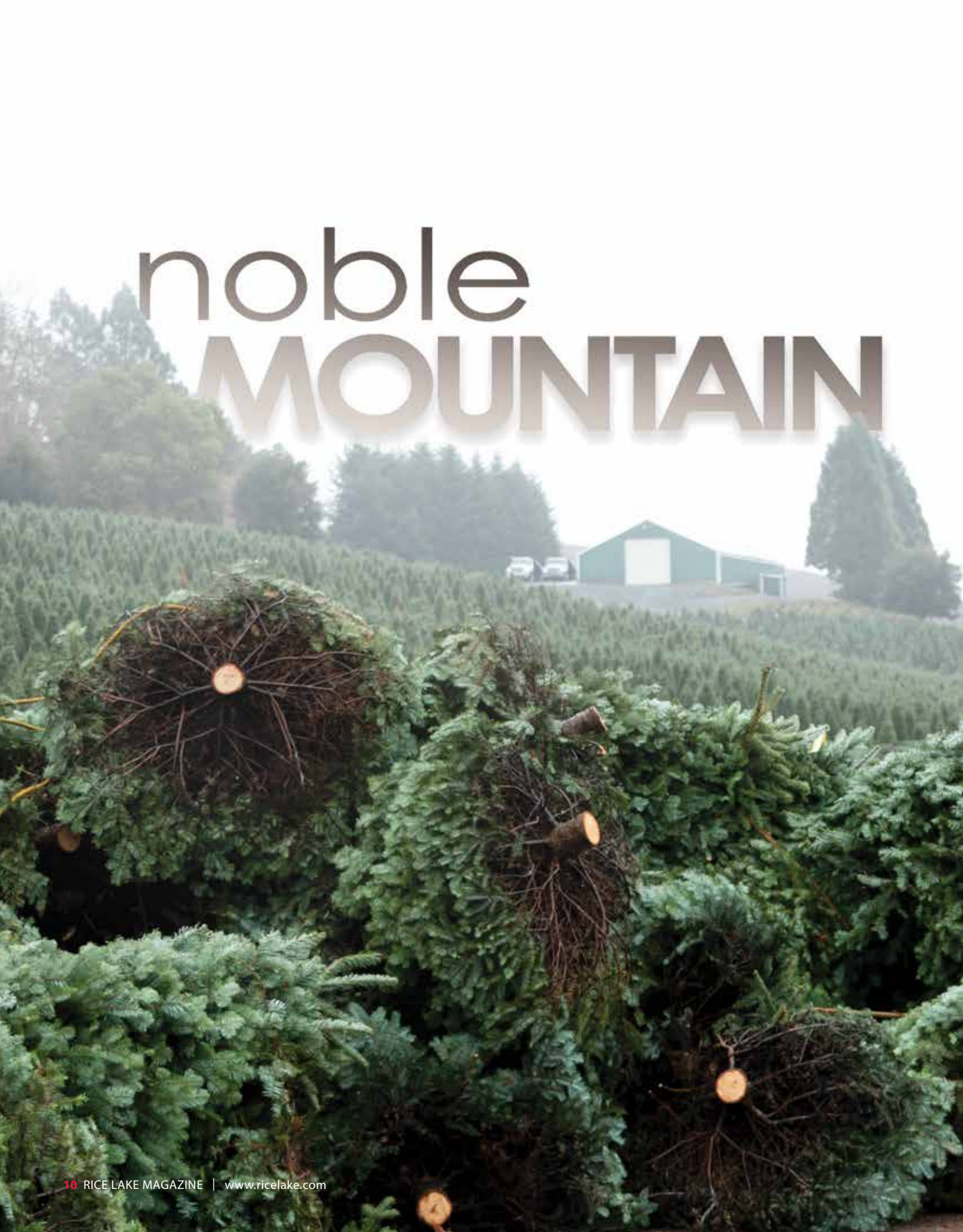


# noble MOUNTAIN



*The finest Christmas trees in the world are bulk-weighed on a RoughDeck® AX-1 axle scale.*

On the edge of Oregon's Willamette Valley, over 4,000 acres of lush evergreens emerge from the mist and fog. Noble Mountain Tree Farm is one of the largest and most renowned Christmas tree growers in the world, specializing in Plantation Noble Fir, Douglas Fir, Scotch Pine and Grand Fir. With over 5 million trees to pick from, customers receive only the best of the bunch. Noble Mountain uses Rice Lake's RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale to further grow customer satisfaction, quantify outgoing shipments and eliminate overload penalties.

