

Increasing returns from farm woodlots with owner-operated processing of timber

Final Report for ENE03-078

Project Type: Professional Development Program

Funds awarded in 2003: \$79,895.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2007

Matching Non-Federal Funds: \$37,107.00

Region: Northeast

State: West Virginia

Project Leader:

[David McGill](#)

WVU Appalachian Hardwood Center

Project Information

Summary:

Farmers who own small to medium sized woodlots often do not recognize the potential value of their timber. Returns from woodlot timber can be raised significantly by on-farm processing rather than lump sum sales to loggers, timber buyers, or mills. West Virginia's year 2000 average farm net income was only \$2,022 versus \$21,382 for the U.S. according to the U.S.D.A. Economic Research Service (ERS). The 1997 Census of Agriculture showed that 41% of West Virginia farmland was in woodland (1.4 million acres) with an average woodlot size of 81 acres. This compares to a U.S. average of only 7% of farmland in woodlots with an average woodlot size of 37 acres. There is a great potential in West Virginia to increase farm income by adding value through on-farm processing of woodlot timber. The opportunity, resource, market and technology is present.

In this project, farm advisors and extension agents were trained so that they feel competent and comfortable disseminating portable sawmill technical information. The intent of these training activities was to demonstrate that adding value to their farms through increased utilization of their timber resource will make smaller farms more sustainable and profitable. Professionals such as Extension agents were given financial and operational information that can be used to convince farmers of potential financial returns and options. This was primarily in the form of direct, hands-on experience with portable sawmill owners and information on portable sawmill enterprises provided by the project funds.

The project involved several phases. Phase one identified and selected demonstration farmers who operate portable sawmills. A curriculum and a fact sheet were developed and existing informational booklets were purchased for outreach education. The second phase involved three workshops for professionals, extension agents and foresters. These workshops were held in three separate locations across the state. The third phase involved the professional advisors (extension agents) disseminating the information and conducting educational programs for their

clients.

Performance Target:

1. 30 extension and other farm and forestry educators will conduct educational programs on owner operated processing for value-added opportunities of timber.
2. Of the 30 educational programs, 10 will involve workshops for farmers/woodlot owners.
3. Of the 10 workshops presented by educators, 3 will incorporate on-farm demonstrations.
4. 100 farmers / woodlot owners who are recipients of value-added timber educational programs will add or plan to add value as a result of this program.

Introduction:

The “Increasing returns from farm woodlots” project was a three-year education project in West Virginia that aimed to provide training in the advantages and challenges to using portable sawmills to add value to woodlot resources. The intent was two-fold. First, farmers were to be exposed to the benefits of adding value to logs grown in their woods by processing them into lumber using small-scale technology (portable sawmills) and then selling the value-added product (lumber). Secondly, the professionals were to be not only invited to these workshops, but in most cases, extension professionals directly coordinated these educational efforts and in the process, became much more confident in handling workshops of this type.

Educational Approach

Educational approach:

This was a workshop-based project with a team from the WVU Extension Service as the key players. For these workshops, advertisements were made through WVU Extension Service, WV Division of Forestry, WV Forestry Association, WV Farm Bureau, USDA NRCS and USDA Farm Service Agency. We also conducted direct mailings to landowners from a 2004 WV tax database purchased in another grant for research purposes. Most of the collaborating portable sawmill owners were compensated for their services, but many would have done the job with little or no compensation.

Target beneficiaries participated in outdoor portable sawmill workshops. All participants were given the opportunity and strong recommendations to wear safety equipment provided (eye glasses and ear plugs). Some participants were even allowed (by the sawmiller) to operate the mill or to pull lumber as it was saw from logs.

Evaluations by workshop participants helped to monitor progress toward project targets (see attached evaluation).

Milestones

Milestone #1

Accomplishments:

Publications

For the most part, accomplishments were made by a push in the third year to get extension agents, not originally part of this project team to participate and help host a workshop. By facilitating workshops through county extension agents we exceeded our performance targets and expanded interest in these farming/forest landowner activities. Extension agents, many of whom did not attend the original trainings for professionals, now have experience with this important value-adding opportunity.

