

15th North American Agroforestry Conference

Roundtable Discussion Session Results



Association for
Temperate Agroforestry

Roundtable 1

How to use the values of agroforestry systems to create new incentive mechanisms?

Lieve Borremans

Session Summary

This workshop was a brainstorm session about innovative financing and marketing schemes that could incentivize farmers to invest in agroforestry systems. This is necessary, because, although multiple studies have shown that overall productivity in these systems is higher than in conventional systems, this is not always translated into higher financial benefits for the farmer. This is a result of (1) the long duration between investment costs and pay-off, which greatly exceeds the usual planning horizon for traditional farming systems and (2) the fact that many forms of value that agroforestry creates, e.g., biodiversity and landscape amenities, and new high-value products are currently not valorized through the market. Therefore the focus was especially on mechanisms that could overcome those barriers.

Making use of the 6-3-5 brainwriting method, participants got some individual working time to come up with new ideas, and comment on the ideas of others. Afterwards, the generated ideas were discussed in small groups, and eventually a group discussion was held about promising ideas, their success factors and/or pain points. The generated ideas included organized as well as market-based mechanisms, which are listed below.

Key Discussion Points

Organized schemes and mechanisms:

- Subsidies
 - Grants for planting materials, necessary tools
 - PES (payment for ecosystem services)
- Tax benefits for farming land under agroforestry
 - Tax benefits for land that is traded and transformed to agroforestry
- Loan for agroforestry investments with periodic (monthly?) pay-off (solar panel idea)

Market-based

- Carbon credit markets, nutrient trading (N₂O, CH₄)
- Short supply chains, add value to a product by processing and transporting it
 - Farm shop
 - Farm-to-table
 - CSA-farming: pay a fixed cost per year, and pick your own apples
- Broadening of farm activities, take advantage of ecotourism and recreation (tourists, hunters, etc.) e.g. farm tours

- Certification
 - Agroforestry label
 - Sustainability label (e.g. climate change impact of product)
- Arrangements where farmer is not owner of the trees, private investment in trees
 - Agroforestry analog to Timberland Investment Management Organizations (TIMO's)
 - Become a shareholder of an agroforestry project (pay share of investment, and revenues are split between farmers and shareholders)

Roundtable 2

Interdisciplinary language – Can you speak agroforestry?

Catherine Bukowski

Abstract

This topic will be focused on navigating the many terms used in correlation with agroforestry, permaculture, sustainable farming, climate-smart agriculture, resilient agriculture, etc. The results of this session will be used to inform whether there is a need for a glossary of sorts to be housed on the AFTA website or elsewhere that helps clarify usage and terms for researchers, agency personnel, practitioners and others or if a panel discussion is needed in the future.

Key discussion points

- Know your audience (in other words, know what interests them, their values, what they can relate to)
 - Keep discussion in terms that your audience understands and use reference points they know. Try to make analogies that help them visualize what you want to explain.
 - Do not start with the exact agroforestry term, end with the term. Introduce terms slowly. Start with examples, explain what you mean and then let people know what it might be referred to as if they are looking for more information, agency assistance, etc.
 - Or, explain the term quickly and why it is used, always provide definitions
- Discuss the benefits: use alternative terms like yield that has broad applications
- Agroforestry = integration
- Trees is a basic term, but agroforestry is about more than trees. Agroforestry is integrated trees and other perennial crops.
- Use a point of reference to speak to the person. Find an outcome that you both care about it and use that in the explanation for adopting agroforestry.
- Taking steps in the practice – lead into it – work towards a common vision.

Conclusions/next steps

It would be helpful to have a best practices guide for how to explain agroforestry and related concepts to new clients, landowners and other agency personnel that is guided by joint values and interests rather than prescription practices. The guide could provide examples of how to talk to different stakeholders based on what has worked in similar situations for others. All agree that it is difficult to remember to create a shared vision with others and general guidelines on how to do so would also be

helpful as part of the guide. An alternative definitions resource hosted on AFTA's website was also discussed as a reference for multiple ways to explain practices rather than using technical language.

Roundtable 3

Plan, plant, preside: Early establishment practices for edible agroforestry

Matt Wilson

Session Summary

This round-table discussion focused on the considerations for mixed-species agroforestry plantings during the planning, installation, and establishment phases. The participants self-organized into three available groups: planning, planting, and presiding/maintenance. Open-ended questions were asked to encourage participants to share their experiences as well as ask questions.

