

Farm Woodlands

SMALL FAMILY forests offer a double opportunity: A good chance of growing money on trees and the certainty that the owner is adding something of value to his community. They range from 3 acres to 5 thousand acres and average 59 acres. They make up 265 million acres and are owned by 4.5 million individuals, more than half of whom are farmers. The lands are as different in composition, age, and capabilities as are their owners. They exist everywhere that forest-type trees grow naturally, but most are east of the Great Plains.

Most farmers own their woodlands as a part of the farm, usually as a back forty or a hilly tract too steep to cultivate. Nonfarmers own woodlands for many reasons—for hunting and fishing, other recreation, pride of ownership, speculation, or investment. The possibility of making money is the primary motive of many owners, but fewer than half of them have done anything about management; they seem to think that growing timber is different from other enterprises in that Nature will take care of it. When an owner asks a forester, "What are my chances of making money in timber?", the forester probably will ask, "Are you interested in speculation or in management?" If the answer is speculation, the forester may show little interest, for he knows that almost anything bought cheap and sold high can yield a profit. He also knows that if all the timber is cut at once the owner might just as well sell both trees and land and get out of the business. If the owner is interested in managing now and in the future, the forester will be anxious to help him. Forestry is generally a long-term business, and quick profits are rare.

The small woodland can be a source of profitable self-employment. A woodland owner can save money by producing posts, poles, and construction materials. Sometimes he can produce maple sirup, fish from his pond or stream, and wild game for his table and have recreation for himself and his family. He may be able to lease for profit the fishing and hunting rights in his woodland or he may rent out campsites. With trees he can heal the scars of erosion. He can protect his fields, cattle, and homesite from the wind and extremes of heat or cold. The prospective timber owner will find opportunities almost everywhere, but some places are better than others. Technical assistance is more readily available in



A fine stand of mixed hardwoods in North Carolina.

some counties. Some sections have excellent publicly financed organizations for protection from fire; in others, the owner must fight fire alone. Opportunities for profitable management are possible only under favorable conditions. One of the most important is that the owner have full control of the land—by living on it himself or having someone live on it who will protect the woodland from fire, animals, insects, diseases, and thieves.

In many places an owner can hire a consulting forester for a daily fee or a percentage of the income from timber sales. Some manufacturers, like the big paper and lumber companies, may offer some free technical forestry assistance. Most States provide the services of a forester free or at a nominal charge to help small owners get started in management and to check on the operations.

Markets vary from place to place and are never static, but timber does not have to be harvested every month or every year. Generally it will keep on increasing in size and value if it cannot be sold profitably this year or next, but harvesting cannot be deferred indefinitely. The sale must be made before decay and other risks become excessive or the owner will lose money.

Good roads and railroads or water transportation are essential to the economical movement of forest products, which are generally bulky and heavy. Also to be taken into account are soil and water. A pine tree or an oak is as responsive to good soil and moisture as a cornstalk. The local tax situation also has a bearing on the purchase of a woodland. In one place, woodland worth 50 dollars an acre may be taxed at 10 to 20 cents; in another place, woodland worth 10 dollars an acre may be taxed 2 dollars a year.

How to start depends a great deal on the resources one has. With respect to the timber, most owners have a small amount of mature salable timber; some good, immature timber, which will yield future harvests; a large number of cull trees, which must be gotten rid of; and some bare or poorly stocked land in need of planting or seeding. Good, growing stock trees of the right species, quality, and sizes, well spaced over the land, are an asset in managing timber. Stocking land with good trees, like developing a fine herd of cattle, cannot be done in a day or a year. Many small woodlands are so choked with cull or scrub trees that good growing stock can be developed only by clearing, followed by planting or seeding. Also to be considered are the owner's physical, financial, and managerial capabilities. A man who can do his own work often can earn a good wage in addition to the stumpage value of the trees to be harvested. An owner who is financially secure can forego limited immediate profits and wait for favorable prices.

Quicker profits can be expected by starting with growing stock at or below harvest size and managing it for a few years, rather than buying bare land and planting it. Price is important. The



Pruning ponderosa pine in California to grow good, knotfree sawlogs and veneer.

initial cost plus carrying charges (including taxes and interest), and costs of protection, development, and administration can add up to a large total expenditure. Unless returns are frequent and sizable there will be no profit. Land with scrubby growth that must be cleared and planted may have a negative value while land supporting a stand of pole-size yellow poplar trees which in a few years will make good sawlogs and then later valuable veneer may yield a profit even if the purchase price is high. Over the long term, good timberland and growing stock generally are more profitable than are poor land and poor growing stock. The owner of a small woodland cannot expect to become an experienced forester overnight. He must have technical help to inventory what he has, determine its capabilities, and make the right steps in planting, thinning, pruning, release cutting, protection, road development, sale, and harvest. Plans and decisions must be made on the basis of facts, good judgment, and experience. (*Arthur R. Spillers*)



This stand of scrub oak has many trees of poor quality and must be improved if it is to be profitable.

The slash pine being planted in this old field in Georgia in time will be a profitable woodland like the one in the background.

