The balsam traits are dominant and the tops have few issues.

The original source they had is lost but was a very deep Green, the current source has a lighter color but still is a nice tree.

He also had some blue Koreans that came from Larry Downey, I am not sure of the way they were crossed.

The smell on these are the Korean citric, greenery has a deep blue, narrow tree, tops are much better than Korean, about 90% have no issues. They are very hardy. They grow well from Vermont to Quebec.

Message from John Curtis

I planted Deep Mt Douglas fir. They grow good for me in spite of the blight. A farmer not 10 miles away couldn't grow them. Proves every farm is different. Bourmuller and Nordmann look very similar. You can't tell them apart. My experience, on my farm, is that Bornmuller is ready to harvest one full year sooner than Nordman.

Needle fir is well named. The needles are 3 inch long and come to a fine point. They are not more prickly than Colorado Blue Spruce.

In NJ, Nikko Fir is good to grow. Not so, Noble fir.

Vetch Fir has an early bud break. It makes up for that failing with its fine scent.

Message from Bob Girardin

Blue Korean Update: I brought a six foot Blue Korean fir in my house as my Christmas tree. No needle drop. Beautiful tree.

Marketing Korean Fir: I donated a eight foot Korean fir to my local Agway store to help promote Exotic conifers. The owner said the Korean sold immediately and he wants to know where he can purchase some Korean firs for next year. If you know who can help him you can email me at bob_red-barn@live.com .

Message from the Editor

Share this edition with prospective and lapsed ECA members by email and social media. Encourage them to join or rejoin ECA. The benefits of membership include this quarterly publication and free on-line ads,

consultations with Bob Girardin, and an invitation to our 2017 General Meeting, held at Don Hilliker's

ARBORETUM ON THE BLUE HILL
981 Jamison Rd.
Elma, NY 14059
e-mail conifers@adelphia.net
<http://www.arboretumonthebluehill.org/>
Phone (716) 652 4206

You are encouraged to publish your thoughts, ask questions and share your knowledge.

