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Forestry and the Iowa Farmer

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The fact that Iowa has such a preponderance of agricultural land sometimes is responsible for disregard of forest values in the state. In most land transactions in Iowa, the farms sell at a specified price per acre with no thought of classifying the forest and agricultural land. The poorer soils and rough forest areas are "lumped in" with the balance of the land at agricultural land prices. This practice has led the farmers to hold the wrong idea concerning actual forest land values as compared with agricultural values. In many sales it is quite difficult to make the land owner realize the relatively low value of forest soil as compared with agricultural land. This lack of balance between forest and agricultural land values has been prominently in evidence during the past several years in the purchase of state park lands in Iowa. In many cases areas of forest value only were held at agricultural prices which not only slowed up the purchase program of the State Conservation Board, but made condemnation proceedings necessary in certain cases.

One of the first essentials in developing forestry work in Iowa is to get a realization that forest land is forest land and farm land is farm land, and at the same time get the fact clearly in mind that returns from soil of poor quality must necessarily be less than such from the best agricultural soils.

On a large number of farms in Iowa the spirit of indifference shown toward the woodlands is responsible for a tremendous loss to the state. Many woodland areas are producing only one-half or one-third of the possible returns. By intelligent management this large area within the farms of the state may become a real source of income and the woodland tracts recognized as profit producers.

The necessity of a proper valuation of forest lands in order to show satisfactory returns on the investment is little understood by the farm owner of Iowa. The impossibility of demonstrating a good forest investment on land with a high fictitious value is well understood by the forester and this fact makes him realize the necessity of correct appraisals of land values.

The statement is often heard that Iowa is not a forested state and is interested very little in forest conservation. Although, between 90 and 95% of the land area is classified as tillable, yet the state of Iowa, and especially the farmers, have a real interest in the subject of forestry and in the conserva-
tion of forest resources. One would hardly be willing to make a statement that the Iowa people are not interested in the products derived from the forest, especially in view of the large consumption of lumber and other forest products in the state. Those who assume that Iowans have no interest in forest conservation are misinformed. It is, perhaps, just as important to the people of this state to have an adequate supply of forest resources as to those of other states. No state in the union would be crippled to a greater extent than Iowa if the forest resources of the country were squandered. Iowa has an enviable position among the states due to her large percentage of high class agricultural land, but this position will become less enviable if adequate forest resources from other states are lacking.

Aside from the general interest of the Iowa people in forestry work, the Iowa farmers have a specific need for forestry work since there is hardly a farm within the bounds of the state which is not concerned in one way or another with forestry problems. The farm woodlots of Iowa comprise between two and two and one-half million acres. Much of this timber is on rough land, which is entirely unsuited for cultivation and which should be kept permanently in forests. As the Iowa farmer becomes acquainted with the revenue producing value of these woodlot areas he will show his interest in a more practical way.

In some parts of Iowa the clearing of forest land for agricultural purposes has gone too far already. In some cases the "kick-back" has already been felt. In one locality the Forestry Section of the Iowa Experiment Station is undertaking a reforestation project in order to save some denuded land from complete destruction. This area is on the Tama Indian Reservation in eastern Iowa, where the land, formerly timbered, has been cut over for agricultural purposes. After a few years of attempted cultivation the land has gullied to such an extent as to make continued cultivation for agricultural crops quite impossible. The steepness of the slopes and loose character of the soil will mean that areas such as this one when reforested should be kept permanently in timber. Many other sections of Iowa are suffering from excessive cutting on forested areas.

During the past year an Extension Service in forestry has been added to the extension work of the Iowa State College. This service expects to get in contact with practically all of the farms in the state which are concerned in one way or another in forestry work. The plan for this extension work comprises a number of lines. One of the most important is the
demonstration of the proper practice in the management of native woodlands. It is the purpose to put on woodlot thinning demonstrations in co-operation with the county agents in all of the counties where work of this kind is important. There has already been keen interest demonstrated in this line of work and within the next few years it is expected that the farmers in Iowa will have little excuse for not handling their woodlots in a satisfactory manner.

The Extension Service is also offering some effective co-operation with the farmers in the establishment of shelterbelts of suitable species and proper arrangement. The Service has already scheduled a number of demonstration plantings in different counties of Iowa for the spring of 1922. At these demonstrations the farmers of the different counties will be assembled on the farm of a co-operator where the actual establishment of a shelterbelt will be undertaken for their observation. At these demonstrations the extension specialist will discuss the merits of the different trees for shelterbelts and windbreaks. An attempt is being made to arrange with the various nurseries of the state to provide suitable planting stock for shelterbelt and windbreak work at prices which will induce the farmers to undertake protective plantings of this kind.

The matter of utilizing the waste corners of the farm and poorer soils for plantations is receiving more attention each year. A large percent of the farms of Iowa have small tracts of from one to several acres which are either not accessible for general farm use or unproductive for agricultural purposes. The possibilities on these lands of growing timber for lumber and fence posts at a profit, are being brought to the attention of the farmer. The records of yields from some of the earlier cottonwood plantings which have been collected by the State Experiment Station serve as an inducement for commercial plantations. The gradual increase in prices paid for fence posts from year to year is pointing the land owners toward the production of their own fence posts. The growing scarcity of burr and white oak within the state is also a further inducement for the farmers to grow short rotation crops of posts. The fact that the farmers of the state use annually between 25 and 30 million fence posts indicates that this is an item worthy of careful attention.

The experiments in creosoting fence posts which were started in the year 1905 as a co-operative project between the Iowa State College and the U. S. Forest Service are becoming very serviceable in showing the farmers of the state the great
saving which may be effected through timber preservation. A number of exhibits of cottonwood, willow, soft maple, box elder and white cedar fence posts have been shown at the state fairs, farmers' short-courses, etc., and the fact that nondurable species such as these, after creosote treatment, last from 15 to 25 years, serves as a conclusive argument to the farmers.

One of the most important lines of extension forestry work is to get the facts in connection with the creosoting fence posts before the farmers. This work is being handled through the Extension Service by illustrated lectures and by actual treating demonstrations on farms selected in the different counties. The value of this line in Iowa is indicated by the readiness with which farmers undertake work of this kind when once they have the facts before them.

One of the most difficult problems connected with the farm woodlot in Iowa is the matter of marketing surplus material which is not needed for farm use. This problem is also being handled by the Extension Service and many of the difficulties in this direction will be solved through co-operative marketing projects.

Aside from the purely commercial aspects of forestry in Iowa, the farmers are showing more and more interest in the establishment of state parks or forests for recreational purposes. The stimulus given to this movement several years ago when the State Board of Conservation was appointed, has been quite marked. Nearly every community in the state has appealed to the Conservation Board for the establishment of a state forest park in its vicinity. Many of these communities have contributed liberally for the purchase of such areas.

In conclusion, the farmers of Iowa as a rule are beginning to see the necessity of forestry both from the national and the farm standpoints. The better farmers are realizing the necessity of securing returns from the entire acreage on the farm, including the woodlot. Persons who formerly looked upon the woodlot merely from the standpoint of so much land to be cleared, are changing their ideas when they realize that such areas can be made productive the same as any other portions of the farm. Although the state of Iowa is essentially non-timbered, forestry in its different phases is extremely important since practically all of the three hundred thousand farmers in the state are interested in one way or another in forestry work.