



Tree Farming Tenacity

**SIXTY YEARS
OLD, AND STILL
GOING STRONG**

BY LESTER A. DECASTER

"Wood
is a crop.
Forestry
is Tree
Farming."

—Gifford Pinchot

"Kill the thing before it spreads." U.S. Forest Service Chief Lyle Watts and his assistant C. Edward Behre tried to kill the thing in 1941. They failed, and it spread from the West, into the South and eventually all the way across America.

The "thing" was the American Tree Farm System, now 60 years old, and documenting the best of forest care on 65,000 private forests. It covers more than 81 million acres now — with 26 million acres of non-industrial private forestland.

Why were Watts and Behre against Tree Farms in 1941? Encouraging private owners to grow continuous crops of trees (as Tree Farming was defined) probably wasn't abhorrent to them. What they disliked was substituting private cooperation for public regulation. They saw Tree Farming as a move to decrease pressure for federal regulation.

Watts and Behre asked the Society of American Foresters (SAF) to question the ethics of members who participated. This move could have killed the program, since broad forester cooperation was needed to make it work, but the professional group disagreed. Why, asked SAF's August 1942 *Journal of Forestry*, shouldn't private owners work to eliminate the need for federal regulation?

"That one of [Tree Farming's] purposes is frankly to forestall federal regulation is certainly not to its discredit," according to the *Journal*.

Push for Federal Regulation

The strong push for federal regulation of forestry stemmed from the 1930s and '40s: America's Depression and war years. Federal leaders living through those times believed that they should closely regulate the private sector, and many people agreed. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, for example, had authority to coordinate major industries to set prices, working conditions and (in the case of forest industry) control forest practices. Industry folks, living through those same times, were determined to manage private lands without federal policing.

Tree Farming was not all that new to this debate. Foresters had been advocating something like it since the first glimmers of American forestry in 1900. Some companies and landowners had essentially been Tree Farming since then, but there was generally little public notice of this.

"Wood is a crop," Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, said in a speech in 1935. "Forestry is Tree Farming." M.L. Alexander, commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Conservation, advocated "timber farming on cutover lands in 1917." But the chronic conditions of bad tax policies and poor fire prevention kept smacking down the idea of private owners keeping land for growing trees.

Government fueled the widespread destruction of forests. The tax system sucked the economic life out of private lands over and over as town and county land taxes often demanded more annually than it cost to buy new land up the road a piece. This encouraged people to cut



Top left: "Keep Maine Green" fire prevention programs were linked to the Tree Farm System in the 1950s. Top right: President (and Tree Farmer) Jimmy Carter greets the 1979 National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year Ella and Al Deishl of Washington, while their U.S. Representative Tom Foley (in back) looks on. Left: Arkansas Gov. Faubus (in dark suit) proclaims April 30 to May 5, 1956, as Arkansas Tree Farm Week. Below: A new Tree Farm sign, incorporating the Boy Scout logo, commemorated National Boy Scout Tree Farm Day on Aug. 25, 1972, in honor of the group's ownership of 133 Tree Farms totaling 113,000 acres.



Above: Southern Region Tree Farmer of the Year (1980) Jim Francis (right) manages his 200-acre Tree Farm near Gourdon, Arkansas, with the help of Weyerhaeuser Co. forester Corley Culpepper. Right: A certificate recognizing completion of the Master Tree Farm program, an in-depth forest management program for Tree Farmers that originated in South Carolina in 1987. (For details on the program, see the story in the May/June 2001 issue of *Tree Farmer*.)





Landowner Boom: Forest Ownership Trends

In the early 1940s there were less than 4 million private forest properties held mostly by farmers. Now there are more than 10 million properties controlled by people who are mostly urban, white-collar professionals. Forests now are seen more as amenities rather than crops, because the service economy, not land, is the primary source of income for most people.

Private forests are breaking into smaller properties, with the total amount of private forestland remaining the same while the number of owners is increasing. This trend presents education and advocacy challenges, as many new owners of smaller tracts are less likely to see the relevance of forest management. —L.A.D.