Key discussion points

- Planning
 - Information from NAFEX and Northern Nut Growers
 - Using SketchUp for design
 - Understand indigenous and local knowledge
 - Know your site! Plant and see!
 - Keyline can help water
 - Talk with nurseries
- Planting
 - Cover crops
 - Deer
 - Know your site (weeds)
 - Animals
 - Soil
 - Site prep
 - Woody species for mulch
- Presiding/maintenance
 - Organic mulch under plastic mulch
 - Planting depth
 - Scoring auger holes
 - Irrigation, drip, adequate moisture
 - Weeds as secondary product/use
 - Pests
 - Biocontrol

Roundtable 4

Barriers to adoption: Identifying best strategies for landowner and farmer entry into agroforestry

Steve Gabriel

Session Summary

While Agroforestry has achieved a solid foundation of research and is beginning to be more promoted by government agencies and universities, adoption by landowners and farmers is slow on the uptake. In this session, groups will share their experience, best strategies, and explore and articulate the major barriers to successful adoption. The goal is to identify patterns and priority areas the group can agree on moving forward as we continue to promote agroforestry adoption.

Premise: (from facilitator)

1. There is enough of a foundational research and practices are well defined enough that we can recommend agroforestry practices to farmers and landowners
2. Low adoption rates are not a logistical problem, but a social one
3. Not merely a lack of knowledge, but a need for a paradigm shift

Key Discussion Points

List of items from participants when asked “write down one of the top barriers to adoption”

- Need to better define establishment period for producers
- Move away from academic focus to solutions focus
- Low compensation for environmental services
- Lack of institutional support
- DON'T UNDERSTAND PRACTICES
- Lack of certification/recognition
- Requires cooperation/co ops
- Land Access and tenure
- Need; simple presentations about practices with cost/benefit analysis
- Producers and TSPs need to see it to believe it, and hear it from each other (horizontal knowledge exchange)
- Upfront costs of conversion (thinning trees or planting trees)
- The narrow view of how trees are seen in US (very different elsewhere)
 - o It's ok to have tree fruits for family, animals for income
- Tenure and ownership; lifestyle in some places, necessity in others
- So academically focused, language becomes a barrier. No one cares about “practices”
- Need to stop focusing only on producers. Historically this audience has been pressured to simplify and get bigger
- TSPs have been afraid or reluctant to promote it
- Time dynamics; annual farmers not used to longer yield times, and foresters think very long term; not used to need for shorter term yields
- Saying that its “complex” and “multi-dimensional” is discouraging – language
- How does it solve my (farmer) problem?

- LISTEN to farmers, rather than tell them
- Farmer alienation from community when doing novel farming practice; important to have a critical mass
- The visibility of knowledge; clearly written, user friendly, widely available
- Demonstrations; Simple Achievable, Profitable
- Intergenerational asset transfer
- Lack of Markets
- Certification/verification program
- Most adoption from people who already think this way, have stewardship ethics
- Informational support + someone to encourage them along the struggle

Roundtable 5

Agroforestry adoption for mitigating and adapting to climate change: Dialogue and organizing forum

Connor Steadman

Session Summary

Overall Framing

Climate change is currently on track to severely damage the lives of most people currently living on the planet and for many generations to come. Within the multi-sector emissions reduction and sequestration pathways articulated by the IPCC and Project Drawdown, among other efforts, the agroforestry scholar/practitioner/producer/advocate community is gathered around one of the most globally significant strategies for large-scale biological and agricultural carbon sequestration. As such, it would be of great benefit to humanity's future for the agroforestry community to greatly increase its ability to drive widespread adoption and land transition towards agroforestry systems in place- and community-appropriate ways.

Session Approach

NAAC participants represent a wide range of roles and positions within food/land use systems and within agroforestry research and practice. In this non-caucused discussion group, that full diversity was apparent in the range of starting points, perspectives, and paradigms present in the room. To build common purpose together without homogenizing existing diversity and divergences, we posed the open-ended question of peoples' relationships to the difficult and needed work of agroforestry adoption, wherever they may be standing and specializing within the overall work around agroforestry. We then utilized peer support practices of reflective dialogue and mutual listening to explore challenges experienced by each individual and illuminate new strategies and opportunities that participants could act on during the remainder of the conference.

Participants grouped into mutual support diads (pairs) and took turns exploring the following four questions with their diad partner's listening and attention:

1. What have been some of your notable successes to date towards agroforestry adoption?
2. What challenges are you currently experiencing related to adoption?
3. What is a new strategy or endeavor that you'd like to take on related to adoption?

