

# The Natural Farmer

## Better Managing our Wooded Land

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At the time of the first European settlement of this continent, great forests existed throughout the northeast. According to naturalist Robert Leverett, early accounts describe New England white pines towering 200 feet tall, black oaks with girths of over 30 feet, Ohio eastern sycamores 10 feet in diameter, and Appalachian Tulip Poplars rising 150 feet above the forest floor on trunks over 25 feet in circumference.

These trees were taken for ship masts and building lumber, cleared for farms, and often simply burned for charcoal and potash. The soils thus exposed were farmed and soon, without a resupply of organic matter and the complex living root zone biochemistry they were accustomed to, lost their accumulated fertility. The trees that had grown back in areas unsuited for agriculture were cut, again and again.



Most NOFA farmers today have land in woodlots — often more acreage in woodlots than in crops. Traditionally these areas were used for cutting the farm's annual cordwood supply. Many still serve this purpose. But forested areas also serve many other purposes on our farms: maintaining ecological diversity, keeping wilderness available to us for psychological and aesthetic satisfaction, using as recreational areas for hunting, fishing, hiking, etc., and harvesting sustainable crops of cordwood and lumber.

Agroforestry is the productive use of forested areas without cutting the trees. It can involve raising food or medicinal crops which grow well in understory shade, pasturing livestock in wooded areas, harvesting renewable products from trees (decorative cones, greens for wreaths, needles for bedding), or intercropping long-life timber with shorter-term saleable items.

In this issue of *The Natural Farmer*, we look at some of these ideas and people who are doing them. Since so much of our land in this region would naturally end up forested, we thought it made sense to look at uses for our land which are both compatible with this tendency and designed to return some income to the family living there and hoping to keep that land as a vital part of the farm. We hope you enjoy it and get some ideas for your own operation.