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## Agroforestry

condensed from NACD *Forestry Notes*

The general concept of agroforestry is to integrate trees and agriculture so as to create a more diversified landscape, while providing the producers with new environmental and/or economic benefits. While it sounds like an easy sell, leaders at the USDA National Agroforestry Center (NAC) in Lincoln, Nebraska admit that some landowners are reluctant to make the transition.

“One of the biggest barriers to agroforestry landowners is ‘tradition,’” says NAC Director Andy Mason. “For example, annual row crops belong in that field and you manage only for trees in the woodland. I’m certainly not knocking tradition, but we need to recognize that agroforestry is a different way of thinking.”

There are five common agroforestry practices: alley cropping, forest farming, riparian forest buffers, silvopasture and windbreaks.

Here is how the NAC website describes each of the five common practices:



--In **alley cropping**, an agricultural crop is grown simultaneously with a long-term tree crop to provide annual income while the tree crop matures. Fine hardwoods like walnut, oak, ash, and pecan, are favored species in alley cropping systems and can potentially provide high-value lumber or veneer logs. Nut crops can be another intermediate product.

--**Forest farming** is the cultivation of high-value specialty crops under the protection of a forest canopy that has been modified to provide the correct shade level. Crops like ginseng, shitake mushrooms, and decorative ferns are sold for medicinal,



culinary, and ornamental uses.

--**Riparian forest buffers** are natural or re-established streamside forests made up of tree, shrub, and grass plantings. They buffer non-point source pollution of waterways from adjacent land, reduce bank erosion, protect aquatic environments, enhance wildlife, and increase biodiversity.

--**Silvopasture** combines trees with forage and livestock production. The trees are managed for high-value sawlogs and, at the same time, provide shade and shelter for livestock and forage, reducing stress and sometimes increasing forage production.

--**Windbreaks** are linear plantings of trees and shrubs designed to enhance crop production, protect people and livestock, and benefit soil and water conservation. Field windbreaks protect a variety of wind-sensitive crops, control wind erosion, and increase bee pollination and pesticide effectiveness. Livestock windbreaks help reduce animal stress and mortality, reduce feed consumption, and help reduce visual impacts and odors. Living snowfences keep roads clean of drifting snow and increase driving safety. They can also spread snow evenly across a field, increasing spring soil moisture.

Agroforestry still has a long way to go, but Mason and other NAC leaders believe the future is bright.

Read the complete article here:

*Agroforestry: the time is now*

–Forestry Notes: Special Report

[http://www.nacdnet.org/news/publications/forestrynotes/ForestryNotes\\_February11\\_insert.pdf](http://www.nacdnet.org/news/publications/forestrynotes/ForestryNotes_February11_insert.pdf)

National Agroforestry Center

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/>

University of Minnesota Extension

Discovering Profits in Unlikely Places: Agroforestry Opportunities for Added Income

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/naturalresources/DD7407.html>