



WoodWorks
131 West Wilson St, Suite 400
Madison, WI 53703
608-258-4393
www.woodworks.coop
egnadeau@inxpress.net

Transforming America's Private Forestland and Marginal Farmland into Sustainable, Productive Resources through Cooperative Action

WoodWorks 2004 Forestry for Farmers Workshops: Review and Lessons Learned

Revised by E.G. Nadeau, April 13, 2005

Between May and November 2004, WoodWorks coordinated and co-sponsored a national series of woodland owner workshops. The primary theme of the eleven workshops in the series was "forestry for farmers." The Farm Credit System Foundation, National Farmers Union, Nationwide Foundation and WoodWorks members provided funding and organizing support for the workshops held in Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wisconsin.

The National Farmers Union was a key partner with WoodWorks in funding and organizing the 2004 Forestry for Farmers workshops. In particular, NFU co-sponsored the workshops held in WI, CO, PA, MO and KY.

This report:

1. Provides a brief description of each workshop; and
2. Summarizes the lessons learned from them.

1. The Workshops

The following workshop summaries are presented in chronological order.

- a. **"Managing Your Woods Your Way."** This event was held in western Wisconsin in mid-May and was organized by Wisconsin Farmers Union and Cooperative Development Services (CDS). About fifty woodland owners -- one-third of whom were young, beginning and small producers -- participated in the workshop.
- b. **"Goods from the Woods"** was a series of forestry and forest product workshops and an exhibition in northern Minnesota that took place

between June and September. WoodWorks and CDS were co-sponsors of this program that attracted over 300 participants.

- c. **“Forest Management and Forest Waste Utilization.”** This seminar was held in Alamosa, Colorado in August. The workshop focused on the interconnected problems faced by woodland owners related to drought, the high density of western forests, disease and the potential for catastrophic fires. The event was co-sponsored by Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, San Luis Valley Development Resources Group, and the International Center for Appropriate and Sustainable Technology. About fifteen people were in attendance, including several Hispanic woodland owners.
- d. **“WoodWorks: Increasing Profit from Your Woodlot”** took place in late September in western Pennsylvania and was co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, the Keystone Development Center and others. Sixteen adults and six high school students participated in the event.
- e. **“Dubuque County Forestry Field Day”** was held in eastern Iowa in late September and was co-sponsored by CDS, Iowa Extension and Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Over 50 participants, primarily area farmers, toured a model tree farm.
- f. **“Working Together for a Healthy Timber Harvest.”** Co-sponsors of this mid-October workshop included CDS, Stora Enso (a large forest products company), Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, Wisconsin Family Forests, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and University of Wisconsin Extension. About 25 woodland owners learned about the economic advantages of group timber sales and other ways to get a good return on wood sales while maintaining healthy forests.
- g. **“Small Forest Landowner Cooperative Workshop Series”** had its first workshop in central Washington in late October. This workshop series is co-sponsored by the Northwest Cooperative Development Center, WoodWorks, Washington State Community Trade and Economic Development, USDA-Forest Service, USDA-Cooperative Services, and Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension. Twelve participants representing five different forestry co-op projects are participating in this intensive workshop series designed to develop detailed feasibility studies and business plans for each project. The second workshop was held in mid-February and the third is scheduled for April 29-May 2.

- h. **“Realizing the Value of Trees in the Farming System -- Agroforestry”** was the title of a workshop in southwestern Missouri held in late October. The event was co-sponsored by Missouri Farmers Union, MFU Family Farm Opportunity Center, Kansas Farmers Union, the University of Missouri Southwest Research Center, the UM Center for Agroforestry, and the Southwest Missouri Resource Conservation and Development District. Approximately 50 people, primarily farmers, participated in the event.
- i. **“Know Your Rights and Earn Top Dollar”** was the theme for a workshop in Mississippi in early November. The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Winston County Self-Help Cooperative and Alcorn Cooperative Extension Program co-sponsored the event. Approximately 30 people, primarily African American producers with small farm operations participated in the workshop. This event is part of a workshop series that is continuing in 2005.
- j. **“Securing Benefits and Profits from Managing Your Woods”** was the title of a workshop held at the University of Kentucky’s Robinson Forestry Center in southeastern Kentucky in late November. The event was co-sponsored by the Kentucky Cooperative Development Center, the UK Department of Forestry, and Commodity Growers Cooperative. Twelve people participated in a planning session on ways to improve farm woodland management and profitability in Kentucky.
- k. **“Your Future Forest: Making It Happen”** was the theme of a forestry workshop held in Ohio on December 11. The workshop was attended by over 25 participants, including woodland owners and representatives from state agencies, watershed councils, community organizations, and universities. The workshop targeted three neighboring watersheds -- Sunday Creek, Monday Creek and Federal Valley -- all tributaries of the Hocking River. The focus was on the existing collaborative initiatives within the watershed groups and the forestry activities that could be started for landowners in the watershed. This workshop and a second one to be held at the Vinton Experimental Forest in 2005 are co-sponsored by the Ohio Cooperative Development Center, OSU Extension, Rural Action and two watershed councils.

