**MINUTES OF THE SUMMER FARM TOUR**

**July 29, 2017, Cox Tree Farm**

The meeting was called to order by PSCTA President Bob Moore. Welcome to guest, Ray Thompson from PNWCTA who was looking forward to our lobbyist’s report and complimented our support as an organization for our lobbyist. He will make sure to share what our contributions are to the PNWCTA as an example of our commitment.

The welcome was followed by a presentation by Mel Cox with an overview of his farm’s history and how he and Sybil run the farm today.

The Cox Tree farm was purchased from Duane Kaiser in 1990. At that time the Cox family lived across the street from the farm so their commute was easy. In the first few years there was no power or shelter, but with many additions and hard work the farm is now a beautiful farm for families to enjoy. Most recently the farm has added an area for family events and a wedding venue as well.

Over the years the farm has reduced the varieties of trees planted, and now has Douglas, Nordmann, Fraser, Noble and Grand firs. Almost all trees are sold as choose and cut, however approximately 50 trees are wholesaled each year. In addition to trees, Sybil makes evergreen wreaths for sale and there are some accessories available including tree stands. All customers are greeted when they arrive, asked if they have been to the farm before, given a map of the farm and saw and directed to the fields where they might best find their tree of choice. There is a lot of signage in the fields and all trees with the exception of the Douglas Firs are tagged for sale. Trees are sold by the foot, $8/foot for Nobles, Frasers and Turkish firs. The farm opens the day after Thanksgiving and remains open for 3 weekends (weekends open all day and weekdays open half days).

The farm accepts credit card transactions (Mel recommends this). The farm offers apple cider and coffee and has a concession stand selling hot dogs and hot chocolate. As a fund raiser for a youth group Kettle Corn is sold and another fund raiser offers photos with Santa. Mel mentioned that he has had some difficulties with photographers coming to the farm and other members also voiced their problems. The Moore’s charge photographers to come to their farm and this seems to be working for them. The Cox farm has a well maintained website with directions and all the services and events on the farm.

Mel closed his remarks by reminding us all of the great mentors he has had over the years through the association who have shared their wisdom and experience which has saved him from making many of the same mistakes. Bob Moore continued this conversation by listing many of the former members and the group chimed in with their memories of past participants. Yes, the association does give us all a wealth of information for having a successful farm.

**Secretary’s Report:** The minutes of the January meeting were accepted as corrected with the updated e-mail address of Brad Tower which is: [btower@phillipsburgessgr.com](mailto:btower@phillipsburgessgr.com).

**Treasurer’s Report:** The report was presented by Sheila McKinnon and accepted. There are 46 full members and 4 associate members. As part of the treasurer’s report, Sheila explained that she is working with Homestreet Bank to open an account there which will earn higher interest than Bank of America is currently paying on the Association’s CD savings. This move was approved by the membership.

Both the treasurer’s report and minutes for the meetings are available on the PSCTA website for those not in attendance.

**Puyallup Fair:** Mike Roosendaal reported on his meetings with Puyallup Fair staff. The fair will run from September 1, 2017 through September 24th. Mike explained to the fair administrators that we did have problems getting volunteers for all the shifts of the fair. The fair committee does not have expectations that we can man the booth at all times, but is anxious for our participation for our benefit and also for the fair. We will continue to participate with as many shifts covered as possible. The shift times are AM 10-3 and PM 3-8. There will be 5 trees displayed. Mike passed around a sign-up sheet to donate trees and he will even pick them up. Set up for the booth will be on August 30th at 7:00 a.m. The booth will have a monitor with a loop of photos highlighting sheering, culturing, planting, services offered at the farms showing that our work is year round. Please contact Denise to share your photos for this display. A calendar was circulated for farms to sign up for the fair. Jan Moore will contact those not in attendance to fill in the spots needed for our booth. Finally, Bob Moore had some T-shirts printed for association members to wear at the fair. The cost of the shirts is $10.00. Some extra shirts not sold at the meeting will be in the booth for anyone who would like to wear a shirt to promote the association.