Table 1: Percent of Total U.S. Private Forest Acreage by Size (Projected to 2010)

YEAR	500+ ACRES	100-499 ACRES	1-99 ACRES
1978	47.6%	30.8%	21.6%
1994	45.1%	23.3%	31.6%
2010	43.2%	18.8%	38.0%

The largest ownership sizes are holding on, while the land area held by middle-size ownerships is shrinking and land held by smaller sizes is increasing.

Table 2: U.S. Private Forest Ownerships (Projected to 2010*)

Year	Ownerships in 500-plus acres	Ownerships in 100-499 acres	Ownerships in 1-99 acres	TOTAL OWNERSHIPS
1978	63,000	538,000	7,156,000	7,757,000
1994	68,000	559,000	9,274,000	9,901,000
2010	68,000	570,000	11,550,000	12,188,000
Change	+ 5,000	+ 32,000	+ 4,394,000	+ 4,431,000

*Assumes the 393,300,000 acres of U.S. forestland in private ownership remains static (Birch 1996)

There are more ownerships in all sizes, with a huge boom in numbers of ownerships below 100 acres.

their trees then move on to new land.

Over several decades government authorities took millions of acres of private property, declaring it tax delinquent, then selling it cheap to get it back into the tax system. The land often ended up back in tax sales after another set or two of owners had extracted what they could.

If the taxes didn't get you, chances

were your woodland might burn in uncontrolled fires that consumed millions of acres. Farmers used fire frequently to clear land and burn off old grass and weeds. Campers tossed away burning cigarettes and left campfires unattended. Firefighting forces were scarce.

Starting around 1936, states such as Oregon and Washington passed tax

legislation to treat forestland more fairly. Fire prevention and control programs also improved.

By the summer of 1941, the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. was encouraged. The company opened its land for tours of what it called a Tree Farm, and more than 700 people motored out, taking the 25-mile round trip over dirt roads from Elma, Washington, and the Montesano area to gaze in amazement at a previously logged and burned area, now covered with a new forest of both naturally seeded and planted trees.

The area was protected by an impressive system of firefighting equipment and lookout towers. Weyerhaeuser took the occasion to ask people to help it protect the Tree Farm by being more careful with fire: people hunting, fishing and camping on the land had frequently caused devastating fires. With fire protection, fair taxation and forestry expertise, all forest owners could and should become Tree Farmers, said the company.

1941: The Idea Spreads

On June 12, 1941, the nation's first Tree Farm was dedicated. Weyerhaeuser Executive Vice President J.P. Weyerhaeuser invited Washington State Gov. Arthur Langlie and other dignitaries to witness the dedication of 120,000 acres of company land near Montesano as the Clemons Tree Farm.

The name honored well-known local logger Charles H. Clemons and used the words "Tree Farm." Chapin Collins, a Montesano newspaper editor, is commonly credited with the idea of using the words "Tree Farm," and Rod Olzendam, Weyerhaeuser's public relations manager, also had a hand in crafting the term, according to folks who were around then.

The term Tree Farm was an inspired choice. After years of talking about silviculture, sustained yield and scientific management, foresters were finally using a term that people understood. Everyone knew that farmers grew crops; clearly a Tree Farmer was someone who grew crops of trees. Forest products firms led

the Tree Farm effort through their western and national associations. State foresters were also in the lead, especially in the South.

The principle was that foresters would certify that the forest practices on each Tree Farm met high standards of forestry. In effect this was the forerunner of the current forest certification programs.

The Tree Farm program — also called the Tree Farm movement — was also designed to communicate. Tree Farms were to be marked with green-and-white, diamond-shaped signs announcing their status. Each Tree Farm certification was to be publicized. Signs on Tree Farms were important and they remain so. On the Clemons tract, "signs sprouted everywhere (saying) timber is a crop, don't burn us up," recalls Art Smyth, a retired Weyerhaeuser executive who was hired as a company forester just after that Tree Farm dedication.