Noble Mountain was founded in 1976 after they acquired a competitor's farm which had over 1 million Noble Fir trees ready to oversaturate the local market. Bob Schaefer, Noble Mountain's general manager, had an idea to spread his

inventory as far as the East Coast of the United States. This would avoid flooding the local region with an overabundance of Christmas trees. However, it was far from a safe strategy. Noble Firs were virtually unknown outside of the Pacific Northwest, and no company from the region had successfully sold them to distant markets.

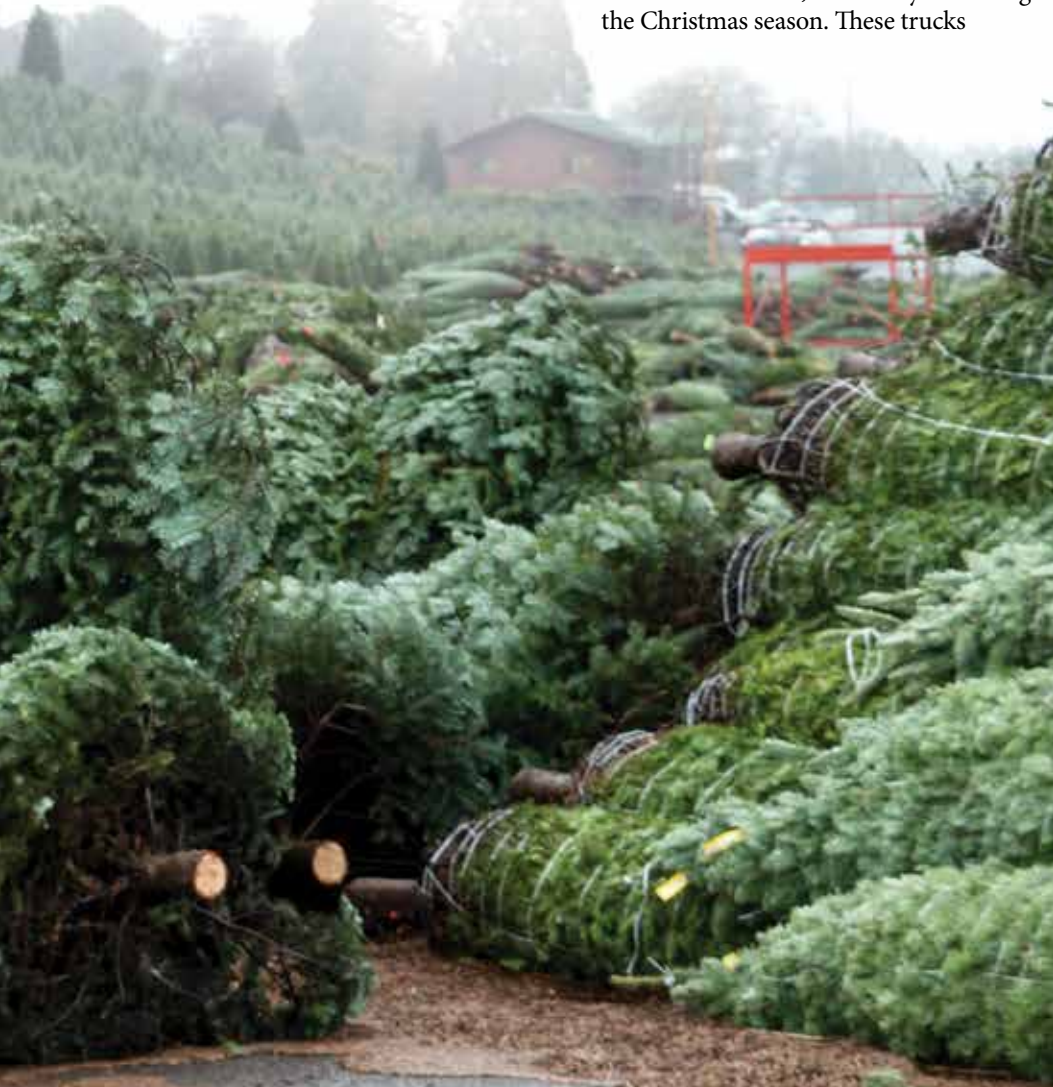
Once their trees started hitting other markets, Noble Mountain trees became widely desired and grew the market across the United States and even internationally—not just for Noble Firs but other species as well. Today, Oregon Christmas trees are regarded as the finest in the world, and each year Noble Mountain plants more and more seeds to satisfy future demand. Years of steady expansion mean a regular flow of trucks loaded with Christmas trees, optimized for size with a baler, leave the yard during the Christmas season. These trucks