4. With the resources and network present at NAAC, what is one single achievable next step you can take towards that new strategy or endeavor in the remaining two days of the conference?

Participants were then encouraged to regroup with their diad partners at a later time during the conference and report on their successes in taking the steps developed in response to Question 4.

Roundtable 6

Launching an AFTA agroforestry policy circle for continuous policy analysis and advocacy for advancing agroforestry in the USA

Gregory Ormsby Mori

Abstract

The release of the 2011 -2016 USDA Agroforestry Strategic Framework was a significant milestone for agroforestry in the USA and helped to articulate goals, raise the profile of and advance momentum on agroforestry. To date, however, many of the stated goals in the strategic framework have not been fully realized, including articulation and adoption of a range of policy actions supportive of agroforestry. Significant gaps in agency and budget commitments to support agroforestry research, as well as inadequate incentive programs and promotion for increased adoption remain. Recognizing the need for increased attention on agroforestry policy and for creating a supportive policy environment for agroforestry, AFTA will be coordinating and hosting an “Agroforestry Policy Circle” to have a functioning forum for ongoing policy analysis at the state and federal levels. The purpose of the agroforestry policy circle is to identify policy gaps and opportunities and to recommend and advocate for adoption of policies favorable to advancing agroforestry science and increased agroforestry adoption. The AFTA agroforestry policy circle will be open to the participation of researchers, agency staff, practitioners and others interested in contributing to policy analysis and advocacy for advancing agroforestry. This roundtable discussion session will be opportunity for input on the focus and priorities of the agroforestry policy circle and the mechanics of how it will function. It is anticipated that some initial steps and areas of focus will be a review and analysis of the proposed farm bill and a comparative analysis of policies, or lack thereof, across states, again, to identify policy gaps and opportunities and recommend policies and advocacy actions supportive of agroforestry.

Key discussion points

Began discussion with introduction on need for increased attention on agroforestry policy, need for creating a supportive policy environment for agroforestry and AFTA intention to launch a policy working group/Policy Circle for agroforestry. The discussion addressed the overarching question: How can AFTA better influence policy to favor agroforestry? One question that arose out of this discussion, was whether AFTA needs to/should develop a policy platform? What is the strategy for doing so, and who will lead the charge? AFTA is reliant on volunteers due to lack of funds to pay someone to lead this effort.

In the discussion, consensus that AFTA has a relatively small membership and challenge is how AFTA can better leverage influence? Suggestions included ‘getting the ear’ of pertinent sister organizations and serving as liaisons on boards etc. to introduce agroforestry into pertinent conversations. Two such

organizations are 'Ag orgs' and SAF. AFTA should look internally to find members who hold seats in sister or partner organizations that might be able to help influence policy. AFTA could also look towards European and other International agroforestry organizations to find examples of how they are able to influence policy.

Conclusions/next steps

1. AFTA should proceed with facilitating or hosting a policy circle/working group.
2. Evaluate whether AFTA should articulate a policy platform/agenda.
3. AFTA might co-sponsor a Policy Fellowship position. AFTA does not have the resources available to fund a full fellowship but perhaps we can share time with a fellow.
4. AFTA needs to support a 'strategic framework' within the USDA for agroforestry. This should involve identifying a few key topics or areas that can serve as shared foci. What are current critical issues that agroforestry can help deal with, or mitigate? How can AFTA get a seat at the table of those sister organizations or policy makers involved in these issues? Examples could be regional or local such as extension agencies, conservation districts and advisory committees.
5. An example of a high visibility area that AFTA could pursue was mentioned as getting 'carbon sequestration' science updated within the international realm to highlight the possible value of agroforestry to mitigate carbon. Right now, agroforestry is largely missing from the conversation in many arenas. This could raise the prominence of agroforestry and possibly lead to funding and policy impacts.
6. AFTA should advocate for 'full funding' of the National Agroforestry Center. The 1990 Bill that established the NAC set annual funding at 5 million per year. The NAC has not received more than 1.3 in any given year.
7. AFTA should advocate for the inclusion of agroforestry practices in government census counts and surveys targeting farmers and landowners. There has been some slow integration but the content is limited. This is limited by the total number of questions that any survey can contain, but the data could help highlight the importance of agroforestry in the landscape. The results need to be accessible and visible; right now it is hard to find such data where they exist.