A West Coast Tree Farm Program was underway by the end of 1941, organized by the West Coast Lumberman's Association and the Pacific Northwest Loggers Association. This soon merged into the Industrial Forestry Association. Urged on by its western members, the National Lumber Manufacturers Association (NLMA) in Washington, D.C., started working on a national system. American Forest Products Industries (AFPI), a subsidiary of NLMA, took on national Tree Farm sponsorship in 1942. By 1946 AFPI was independent and Tree Farm was one of its major programs.

The South quickly followed the West in adopting Tree Farming. The Alabama State Chamber of Commerce and the State Division of Forestry certified the first non-industrial property, 60 acres owned by Emmett McCall in Brewton, on April 4, 1942. The Arkansas Forestry Commission was next, with a Tree Farm dedication on June 6, 1942.

By 1945 there were 945 Tree Farms covering more than 11 million acres in 11 states: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Protecting forests from fire was a basic principle of Tree Farming. By 1948 the

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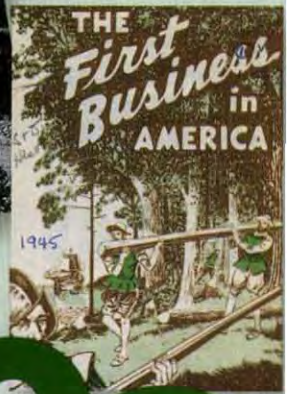
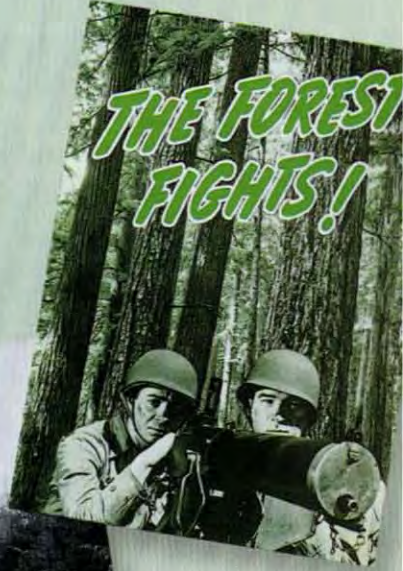
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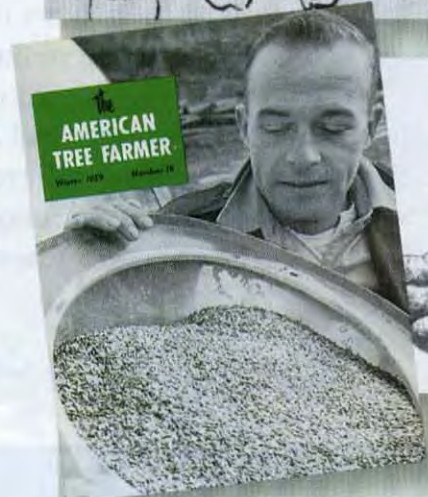
understood.

'40s



'50s

From top: This World War II brochure shows how forest products contributed to the war effort. Fire-blackened tree snags and stumps from log salvage dominate this view of Rock Creek Road near Montesano, Washington, in 1941 (part of a series of six images taken over time) when frequent, uncontrolled fires discouraged long-term forest ownership. A 1945 brochure shows colonists harvesting wood. A cartoon pulpwood stick named Woody promoted Tree Farming in the 1950s. The cover of the Winter 1959 issue of *American Tree Farmer*, precursor to *Tree Farmer* magazine. A cartoon that ran with the caption, "Timber is a crop."



national sponsor, AFPI, was annually sending out more than 3 million pieces of educational materials on forestry and fires to about 50,000 schools and organizations. The U.S. Forest Service Smokey Bear program followed a similar approach and eventually took over much of the industry's fire prevention program.

The 1950s: Cooperation

By the 1950s Tree Farming had settled into the forestry systems of most states. Industrial forests were still involved but the main targets were the more numerous non-industrial family forests. And fire prevention remained a part of the process of educating people about Tree Farming, as fires still burned 7 million acres or more in most years.

A program called Keep America Green was generally linked to local committees promoting Tree Farming. State foresters, state and regional forest associations, private consultants and industry foresters worked together to finance, produce and distribute materials and operate programs.

