



Fire



Development

These are all concerns facing more than 10 million family forest owners who own much of America's forests.

Congress can help improve programs and policies for family forest owners in the Farm Bill—

Forest owners are farmers, too!



Pests



Family



Finances

Congress can help family forest owners keep their forests healthy and intact by incorporating the following recommendations in the 2012 Farm Bill:

- Improve outreach, education, research, and technical assistance to family forest owners.
- Strengthen conservation tools for family forest owners through Farm Bill conservation programs.
- Open market opportunities for traditional forest products, renewable energy, and ecosystem services.
- Strengthen USDA efforts to combat invasive species.
- Create new tools for educating the next generation about forests and the environment.



Forest Owners are Farmers, Too

There are more than 10 million family forest owners in the U.S. compared to 2 million farmers. Many of these farmers own forests, too. However, only 6% of EQIP dollars were spent on forestry projects in 2010. Forest owners need access to these programs in order to leverage their own investments and keep our nation's forests healthy and intact.



American Forest Foundation

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a nonprofit forest conservation and environmental education organization that works to ensure the sustainability of America's family forests for present and future generations. The American Tree Farm System is a program of AFF and helps nearly 90,000 family forest owners sustainably manage 26 million acres in the U.S. Many of these recommendations are shared by the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition, a diverse group of environmental, conservation, and forest industry organizations. AFF leads this Coalition, in partnership with others.



Improve outreach, education, research and technical assistance

Improve outreach, education, and technical assistance to family forest owners, focusing on unengaged forest owners.



There are over 10 million family forest owners in the U.S., who own over one-third of the nation's forests. However, among these 10 million forest owners, less than 4% have a management plan, meaning very few have put together a plan for good stewardship of their forests. At the same time, these forests are under pressure from growing threats: invasive and native species outbreaks, wildfires, development pressures, and an impending ownership shift in these lands as more than half of family forest owners are over the age of 50. Leaving forests alone is simply not an option.

The first step to engaging family forest owners in getting their forests healthy, many of whom think doing nothing is the best thing for their land, is strong outreach, education, and technical assistance programs.

Recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill

- Reauthorize the Renewable Resources Extension Act enabling forestry outreach and education through the nation's land grant institutions
- Boost Technical Assistance Capacity for family forest owners ensuring that State forestry agencies, NGOs, and other private technical service providers are fully utilized to reach landowners.
- Continue to support the USFS Forest Stewardship Program and NRCS conservation operations, key programs that provide technical assistance and forest management planning assistance.
- Continue support for the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and Conservation Innovation Grants enabling innovative outreach to forest owners through NGOs and others.
- Modify the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program in the research title to include outreach to new tree farmers and family forest owners.
- Reaffirm the importance of the US Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA) and direct the Agency to enhance the program's efficiency and effectiveness to ensure the program is fully implemented in all states.

Much Needed Technical Assistance

Joe Massoni, a Tree Farmer from Cle Elum, Washington, relied heavily on his NRCS forester after purchasing 33 degraded acres in eastern Washington state. Several trees suffered and were lost as a result of disease mismanagement and poor harvesting practices, but his local NRCS forestry expertise helped solidify Joe's management plan by providing practical solutions for forest improvement. Joe's Tree Farm is now looking better than ever.



The American Tree Farm System gives people the tools they need to be effective stewards of America's natural heritage by keeping their forests healthy and productive. These woodlands are vital to our country's clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreational activities and producing the jobs, wood and paper products we all need.

Strengthen Conservation Tools

Farm Bill conservation programs provide critical tools for family forest owners.



In 2008, Congress made a number of improvements to Farm Bill Conservation Programs that allowed family forest owners greater access to these programs. In the largest cost-share program alone, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), we've seen a 264% increase in funding for forest conservation practices since 2007.

USDA Conservation programs are a critical tool that help family forest owners implement necessary forest management practices. Yet even with all these improvements, funding for keeping family forests healthy and intact is still only a very small part of the total funding for conservation in the Farm Bill. Only 6% of EQIP dollars, the largest cost-share program, are spent on forest practices.

Program Consolidation

Congress has been talking about consolidating some of these programs. We recognize the need to streamline programs and reduce unnecessary costs, especially in this current budget climate. Any proposals to consolidate programs should ensure family forest issues are addressed and subsequently treated equal to those issues that affect farmers.

Recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill

- Strengthen cost-share opportunities for family forest owners. Programs like EQIP, WHIP, CSP, and EFRP have provided valuable tools for leveraging landowner dollars for conservation.
- Better incorporate forest priorities into conservation programs by encouraging State Technical Committees to consider the priorities in the State Forest Action Plans and the State Wildlife Action Plans.
- Provide Tools for Forest Conservation: HFRP, WRP and CRP have provided valuable tools, such as permanent easements, 30 year contracts and 10 year contracts, to enable landowners to keep lands as forests.
- Modify Beginning Farmer and Rancher set asides: Put forest owners on equal footing with farmers and ranchers in conservation title provisions that help the next generation begin to manage and conserve their land.

