

# Forestry Is Economic Powerhouse In Rural Arkansas

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.**

**W**hen you talk about Arkansas agriculture, most people immediately think of rice, soybeans, cotton, wheat or whatever they see growing in the fields. But they don't see the forests for the trees.

Arkansas has 18 million acres of forests, about 56 percent of the total land base.

Farmers, ranchers, and other individuals own most of the forest land in the state, and many actively manage their forest lands.

Arkansas ranks fourth in the nation in timber production, according to a 2005 University of Arkansas report.

The forest products industry, including the pulp and paper industry, is the state's largest manufacturer and directly employed 37,291 employees with a payroll of \$1.51 billion, according to the 2005 report. A total of \$2.63 billion was contributed in value-added dollars.

"Arkansas forests provide habitat for a vast multitude of plants and wildlife," said Dr. Tamara Walkingstick, a forester with the U of A Cooperative Extension Service.

"Our forests also provide a diversity of products and other important benefits including wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, watershed protection and aesthetic values," she said.

Walkingstick said private landowners have "an incredibly diverse set of objectives in mind for using their land." She said some are solely interested in income from their land, and some people value their land just for varied aesthetic or recreational reasons, including wildlife watching, hunting, trail riding and hiking.

Walkingstick, who owns 30 acres of forestland, enjoys the wildlife and natural beauty on the land, "but I expect someday to market some of the trees and reap financial benefits while balancing that with my aesthetic needs and environmental concerns."

But private landowners don't always know

how to reach their objectives. Some have inherited land and know nothing about taxes, how to market their trees, avoiding bad financial deals or how to manage their timber for the future.

Walkingstick said the extension service can provide that information to help landowners reach their goals.

"We can help them improve wildlife habitat, or if they're interested in selling timber, we can provide information about the best way to go about it," she said. "We teach best management practices, how to manage a forest for a healthy stand, the importance of forest management plans, and we provide education on estate planning and timber taxation." For people interested in the latest timber prices, go to the online Arkansas Timber Report at: [www.arnatural.org/News/Timber\\_Report/default.htm](http://www.arnatural.org/News/Timber_Report/default.htm).

Bobby Hall, Dallas County extension staff chair, said Dallas, Bradley, Calhoun and Cleveland counties are cooperating to provide a stronger, more focused educational effort for landowners in the four counties.

"We want people to know that extension is a reliable source of unbiased information on the topics they're interested in," he said. "From literature to on-the-ground assistance, we can help them manage their forests with such concerns as site selection, site issues, pests, species selection and wildlife management."

He said extension is providing up-to-date information about the carbon offset program, a value-added income to forestry.

"We're also providing GPS training to help landowners better keep up with tracts of land they own," Hall noted. "With GPS, they can give the coordinates of the tracts to timber cutters, or they can mark insect infestations and zero in on treatments."

One of extension's tools to help landowners is a farm market newsletter, which provides marketing information. Δ