The Forest Service had come around to working with Tree Farming organizations by now. They helped produce programs and materials, and became a major financial backer of efforts to build state forest services. More and more states hired service foresters (sometimes called farm foresters) to provide forestry advice to private forest owners. "State foresters deserve a lot of credit for keeping things going over the long haul," says Don Smith, retired manager and forester for the southern Tree Farm System.

By 1955 there were more than 7,500 Tree Farmers using forestry advice to care for almost 38 million acres of forests in 41 states. American Forest Products Industries, the national Tree Farm sponsor, ran an office and printing plant in Washington, D.C., a news bureau in New York City and a dozen field offices in major locations from Boston to San Francisco.

Tree Farming had entered the public's consciousness: A cartoon stick of pulpwood named "Woody" promoted fire prevention and forest princess beauty contests were popular.

The Tree Farm System had developed

tentacles, reaching across federal, state and private delineations and pulling thousands of foresters together in local committees. And it publicized results: News releases on progress and problems went out; signs went up on each new Tree Farm; dignitaries were invited to dedication ceremonies.

The 1960s: Rebellion

Environmentalism and rebellion against familiar things came to the forefront in the '60s. Americans returned to civilian life in 1945 after World War II, grateful to be alive and free. They got on with making a living and making babies. The babies they made (known in demographics as baby boomers) entered the raging hormone phase of young adulthood in the '60s. This huge population of young people saw no reason why things should not be the way they wanted because things had always been arranged the way they wanted.

They questioned everything. Private property, Tree Farming, the thought of affecting nature — all came under intense scrutiny.

Foresters working on Tree Farming were edgy too. There were calls for improved quality control on Tree Farm requirements and simplification of forms. One forester wrote to the national Tree Farm office in 1965: "The McBee (Tree Farm) inspection form is the worst form I've ever used." Uniform standards were still lacking into the mid-'60s because some localities (the West and some Lake States) ran their own systems with little national input.

Forestry leaders were pushed to examine traditional assumptions,

From top: In 1961, 20 years after fire and salvage, the Montesano site (see photo, page 9) is taken over by Douglas fir and hemlocks. *American Tree Farmer* celebrates 25 years of Tree Farming in 1966. A story, "Ski to Work," from *American Tree Farmer*, Winter 1962-63. Potential Tree Farmers received the system's brochure, "Your Forest," in the 1970s. The Montesano site in 1972 — the forest towers over Rock Creek Road. The American Forest Council's logo in 1975.

'60s



'70s



**YOUR FOREST.
TAKE A STAND TO HELP IT GROW.**



'80s



'90s



changing many organizations. American Forest Products Industries was among the changes in 1969. It became American Forest Institute, a new organization strongly focused on communications.

The 1970s: Kill It or Fix It

The first Earth Days arose as the 1970s started up, driven by the growing size and influence of environmental groups. Groups gathered to protest against environmental conditions, bury cars and hug trees. According to the Sierra Club, Tree Farms were not forests—they were sterile rows of planted trees.

Tree Farming was in trouble, not just from environmental pressure but internally as well. George Cheek, president of the institute, was quoted as saying: "I'm either going to fix the Tree Farm thing or drown it in a bucket."

There was plenty to be fixed. By 1970 the system listed nearly 34,000 Tree Farmers managing more than 74 million acres in all states of the continental United States, but funding and staffing for administration had not kept up with growth. Records were a mess. Foresters had lost touch with many Tree Farmers or stopped documenting their work. Although we listed Tree Farms in all states, only 10 states had active committees.

It was decided that Tree Farm work was too valuable to be abandoned. Budgets were increased to improve record keeping. Incentives were created to encourage state committees and foresters to document all Tree Farms, re-inspecting everything at five-year intervals at least. By 1973 the count had

Left to right: The Nov./Dec. 1983 magazine cover featured a photo of the national Christmas tree. A Tree Farm brochure that was used from the mid-1980s through 1993, when the American Forest Council became the American Forest Foundation. The 40th anniversary brochure. Television star (and Tree Farmer) Andy Griffith points to his sign during a public service announcement he made to celebrate Tree Farm's 40th anniversary in 1981. The look of *Tree Farmer* magazine in Spring 1991.

been reduced to a little more than 30,000 Tree Farmers, as listings that couldn't be documented were thrown out. State Tree Farm committees came back to life and the program started growing again. The Tree Farm name and logo was registered as a trademark in 1976.