Performance Target Outcomes

Performance target outcome for service providers narrative:

Outcomes

The target number of beneficiaries was exceeded for this milestone. The three workshops were attended by a total of 112 participants. Our effort was geared toward getting as many educators as possible to these workshops. A summary of each workshop follows:

April 13, 2004—As part of the 2004 West Virginia County Agriculture Agents Spring meeting, Steve Milauskas facilitated a NE SARE Portable Sawmill training session. Other trainers involved were Ed Cesa (USDA Forest Service), David Hardesty (WV Division of Forestry), Jeff Parsons (Sawmill owner), and Dave McGill (WVU Extension Service). Other project partners—WVU Extension Agents Brian Sparks, Larry Campbell, and Ronnie Helmondollar— and 23 additional county agriculture agents from the WVU Extension Service were participants of this initial training session.

July 23, 2004—Two, two-hour portable sawmill workshops were held during the NESARE Timber to Truffles workshop on the Glenville State University Campus. Among the 33 extension agents, natural resources agency personnel, and master forestland owners were project partners Steve Milauskas, Dave Hardesty, Larry Campbell, and Dave McGill.

November 14, 2004—A day-long portable sawmill training session was delivered as a West Virginia Forest Stewardship Planwriters workshop. Each year foresters who write forest stewardship plans are required to complete two of these workshops. Fifty-three forest resources professionals attended this session. Project partners included Ed Murriner and Dave McGill.

With the departure of Steve Milauskas from the project in August 2004, the project is now administered by Dave McGill. Since the outset of the project, two other project partners have left the WVU Extension Service. We will be filling those partner positions in 2005. Technical and logistical difficulties with the initial sawmill contractor for the 2004 workshops made it necessary to contract with other local sawmillers to complete the workshops. All three workshops were held using appropriate safety equipment and none had any reportable injuries.

In 2005, this project began an accelerated outreach program that would stretch into 2006. In addition to the annual portable sawmill demonstration the we hold in conjunction with the SARE Timber to Truffles program, we had a county-based workshop in Harrison county on the eve of the October

24th storm that wreaked havoc on trees still in full leaf out condition. Apart from the inclement weather, the workshop was well attended with 20 participants.

This project exceeded this performance target. In 2006, this project sponsored or cosponsored 14 workshops in 13 separate counties in West Virginia. Hence, 13 of 30 targeted extension agents have facilitated a workshop. Total attendance at these workshops was approximately 277, an average of 21 people per workshop, exceeding this performance target. County extension agents from the WVU Extension Service assisted and helped to facilitate each of these workshops. Twelve different sawmill operators served as instructors and sawmill demonstrators at these workshops. In 2007 with an extension of this grant we put on three more workshops in three new counties.

Initially, we planned to have three separate information sheets, but these were merged into a single sheet for distribution purposes (see attached). We are also developed three case studies of individual sawmillers to provide insight into portable sawmill enterprises, however, we do not currently have a plan to publish or otherwise distribute these. Likely, they will be used in future workshops as examples.

Additional Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

For the most part, accomplishments were made by a push in the third year to get extension agents, not originally part of this project team to participate and help host a workshop. By facilitating workshops through county extension agents we exceeded our performance targets and expanded interest in these farming/forest landowner activities. Extension agents, many of whom did not attend the original trainings for professionals, now have experience with this important value-adding opportunity.

Assessment of Project Approach and Areas of Further Study:

Potential Contributions

The primary contribution made by this project was the increased awareness and motivation of many WV county agents to host workshops in portable sawmills. Undoubtedly, these workshops will continue even now that the SARE-sponsored project is complete as many of the agents are familiar and even enthusiastic about these mills. One agent has built his own portable sawmill in this period.

Another contribution resulting from this project was the direct contact made by the approximately 315 total workshop participants with the various portable sawmill owners. The information gathered through these workshops have been used and will continue to be used by the participants. In addition, in the attached follow-up survey, respondents indicated that they had generally benefitted from these workshops and some were even considering purchasing a portable sawmill. Continuing evaluations of these impacts will help us better understand these contributions.

Future Recommendations

Our county-based workshops took individual topics directly to extension educators, farmers, and landowners in the form of two to three hour evening seminars. These were very popular workshops. Indeed, it was also a way to bring extension agents trained traditional agriculture into a training session related to forest resource. This was very beneficial to the forestry program.

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