

TIMBER PRODUCTS OF THE FARM WOODLAND



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An interview between Carroll V. Sweet, Chief, Timber Harvesting Division, Forest Products Laboratory, U. S. Forest Service, Madison, Wisconsin, and Everett Mitchell, National Broadcasting Company; broadcast during the U. S. Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Friday, June 10, 1938, by a network of 90 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

EVERETT MITCHELL: Today, we resume our series of reports on work being done by the Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin -- wood research institution of the United States Forest Service. The subject today concerns every farmer who has a woodland -- whether it's the size of a mere windbreak or a couple of hundred acres. Can you make that woodland pay its share of the farm income? Well, let's hear from the Chief of the Timber Harvesting Division of the Forest Products Laboratory, Mr. Carroll V. Sweet, who is ready to tell us how the farm woodland fits into the timber situation of the Nation as a whole. Mr. Sweet.

CARROLL V. SWEET: Well, Mr. Mitchell, farmers in the United States own one-third of all the timber-bearing land. That is almost as much as the timber land in commercial holdings, and more than the Government owns in the National Forests.

MITCHELL: What is the value of the farm woodland crop -- in cash.

SWEET: The gross return is very large. A quarter billion dollars. Equal to the value of all barley, rye, rice, and flaxseed crops; eight times the value of the peanut crop, and nearly equal to the tobacco crop. Per farm, per year, the average value of the farm woodland products is ninety-five dollars.

MITCHELL: Cash?

SWEET: One-fourth is cash; the balance is in fuel, fence posts, building material.

MITCHELL: Of course the farm woodland is a tremendous asset to the farmer.

SWEET: It is, and it could be even greater.

MITCHELL: You mean it could bring in more cash income?

SWEET: Yes. Now I mentioned the fact that there is nearly as much farm woodland as commercial timberland. Yet, when you compare the actual value of saw-logs from the farm, with values from commercial holdings -- the farmers

are hardly in the running. The balance is against farm woodlands about six to one.

MITCHELL: One reason, I suppose, is that the farmer has to cut his timber slowly -- as it grows to size.

SWEET: That is very true, and incidentally, one of the advantages the farm owner has. But the farm woods could be growing big ones, ready for market, three or four times as fast as they are now. And the country's got to depend on farm timber, more in the future than in the past. In fact, the country's heavily dependent on farm timber right now.

MITCHELL: Do you think farmers can build up their woodlands to meet the demand?

SWEET: Personally, I have no doubt of it. More and more farmers are keeping fire out of the woods, preventing grazing, and cutting the stand to improve size and quality.

MITCHELL: To be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Sweet, building up a forest seems an appalling job to me. Say I have ten or twenty or a hundred acres of scrubby woods. Fire has been through it again and again, cattle keep all the young trees trampled, or grazed down. Maybe if it is left alone for a hundred years or so it will have some valuable timber on it again, but I can't wait that long. A tie operator or a pulpwood man comes along and offers me two or three dollars an acre for stumpage. So what?

SWEET: So you apparently take the defeatist attitude.

MITCHELL: Well, maybe so.

SWEET: You under-estimate the power of the trees to "come back." You over-estimate the time element. Now let me tell you a story. A farmer, settling on a quarter section of cut-over timberland in northern Wisconsin, reserved 70 acres for permanent woodland. He cleared the rest. The natural timber was pine, spruce, and fir. After a few years he began cutting timber, carefully, always leaving the best. This was winter work for the farmer and his sons. Now for 31 years he kept a record -- the amount of timber cut and the money received for it. The timber cut has amounted to 700,000 board feet of saw-logs, which has brought him in an average gross return, every year, of \$500 in cash. Yet, by good management, the land at the end of the 31-year period had about 275,000 feet of standing timber. I think that is quite an encouraging picture.

MITCHELL: Not so bad! Why don't all farmers handle their woods that way?

SWEET: One reason -- a farmer may be pressed for cash. He may not recognize values and cut up a fine white oak log for cordwood, or fence posts, when he might have gotten \$25 for it as a veneer log. Again the farmer is not apt to know much about grades or specifications used by the mills in buying logs.

MITCHELL: Can't a farmer sell his timber to some mill in the neighborhood?