Donald Smith, then southern Tree Farm System manager, and Richard Lewis, the national director, had been talking about a contest to select and publicize the best Tree Farms in all regions of the country, and then to select a national winner. They wanted the U.S. President to present the national award.

In 1976 Fred Barber of Florida became the first National Outstanding Tree Farmer (see story, page 28). And two years later President Jimmy Carter presented the National Outstanding Tree Farmer Award to Henry Langford of Virginia. Various Tree Farmers have visited the U.S. President since then. Visits have ranged from quick photo opportunities to full-scale presentations

on such issues as estate taxes.

The contests yielded unprecedented favorable publicity about Tree Farming. They encouraged local Tree Farm committees to seek excellence in forestry and more actively communicate with the public.

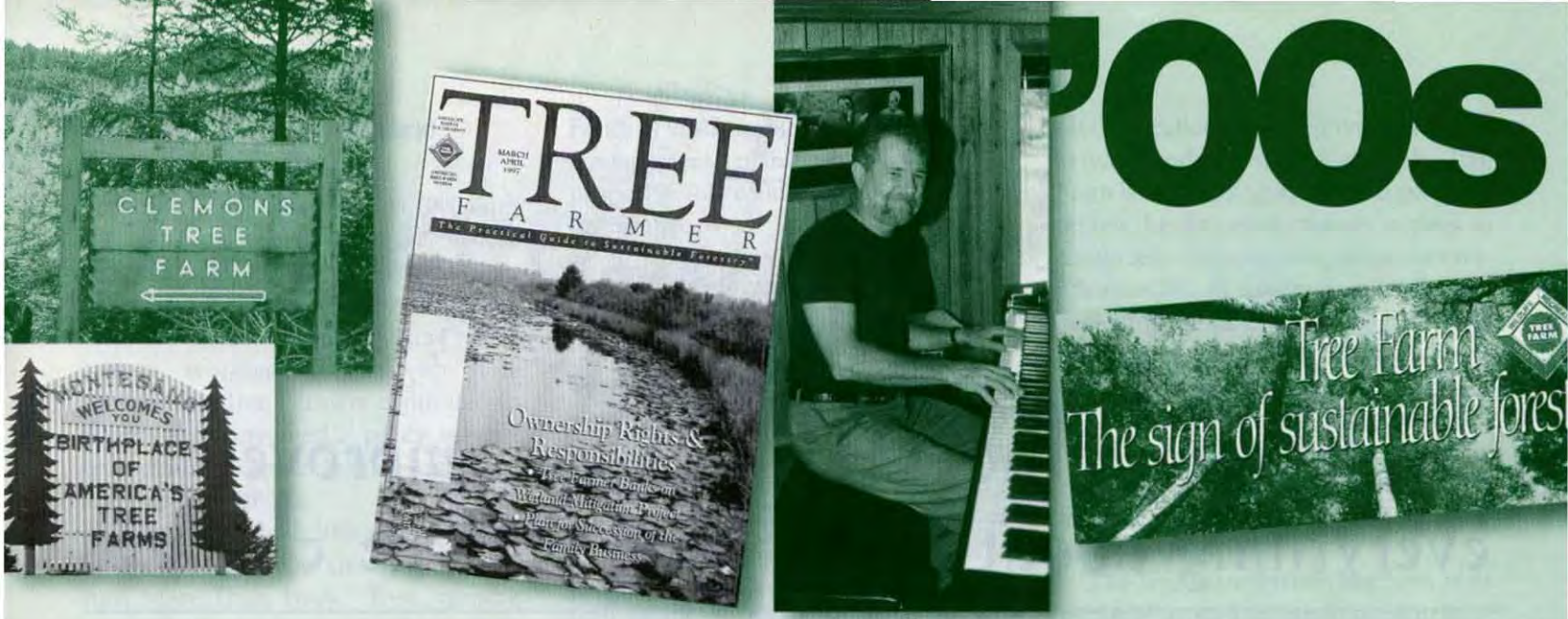
The 1980s: Tree Farm Activists

Tree Farming grew rapidly in the '80s. The 40th anniversary theme in 1981 was appropriately, "40 Years of Counting and Growing." *American Tree Farmer* magazine, the first full-color publication for Tree Farmers, was launched in 1981. The system was moving rapidly toward involving more Tree Farmers in forestry issues and operation of the system.