**Lobbyist Report:**  Brad Tower was joined by his colleague Troy Nichols who works in public policy. Together Brad and Troy outlined the latest legislation and also addressed some of our questions regarding the Agri-tourism bill and minimum wage requirements. Brad opened with some good news related to fire suppression charges which provides an exemption for increases for Christmas tree farmers. House bill 1467 can be reviewed for more information about the fire benefit charges that were a concern for many of our farms. Thankfully we had a lobbyist in our court to exempt us from these increases.

There was extensive information from Brad about the Hearst decision regarding wells on rural property. Questions about existing wells, permit applications for water, etc. can be sent to Brad. The issues of water rights and wells is complicated.

Minimum wage as stated in bill 1433 sets the rate of $11 for 2017. This rate increases to $13.50 in 2020. A member had a question regarding “training wages” and if that would apply to our farm labor reducing the minimum wage requirement. Training wages do not apply in our case for our seasonal employees because the employee isn’t in a training program to meet qualifications for a full time position.

Agri-tourism senate fill 5808 which was e-mailed to all our members was discussed. Of particular importance is that we all have signage on our property with the appropriate warnings to customers. The signage must be specific, in clear view, and with black letters a minimum of 1 inch in height. Please review the notice sent for the wording for signs.

Following our great potluck lunch and conversations….

**New Products:** Jan Moore had a show and tell of some of the accessory products that are offered at her farm. She suggested that we look at things like tree removal bags, tree preservative, watering spout, etc. for added revenue during our selling season. Customers really appreciate these extra items. These comments led into the introduction of Mike Hepler, our new sales representative from the Kirk Company. Mike gave a demonstration on the hot new item, “Colors by Kirk”. Customers are excited about the prospect of painting their tree a different color, maybe pink or Seahawk blue/green. Some farms even order the green paint to cover up some brown ends on the trees. This paint will not hinder growth of the tree. Mike is happy to deliver items from the Kirk Company. Check out the catalog for the Kirk Company and call Mike at 503-621-8257.

**Marketing Updates:**  Sheila let us know that the PSCTA website is up and running. Remember to update your farm listing. If you forgot your password, give Sheila a call and she will help you out. PSCTA has a facebook option and many farms find this an important marketing tool. You can join the facebook chat with an administrator’s approval. For more information contact Sheila.

**Dues re-balancing proposal:** In reviewing our budget projections Sheila explained that the actual expenses for marketing were less than $75 and the actual expenses for the association membership exceeded $75. The question to the group is whether or not we should increase membership dues and decrease the marketing amount. After discussion the group decided to leave the budget as it is and not increase the membership fee.

**Activities on the farm after the holiday sales:** Several farms have other activities on their farms outside of tree sales including family gatherings, reunions, pumpkin patches, and weddings. Harvey Hawkins has had weddings at his farm and gave a presentation of the pros and cons for having a wedding venue. Harvey said that he did 20 weddings for free the first year to get photos and video for promotion. The farm needed to be 1st class and in order to be prepared for all weather, he purchased a canopy for $7,000. In addition a Sanikan needed to be available. He suggested that limiting attendance to 100 guests was advisable and that the pay off would be to have 2 weddings a weekend. Today things have changed and King County came to them and said that weddings were not agricultural. They required a permit costing $2500 and a contract was required. Now that the cons are accounted for, weddings might not be the best option for the off season. Harvey ended by saying that his train was just about running now so this will be an added attraction!

Before we adjourned, Darryl Westover announced that his farm and home were being sold. The farm would remain in operation and he would be on hand to help the new owner during 2017 sales. We will welcome the new farmer and keep Darryl in our most honorary status!

**The fall meeting will be held on October 7, 2017 at Mike Peter’s farm in Lake Stevens.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.