SWEET: Often he can, but that brings up another problem. There are thousands of small portable sawmills -- crude and wasteful outfits, mopping-up on trees that have grown since the virgin timber was cut off. Naturally, with their wasteful methods and low-grade output, the price they offer the farmer for logs is the very lowest, and when they have finished with a stand, it is pretty well cleaned out for a long time to come. The farmer gets drawn into a vicious circle of overcutting and low timber values.

MITCHELL: How can these small mills go on?

SWEET: In the same way a woodpecker does; they keep pecking away on cheap raw material. The system's bad, for both the mill and the farmer.

MITCHELL: Give us the other side of the picture, Mr. Sweet. Show us the silver lining.

SWEET: All right. There is a silver lining. As for sawmills -- the Forest Service is completing designs for an entirely new type of portable band mill that will reduce waste in sawdust and poorly sawed lumber by 50 percent. The mill can be moved from farm to farm, as easily as a threshing machine. And it looks as if we'll have more local wood-processing plants, small but efficient.

MITCHELL: Does that mean the consumer will pay less for lumber?

SWEET: It does. Transportation cost will be less. That is an important point in developing a local plant. As you may know, Mr. Mitchell, there are many quite modern local wood industries nowadays -- and they are getting along successfully, too.

MITCHELL: Some of them are run on a cooperative basis, like creameries, aren't they?

SWEET: Yes, a few are cooperative. An important point in their favor, from the farm wood-crop point of view, is that they link up timber cutting with timber growing. Also, a forest products cooperative may provide a processing plant for low-grade timber that commercial mills are not organized to handle.

MITCHELL: Of course that doesn't mean these local processing plants will turn out only low quality lumber.

SWEET: Oh no, quite the opposite. They don't put as much emphasis on clear lumber as on forms of wood products cut out from between the defects. The stock is cut to the exact length and width actually used in making furniture, boxes, and the like. Both squares and flat stock are manufactured at the mill, and bundled ready for shipment to the factories.

MITCHELL: How about building materials, from low-quality woodlot timber?

SWEET: Right now, the Forest Products Laboratory is developing timber in new forms -- laminated beams and arches and other members, for barns for

example, built up from small and low-grade material. In fact, these beams and arches are already in actual commercial production -- and every bit as strong as large solid timber. In many respects they are better than solid pieces.

MITCHELL: So you believe local manufacture holds the answer to marketing farm woodland material?

SWEET: Well, that is a broad question, and we can only go one step at a time. However, local manufacture of a simple type is going to play a big part. It means local materials for local needs, for such bulk commodities as snow fencing, treated farm, highway, and specialty fencing, truck-crop and fruit crates, and the like.

MITCHELL: What is being done to help the farmer get better growth on his woodlands?

SWEET: As far as growth and management are concerned, the Extension Service is helping a great deal. Building up and managing a woodland is like building up a dairy herd. No farmer would think of trying to build up his dairy herd by periodically selling the young thrifty heifers as beef cattle -- but that is about what many farmers do with their woodlands -- cut off the thrifty young trees as soon as they have any market value, and leave the low-grade trees until there is nothing else. On the cutting end, we find that trees below certain diameters, usually about 12 inches, are very poor prospects for lumber and should be left growing. So far as possible, pulpwood, posts, and fuel wood should be cut from thinnings and less thrifty trees, to give the better trees a chance.

MITCHELL: In general, then, your policy for the farm woodland is to build it up, in productiveness and quality.

SWEET: Yes, while using it efficiently. That is the objective of the Forest Service.

MITCHELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Sweet, for coming here today from Madison, Wisconsin, to give us this report. Farm and Home folks, you have just heard a survey of the farm woodland production and marketing situation given by Mr. Carroll V. Sweet of the Forest Products Laboratory, United States Forest Service, Madison, Wisconsin. If you'd like a copy of this broadcast, send a card to the Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin. The address, again, Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin.

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References

Practical pointers on the growing, management, and cutting of farm timber are contained in the following U.S.D.A. Farmers' Bulletins:

No. 1117, "Forestry and Farm Income."

No. 1794, "Forest Farming."

These are obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at a cost of 5 cents each (coin or money order). A free publication, U.S.D.A. Leaflet No. 153, "How to Cut Southern Farm Timber for Steady Profit," is obtainable on request from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.