Enhancing Rural Economies through Agroforestry: Assessing Emerging Opportunities

The USDA National Agroforestry Center and the USDA Interagency Agroforestry Team are convening an invitation-only workshop to lay the foundation for assessing economic opportunities for the agricultural community to benefit from agroforestry. Producers, researchers, and professionals from the public, private, and non-profit sectors will discuss opportunities for enhancing the profitability of agroforestry through increased access to resources, markets, and payments and markets for ecosystem services. Small group discussions will identify ways to assess and strengthen these emerging opportunities.

DATES: March 19, 20, 21, 2018[1]

LOCATION: USDA Economic Research Service, Patriots Plaza, 355 E St. SW, Washington D.C. 20024

BACKGROUND

Opportunities are expanding for America's rural and urban communities to benefit from agroforestry, defined by USDA as "the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal production systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits". Each of the five agroforestry practices most common in the United States – windbreaks, riparian forest buffers, silvopasture, forest farming, and alley cropping – can provide economic and environmental benefits to producers and communities (see Appendix I for more information on these practices). Benefits can include increased production, diversified income streams, and more effective use of buffers and other field edges. Such benefits can appeal to a range of farm sizes and types, from larger commodities growers to small, new, and/or limited-resource producers.

Agroforestry is promoted at USDA through numerous programs, research efforts, and outreach activities across the agencies and through the USDA National Agroforestry Center. The mission of the National Agroforestry Center (NAC) is to advance the health, diversity, and productivity of working lands, waters, and communities through agroforestry. This work advances USDA's goals to "strengthen the stewardship of private lands through technology and research" and "facilitate rural prosperity and economic development."

The National Agroforestry Center is a partnership between two Deputy Areas of the USDA Forest Service - Research and Development, and State and Private Forestry – and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

[1] Workshop hours: 1:00 – 5:00 March 19, 8:30-5:00 March 20, 8:30-12:00 March 21.

WORKSHOP GOALS

- Enhance understanding of existing and emerging opportunities to strengthen the economic and ecological benefits of agroforestry to producers and communities. Opportunities will be discussed under the following categories:
    - Accessing resources;
    - Accessing markets for products from agroforestry systems; and
    - Payments and markets for ecosystem services.

- Identify data, resources, and partnerships to strengthen these opportunities.
- Identify potential mechanisms to support producer engagement in these opportunities.

WORKSHOP FRAMEWORK

The workshop will consist of panel presentations to enhance participants' understanding of current and emerging opportunities for enhancing the economic benefits of agroforestry, and will include producers who practice agroforestry on farms, ranches, and woodlands. World Café-style discussion groups will identify next steps for the agriculture community to build upon and take advantage of these opportunities.

Questions to be addressed will include:

- How is the agricultural community engaging in current and emerging economic opportunities to benefit from agroforestry?

- What supports and structures are in place, or are needed, to broaden engagement in these opportunities?

- What resources are needed to better understand and communicate the economic costs and benefits (market and non-market) of engaging in these opportunities?

The fifty workshop participants will include producers, researchers, program managers, and others in the agriculture and forestry communities. Participants will represent Federal, State and local government; Tribes; non-profit groups; and private industry.

Workshop Planning Group

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service: Tricia Kovacs, Local and Regional Food Systems Policy Advisor

USDA Agricultural Research Service: Marlen Eve,Ph.D., National Program Leader (Soil and Air), Natural Resources and Sustainable Ag Systems

USDA Economic Research Service: David Smith, Ph.D., Agricultural Economist, Conservation and Environmental Branch in the Resource and Rural Economics Division

USDA Forest Service: Susan Stein, Director; Gary Bentrup, Research Team Lead; Richard Straight, Technology Transfer Lead; Kate MacFarland, Assistant Agroforester, National Agroforestry Center

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture: Eric R. Norland, Ph.D., National Program Leader, Forest Resource Management

USDA Office of Environmental Markets: Chris Hartley, Ph.D., Environmental Markets Analyst

University of Minnesota: Dean Current Ph.D., Director, Center for Integrated Natural Resource and Agricultural Management (CINRAM)

Appendix I: The Five Most Common Agroforestry Practices in the United States

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines agroforestry as "the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal production systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits".

The five most common agroforestry practices in the United States are:

- *Windbreaks.* Trees and shrubs are planted in rows to reduce wind speed. Windbreaks improve crop yields, reduce soil erosion, improve water-efficiency, protect livestock, and conserve energy.
- *Riparian forest buffers.* Riparian forest buffers are natural or planted woodlands adjacent to water bodies consisting of trees, shrubs and grasses. This practice reduces water pollution and bank erosion, protects aquatic environments, and enhances wildlife habitat.
- *Silvopasture.* This practice integrates trees, livestock, and forage into one pasture. The trees can be managed for timber or other tree crops while at the same time they provide shade and shelter for livestock, which provide annual income.
- *Alley cropping.* Agricultural or horticultural crops are cultivated in between widely spaced rows of trees and/or shrubs. This arrangement benefits the woody plants and crops, creates annual and long-term income, and provides conservation benefits.
- *Forest farming.* Also referred to as multi-story cropping, forest farming involves the intentional production of food, herbal, botanical, or decorative crops under the protection of a managed forest canopy.