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Making Money from a Well-managed Woodlot



Ginseng thrives in mature woodlands

Many farms include wooded areas. Sometimes they occupy land too steep or rocky to work with equipment—or even to graze. Sometimes they are designed as windbreaks for cropland or as buffers along streams. Some are just fencerows that have grown up with trees or shrubs. These areas offer habitat to wildlife, erosion protection for streams, and beauty to the beholding eye.

Wooded areas can also contribute to the bottom line of a diversified farm in many ways. With good management, timberland can provide wood products year after year. In addition, woodlands can offer many non-timber products. In fact, studies have shown that old-growth forests are more profitable over the years when managed for both these types of production rather than for a one-time harvest.

Enclosed are materials about managing a woodlot for traditional uses—firewood and timber. You will find information about consulting foresters who can assist in making a long-range plan for intermittent selective harvests. You will also find articles about how to arrange a timber sale so that both you and your land are adequately protected.

Many items besides timber can be harvested, processed, and sold from an ordinary woodlot if you use your imagination. It takes a good deal of creativity and persistence to first see the possibility and then develop a “profit center” around such products. It is necessary to build up an understanding of the many markets in which a demand may exist or can be encouraged.



Woodlot thinnings can produce shiitake mushrooms

At a conference on these “Special Forest Products,” I was amazed at the variety of products and the ingenuity of people selling everything from pinecones, to berries for jams, to ferns for the European ornamentals market, to burls for specialty woodworkers. The Proceedings of the conference are available; if you are interested in learning about these many products, you can obtain a copy from CINRAM:

CINRAM
1530 Cleveland Ave. N.
115 Green Hall
St. Paul, MN 55108
(612) 624-7418
e-mail: CINRAM@forestry.umn.edu

Many forest products – such as maple syrup, nuts, and berries – result from the deliberate management of the woods to favor that product. Competing species are controlled and replacement trees are encouraged. Small landowners ensure a reliable harvest of berries, for instance, by either controlling invasive trees in existing openings or beginning new patches periodically by clear-cutting a new area. Managing the canopy for specific forest floor conditions favorable to a crop or selecting for nut-bearing species are other examples of forest management for marketable products.

Some products are simply harvested as they occur. Materials for caning and basketry, pine needles for mulch, and many species of herbs are often collected from their natural forest habitat and sold. Some undergo further processing before going to market. Game animals such as quail and deer, when hunted on a lease basis, can be considered special products of the functioning forest. If you are interested in collecting from woodlands other than your own, be sure to obtain proper permissions or licenses.

The enclosed articles include many examples of people who have seen a possibility and created their own opportunity. They may collect burls or odd-shaped pieces of wood and make them into animals or sell them to specialty woodworkers. They may rake and bale pine straw and sell it as “designer mulch.” They may collect berries or herbs or vines and process them into jams or sauces or basket-weaving materials. The list of plants that can be harvested from wooded areas is long, and there are even more products to be discovered and developed. Imagination is the most limiting factor; marketing is the next most limiting.

Marketing



**Imaginative furniture
made from hazelwood**

Some forest products, such as a few edible or medicinal mushroom species and herbs, have large established wholesale markets. Others have a small, focused market, which must be found and then exploited. For example, woodworkers may be interested in odd tree features, wood from unusual tree species, or wood from tree farms that are certified “sustainable.” Still other forest products require extensive promotion. An example of this is a novelty item such as “pinecone people” designed for the tourist market.

One idea that may be worth promoting to the environmentally conscious consumer is that your product is dependent on the continued health of the intact forest. You are taking care of and preserving the forest while providing the item for sale. Such a concept, if presented on the label or display, might find a sizeable market among tourists or at high-end gift shops.

Direct marketing is often more profitable than using conventional channels. The ATTRA publications *Direct Marketing*, *Adding Value to Farm Products: An Overview*, *Keys to Success in Value-added Agriculture*, *Evaluating a Rural Enterprise*, and *Entertainment Farming and Agri-Tourism*, available on the ATTRA website (<http://www.attra.org>), may also be helpful in planning your marketing strategy. If you do not have access to the internet, call ATTRA at (800) 346-9140 and request a free copy of any of these publications.

Further Resources

The number of agroforestry websites is growing, and they are a good resource if you have access to the Worldwide Web. I have listed some of them at the end of this letter. There is an excellent article about development of non-timber forest products on the web at <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/V7540e/V7540e25.htm>>.

Nontimber Forest Products in the United States (1) is a new book, just off the press. Editors Eric T. Jones, Rebecca J. McLain, and James Weigand offer a comprehensive look at the range of products being produced in woodlands. Included are descriptions of traditional uses and users of the forest—both commercial and non-commercial—and a discussion of sustainable management. It also covers topics more interesting to an academic audience, such as policy, economics, and future research needs.

ATTRA has publications on several other crops that can be grown under forest canopy. *Woody Ornamentals for Cut Flower Growers*, and several of the herb and fruit titles, could help you meet your goals for your woodland.

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Websites related to special forest products

USDA Forest Service—Special Forest Products
<http://www.srs4702.forprod.vt.edu/pubsubj/sfp.htm>

Contains several articles about non-timber forest products.

University of Minnesota site
<http://www.cnr.umn.edu/FR/CINRAM/home>

Site to order the Proceedings from the 1998 Specialty Forest Products/Forest Farming Conference and a publication on marketing special forest products.

Forestry with Steve Nix
<http://forestry.miningco.com/cs/alternativeforest>

Several articles about forest products, including charcoal, tree seeds, botanicals, and pine straw.

Institute for Culture and Ecology's U.S. Non-timber Forest Product Database
<http://ifcae.org/ntfp/>

Lists commercial and non-commercial NTFP species – for identification, development, and conservation; can be searched by scientific or common name, product use, parts used, state range, and distribution; also has a searchable bibliographic and Internet links database.

Websites related to agroforestry

National Agroforestry Center's home page
<http://www.unl.edu/nac/>

NAC homepage with links to publications and other excellent materials, including a Specialty Forest Products series.

University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry
<http://agebb.missouri.edu/umca/>

General agroforestry information, publication on budgeting agroforestry practices, and videos on various practices; describes the Center and its staff; provides abstracts of research; excellent links to many related sites.

Forest Landowners Guide to Internet Resources
<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ir/index.htm>

Index of on-line publications covering a wide range of topics related to owning and managing woodlands. Pubs on special forest products, riparian buffers and windbreaks, forest tourism, and much more. Includes direct on-line links.

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Several crops growing under a modified forest canopy

The electronic version of **Woodlot Enterprises** is located at:

HTML

<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/woodlot.html>

PDF

<http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/woodlot.pdf>