2. Lessons Learned

The eight lessons presented below are intended to highlight the steps that worked well in organizing these eleven woodland owner workshops. They are also intended to provide guidance for organizing forestry workshops in the future.

- a. **In-state leaders and co-sponsors.** A key factor in the success of the better-attended workshops was a committed group of in-state leaders and co-sponsors. In a number of cases, informal steering committees developed a plan and timetable for the workshops, divvied up the organizing tasks, and checked in via periodic conference calls to make sure preparations were on track. Involvement of public and private forestry professionals was also important in these workshops both in developing quality agendas and in providing a broad sense of ownership and legitimacy for the events.
- b. **Workshop themes.** Each of the workshops was designed to address the priorities of farmers and other woodland owners in a specific geographical location. This “customized” approach worked well in getting landowners to participate and in having them evaluate the workshops favorably. In addition to the “customized” themes, the economic benefits from sustainable forestry practices and careful planning of timber harvests were a featured part of most workshops. Workshop organizers generally agreed that stressing economic issues was a good way to encourage farm woodlot owners to participate.
- c. **Classroom training and walks in the woods.** Most of the workshops combined a classroom component and a field component. This approach worked well in communicating information, generating questions and discussion, and having participants see “real life” examples of different forest ecosystems and forestry practices.
- d. **Workshop location, scheduling and length.** With the exception of the Washington State workshop, which is part of an in depth training program, all of the workshops took place on a Saturday and ranged from two to six hours in length. In general, organizers thought that they would get a good turnout with a half-day program on a Saturday. Most workshops targeted woodland owners who lived within an hour’s drive of the training site.
- e. **Workshop fees.** In all of the workshops except Washington’s, fees varied from free to \$10. Because these workshops were introductory in nature, organizers didn’t want the cost to discourage people from coming. In addition, financial support from NFU, the Farm Credit System Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation meant that workshop fees could be optional. Some organizers thought that charging a nominal fee would make the participants value the workshop more. Others didn’t see that as necessary. In some cases the fee – or lack of a fee – was based on what other groups in the state charged for similar events. Lunch was usually covered by the fee or provided free of charge.

- f. **Number of participants.** There was quite a bit of variation in workshop size – 12 at the low end and over 50 at the high end. In most cases, organizers were aiming for 25-50 participants who resided within an hour's drive of the workshop site. This size range is large enough to make the workshop planning and development efforts worthwhile, and small enough to be able to address each participant's interests.
- g. **Achieving attendance goals.** In general, the organizing groups that achieved their attendance goals used a combination of mailing lists, announcements in local newspapers and newsletters, and word of mouth promotion. Some also used local radio spots. This publicity began about a month before the events. The primary reasons that several workshops fell short of their attendance goals were that they didn't publicize them early enough or didn't target the publicity well enough to the intended audience.
- h. **Evaluation.** In about half of the workshops, participants were asked to fill out a simple evaluation form. The large majority of participants who filled out forms gave favorable reviews of the workshops. Many recommended topics and improvements for future workshops. They also provided information about themselves and their woodlands that will be useful for planning future workshops and other forestry activities.

Conclusion

The primary conclusion from this overview of workshops and lessons learned is that this approach to providing woodland owner education works. In general, attendance by farmers and other woodland owners was good and participants evaluated the events favorably. **WoodWorks** members, co-sponsors and funders deserve a lot of credit for coordinating a series of workshops that spanned ten states over a period of eight months.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this workshop series is only a part of a broader strategy to improve management of private forestland and to help woodland owners increase their economic returns. In 2005 and beyond, WoodWorks will continue to co-sponsor forestry education events. It will also step up its efforts to assist local groups of woodland owners to form cooperatives and nonprofit associations and to carry out joint forest improvement and marketing activities.

All of these activities are in keeping with **WoodWorks**' mission of "transforming America's private forestland and marginal farmland into sustainable, productive resources through cooperative action."