In 1983 American Forest Institute's budget was cut from \$4.8 million to \$1.8 million. Staff was reduced from 48 to 18. Tree Farm remained a core program but its budget was reduced.

Resources rebounded a bit by 1984, but then an identity crisis set in. Company leaders debated whether the Tree Farm System was a communications program or a forest productivity program — they wanted to choose one or the other. Meanwhile, a forest productivity effort sprang up in another industry association, also in Washington, D.C. Companies were getting tapped for Tree Farm efforts and receiving another bill for a separate productivity effort. They were understandably confused and skeptical.

The confusion ground along into 1986, when the American Forest Institute was reorganized as the American Forest Council. Tree Farm was retained as a key



Left to right: The Clemons Tree Farm (top), created in 1941 as the nation's first Tree Farm by Weyerhaeuser in Montesano, Washington (below), remains an active Tree Farm. The March/April 1997 issue of *Tree Farmer* features article on mitigation banking and estate planning. National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year (1999) Chuck Leavell combines his love of music and Tree Farming in a 2001 public service announcement for Tree Farm. The current Tree Farm System brochure.

program and assigned productivity functions as well as a communications role. By now the program covered 49 states and more than 55,000 Tree Farmers with 87 million acres.

The importance of Tree Farmer activism increased as Congress debated how forest income should be taxed. In September 1989 the council and several other organizations put together a White House meeting with then-President George Bush (the elder). The topic was reinstatement of capital gains tax treatment for forest income, a key forestry goal.

Out of the 17 landowners asked to attend, 11 were Tree Farmers or local Tree Farm sponsors. Two Tree Farmers — Murray Lloyd, a young lawyer from Louisiana, and May Grosetto, a widow from Pennsylvania — impressed the President so much that he invited them back for a round of media briefings and visits with political leaders. Tree Farmers were clearly effective communicators on the issues.

Urbania: From Rural Harvesters to Urban Managers

Over the 60-year life of the Tree Farm System, America has grown and changed from a rural, agrarian society to an urban, service-based economy. When Tree Farming started in 1941, almost 45 percent of Americans lived in rural areas and about 20 percent worked at growing and harvesting things ranging from corn to trees. Now less than 24 percent are rural residents and only 2 percent of the population works at growing and harvesting things. This trend means that growers and harvesters may need to spend more time explaining their roles to the larger population.—L.A.D.

Figure 1. Hail Urbania—Urban and Rural Residents
Percentage of Total U.S. Population

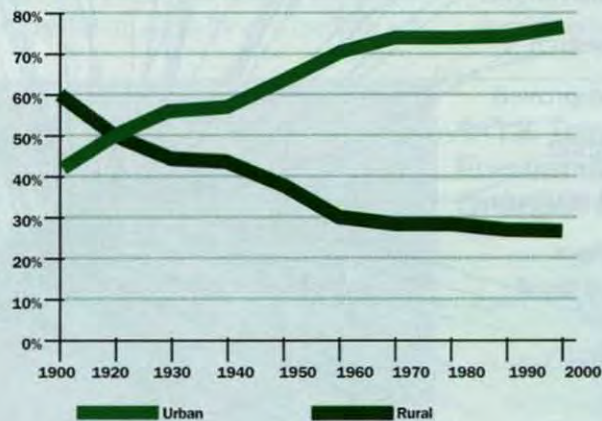
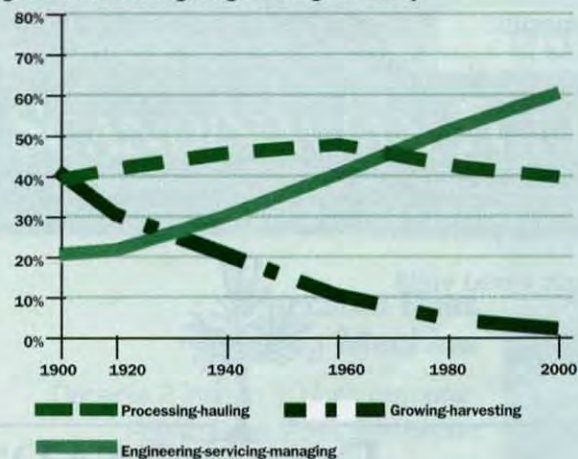


