

Trucking & Freight

Discussions about trucking and freight will get Christmas tree growers and buyers rolling their eyes and telling stories of things that went wrong. It is the one part of the business not entirely under either party's control, presenting an ongoing and problematic variable. Even under the very best circumstances there is a difference between the schedule and the performance that must be accommodated. Trucking and freight is often the most stressful part of the entire process of retailing Christmas trees.

Freight costs represent a very significant portion of the overall cost of goods and it is always important to keep in mind your "dropped in cost" as opposed to the purchase price of your tree. Savings on the freight bill go straight to the bottom line. Like all agricultural produce Christmas trees are a perishable product, so just-in-time shipping is the norm. But deliveries that are needed to open a Christmas tree lot at the beginning of the season or for a big sales weekend simply have to arrive on time.

- *Lost Christmas tree sales are not recoverable.*
- *Not at all.*

The family that is going out together on Saturday afternoon to pick out a Christmas tree is going to buy their tree that Saturday afternoon. They're not going to wait until your truck arrives.

Christmas tree freight arrangements gone bad have caused many serious business problems and in many cases have led to long term bad relations between buyers and sellers. Being proactive and securing reliable freight will make a significant contribution to your tree buying process, and your sanity.

So beware when making freight arrangements! The freight industry is filled with 'freight brokers' who simply lie for a living. Many if not most freight brokers will make any promise and fill you with reassurances then completely fail to deliver the promised trucks. I'm not talking about trucks that arrive late or are behind schedule. I'm talking about trucks that never show up because there never was a truck.

Brokers promise a truck. It is often, too often, an empty promise.

Everyone is left hanging and the trees sit un-shipped. And when it happens, it is totally unnerving. It's happened to me, and it's happened to every grower and tree buyer I know. Fact is, every year there is a huge demand for Christmas tree trucks in the weeks before Thanksgiving. With today's technologies truckers can simply move to the best paying loads. And ignore yours.

If you are buying trees you may think this really isn't your problem because the grower is responsible for arranging for the trucks. But it becomes your problem in a very big hurry when your trees are not shipped on time regardless of who was responsible. Time and again, I have seen people pay exorbitant rates at the last minute when they got hung up without a truck and needed their trees shipped yesterday.

There are plenty of unscrupulous freight brokers ready to shake you down when you're really stuck. Because of this, pre-arranged transportation with a trucking company providing reliable, on-time performance will always trump the lowest-cost offers by far. It's safer, better financially, and far better for your blood pressure.

So how do you go about finding reliable, trustworthy trucking companies? Well, you start by avoiding all freight brokers, they have nothing to offer. Stay away from them completely. What you want to look for is a trucking company that has trucks. You would think that would be redundant but it's not. Most transportation companies are only in the business of arranging freight and don't actually own or control any trucks at all.

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