need to be weighed to ensure they do not exceed legal road weight or a truck's axle capacity.

Because peak season is relatively short and Noble Mountain doesn't sell based on weight, a Legal for Trade scale was not needed. They consulted with Scales Northwest in Scio, Oregon, who recommended Rice Lake's RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale as a perfect fit for the application.

The AX-1 axle scale provided an incredibly durable, consistent and accurate solution for monitoring vehicle axle weights at Noble Mountain. Truck drivers simply stop with each axle resting on the scale and the remote display brightly presents the sum total. The AX-1 is compact and easy to install, and can be placed or moved to virtually any location. "The AX-1 is one heck of a great product," explains Bob Schaefer, manager of Noble Mountain Tree Farm. "I barely have to think about it. Just pick it up, drop it in, hook up the indicator and go about business."

*Continued on pg.12*



*Bob Schaefer, general manager of Noble Mountain Tree Farm, chose the AX-1 axle scale because of its combination of portability and durability. During peak season, over 15,000 trucks are weighed in 30 days.*

Elsewhere on the property, a gravel pit with a full-length truck scale operates a separate venture. In previous seasons, Noble Mountain would utilize the scale for its weighments. “It was very inconvenient,” Schaefer remembers. “In a period of 30 days, we load over 15,000 trucks with Christmas trees. Sending each one down to the gravel pit to check their load was not economical. It also presented a safety issue driving around piles of aggregate.”

“Some of our crews would eyeball bundle sizes to estimate total weight. Sometimes, they were pretty good but sometimes their estimates were a little off, especially early in the season. Add the complication of water weight, since it rains a lot in Oregon, and those estimates get even more difficult. Wet trees can increase a load by up to 4,000 pounds, which you wouldn’t know just by looking at it. A scale is really the only way to know if a truck is overloaded.”

Working with Scales Northwest to install the RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale is just one way the business on Noble Mountain has evolved. Over the last several decades, much else has changed—from fads that threatened the entire industry to advances in technology that aid harvesting.

## The Plague of Plastic

When artificial trees started to become popular in the 1980s, members of the Christmas tree industry were worried. Once pre-lit artificial trees started hitting the market, they emerged as potential

competition. “I was a little concerned we were growing the equivalent of buggy whips!” Schaefer laughs. “But every year, retailers would come back and tell me customers who just bought a plastic tree now want a real one.”

“Artificial trees might be more convenient, but they are lacking charm and tradition. We actually saw sales increase because the younger generation wants tradition and has an increasing desire for environmentally friendly products. When you throw away an artificial tree, it sits in a landfill for thousands of years. A real tree has a smaller carbon footprint, produces oxygen and can be used for secondary benefits after the season, such as fish habitat,” Schaefer concludes.