Farm Bill Programs get Hurricane victims on their feet

Hurricane Katrina devastated Russ and Barbara Ford's Mississippi Tree Farm in 2005. However, emergency funds helped them restore their Tree Farm to pre-Katrina conditions. The Fords participated in USDA's Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) to help re-grow their pine and hardwood trees and control invasive species. Russ and Barbara refused to be victims of this tragic natural disaster, and instead, leveraged USDA's resources with their own time, energy, and investment to bring their Tree Farm back.



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Open Market Opportunities

Enable market opportunities for traditional forest products, renewable energy, and ecosystem services.



As land values increase and development pressures escalate, the need for new and improved income streams for family forest owners becomes increasingly important. At the same time, the traditional forest products industry in the U.S. is undergoing a depression, with new housing starts down to depression-era levels. Combine this with federal policies that discourage the use of wood products and the income for family forest owners is greatly diminished.

Recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill

- Modify the USDA Biobased Labeling Program, removing the disparity in the program against forest products. This label drives buying decisions in the market place and because most forest products cannot get the Label, family forest owners are shut out of potential markets.
- Improve development of Ecosystem Markets and promote USDA leadership in this arena, encouraging better monitoring and evaluation of conservation outcomes associated with particular practices and approaches and by reaffirming the importance of development consistent metrics for ecosystem services.
- Strengthen policies and programs that enable generation of renewable energy from forests, supporting forest-related energy research; renewable energy infrastructure development assistance—especially community scale electricity, heat, and power projects; and development of new supplies of forest-related biomass. Renewable energy markets can supplement the income family forest owners receive from traditional forest products markets.

We're Losing Forests

Our forests are facing a variety of pressures that threaten their very existence. The recently released Southern Forest Futures Project, highlights that in the south alone, we could see a loss of forests equivalent to the size of the state of South Carolina. Farm Bill programs provide important tools for forest owners to keep their forests healthy and intact. The Farm Bill also has the potential to ensure forest owners gain increased market access, so keeping their forests makes more economic sense.



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Combat Invasive Species



Strengthen USDA efforts to combat invasive species

For a family woodland owner, the invasion of a forest pest can mean a complete loss of their woodland, destruction of a family treasure, reduction in income from their land, or the elimination of important wildlife habitat.

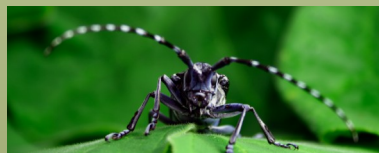
The damage to our communities, our environment, and our economy from these invasive species is tremendous. Some estimate the damages at over \$138 billion annually, due to losses in the forest products industry, losses in the tourism and recreation industry that rely on forests, and a loss of income for woodlands owners.

Recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill

Maintain the Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program, helping build and preserve critical plant health safeguarding initiatives. Congress should also urge the agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of their existing plant safeguards.

Invasives are Spreading

The Emerald Ash Borer, a non-native beetle from Asia, has spread to 15 states since it was first discovered in Michigan in 2002. The pest now fatally threatens 8 billion ash trees across the country. Similarly, the Asian long-horned beetle, first discovered in Worcester, Massachusetts in 2008, quickly spread to nearby forests and was recently discovered as far away as southern Ohio in May 2011.



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Educate the Next Generation

Create new tools for educating the next generation about forests and the environment.



Family forest owners know all too well the need to educate the next generation about forests. With over 60% of private forests owned by people age 55 or older, the fate of the nation's private forests will be in the hands of the next generation very soon.

Unfortunately, today's youth spend, on average, 27% of their time with electronic media and only 1% outdoors. And most Americans today cannot even pass a basic quiz about our natural resources.

While there are a number of USDA supported education efforts, most of these efforts are after-school activities that are prevalent in rural communities; however, many new family forest owners are absentee landowners and city dwellers. The Farm Bill can strengthen existing USDA efforts to focus on engaging kids in the classroom, during school hours, in efforts to learn about our natural resources, ensuring kids are equipped to take on the management of this important resource.

Recommendations for the 2012 Farm Bill

- Continue support for the USDA Forest Service's Conservation Education work, funded through the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry deputy area.
- Modify existing rural energy programs, like the Community Wood Energy Program and the Rural Energy for America Program, to encourage energy audits of schools and other community buildings that involve kids. This will help get kids thinking about energy and natural resources and will help schools and communities save money on energy costs.

"Helping our students grow in their understanding of how important it is to use, care for, and manage our natural resources wisely is an essential part of a quality education. As a result of using PLT, my students definitely improved in their application of real-world math skills. As an added bonus, their test scores in science went up significantly, too. We really need rigorous lessons like those provided in PLT."

-Karen Christenson, Teacher
Grand Rapids, Minnesota

Project Learning Tree (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation and develops natural resource curricula for kids.



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