Figure 2. A servicing, engineering economy



Source: Bureau of the Census Historical Statistics, Colonial Times to 1970; Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1980, 1990, 1999, U.S. Dept. of Commerce

The 1990s: Consolidating and Sharpening

The Tree Farm System started 1990 with the biggest, broadest, most visible program ever: 70,000 Tree Farmers were managing 93 million acres and 9,000 foresters were volunteering time to the system, working closely with state committees. Tree Farmers continued to become more involved in policy, serving on committees and becoming organized and effective activists.

The theme for the 50th anniversary in 1991 was "50 Years of Growing Trees ... And More Than Trees." Tree Farming was still about growing trees as a crop but it also carried strong messages regarding all the benefits of good forestry: wood, water, wildlife and recreation.

Years of debate and discussion among forest industry leaders led to massive consolidation of their organizations toward the end of 1991. The solid-wood (lumber, plywood) side of the business and the paper side had funded a variety of separate national organizations for years. Most of these were combined into the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) in 1991. The American Forest Council remained separate, and was reorganized as the American Forest Foundation. Tree Farm remained a core program.

In the 1990s competition for attention and resources rose. A new publicly funded Stewardship Program operated by state foresters got underway. This overlapped the Tree Farm System in many ways. Hundreds of meetings ensued, to coordinate stewardship and Tree Farm standards and minimize confusing and conflicting publicity. The coordination ultimately had the effect of tightening Tree Farm standards to reflect contemporary benchmarks for sustainability and emphasizing written forest management plans and documentation.

Qualifications were established for Tree Farm inspectors, and a new national training curriculum was created. The American Tree Farm System's focus on quality meant the '90s ended with 65,000 certified Tree Farmers managing more than 81 million acres in 48 states; 7,000 qualified volunteers were guiding Tree

Farmers in the implementation of forest management plans and conducting property inspections for Tree Farm certification.

The 2000s: Prove it!

This is the "prove it" era.

Certification is becoming an increasingly hot topic, driven largely by rising demand for certified wood and paper products worldwide. AF&PA operates a Sustainable Forestry Initiative now to certify management of industrial forests and the Tree Farm System recently signed an agreement to coordinate its certifying standards on non-industrial forests. A variety of other forest certification programs are underway, all trying to prove, undisputedly, that they are doing what they say they are. All are substituting in some way for putting the federal government, or some other public entity, in charge of what happens on millions of acres of private forests.

With the growing globalization of forest product markets and increasing pressure on private lands to satisfy world demand, Tree Farm is working to become accepted internationally as a credible for-

est certification option for non-industrial, private landowners. For example, Tree Farm is undergoing an internal program review by PricewaterhouseCoopers to continue to improve the quality of its certification and reinspection process, and it is seeking membership in the Pan European Forest Certification Council. These initiatives aim to ensure certified Tree Farmers will be preferred suppliers for certified wood markets, both in the United States and abroad, and trade barriers for their forest products will not be inadvertently created.

The Tree Farm System has been at its job for 60 years and would seem to have at least as much ahead as behind.

"Tree Farming is just a great idea," says Bill Hagenstein, a 60-year supporter of Tree Farming as chief forester and later Industrial Forestry Association president. "It was great 60 years ago and it still is!" ■

Lester A. DeCoster was director of the Tree Farm System from 1982 to 1992. He is currently president of the DeCoster Group Inc., based in Reston, Virginia, which specializes in forestry communications.



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