## Harvest by Helicopter

Where there was once a worker with a chainsaw and pick-up truck, now there is aerial assistance to lift and transport bundles of Christmas trees. Helicopter harvesting was an enormous innovation for the industry, providing a faster, less labor-intensive solution. When a group

of trees has been cut and bundled, a saw operator signals for the helicopter, which hooks the bundle and carries it to a loading area. The pilot disengages the claw, the bundle drops and a small group of workers loads a large truck for ground transport.

The harvesting method is so efficient, the only time it is interrupted is for refueling. In the amount of time it takes for the helicopter to pick up a load and return to the loading zone, the previous set of trees has just finished loading. Minimizing time from harvest to final destination results in fresher, cleaner and more appealing trees. Before air support, the farm would begin cutting in mid-October; now they harvest four to six weeks later.

## RoughDeck the Halls

A few seasons ago, the RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale’s reputation for toughness was put to the challenge. Extreme weather subjected Noble Mountain’s equipment to harsh conditions. “When I saw the environment, I thought we would be shut


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Bob Schaefer,  
Manager of Noble Mountain Tree Farm

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down for service,” Schaefer remembers. “But the scale didn’t miss a beat...the AX-1 just keeps chugging along, truck after truck. I’m impressed with its durability and this was definitely a feather in its cap.”

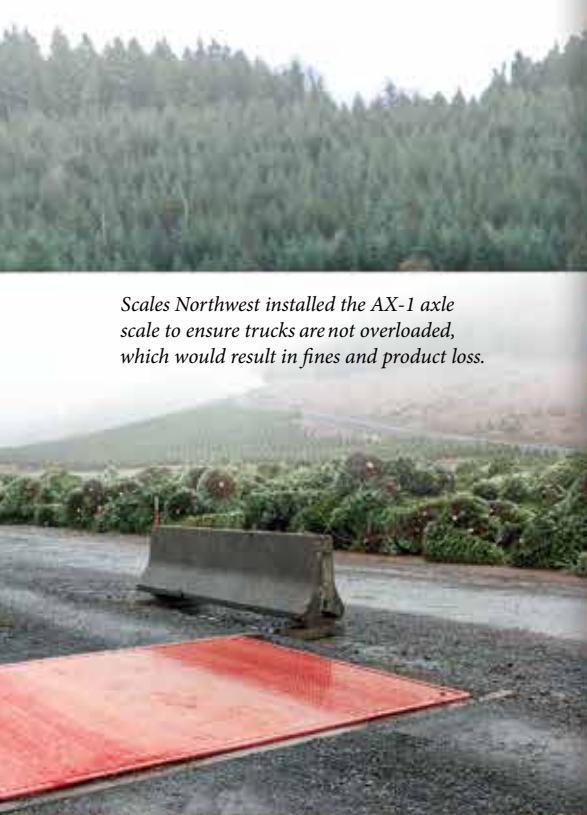
It turns out Noble Mountain is doing more with their RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale than simply checking for overloaded trucks. While that is the scale’s primary mission, it also presents valuable statistics on forest health needs and future workforce requirements. Analyzing averages for different species and age classes of trees will help fine-tune expectations for crews each season, set goals and quantify results on a farm-wide scale.

The Christmas season might be a busy time of year for all of us, but for Noble Mountain’s RoughDeck AX-1 axle scale, it is a relentless procession of heavy-duty work. Just like choosing a natural Christmas tree, however, the work is worth it in the end. Bob Schaefer sums it up best: “If you treat it right, it can really enhance the holiday.” ■

## Features

Optional ramps and scale frame, Four IP67 load cells, JP4SS TuffSeal™ Junction Box

# PORTABLE POWER



*Scales Northwest installed the AX-1 axle scale to ensure trucks are not overloaded, which would result in fines and product loss.*

**Rice Lake’s RoughDeck AX-1 is the ultimate combination of power and portability. Accurate and reliable, the AX-1 is an economical choice for axle load monitoring in temporary locations.**

The AX-1 provides non-Legal for Trade weighments and is manufactured for long-lasting durability. A single, large platform is reinforced with top and bottom steel decks for wider wheel access and faster weighing.

Get reliable, accurate weighing in almost any location with the RoughDeck AX-1.