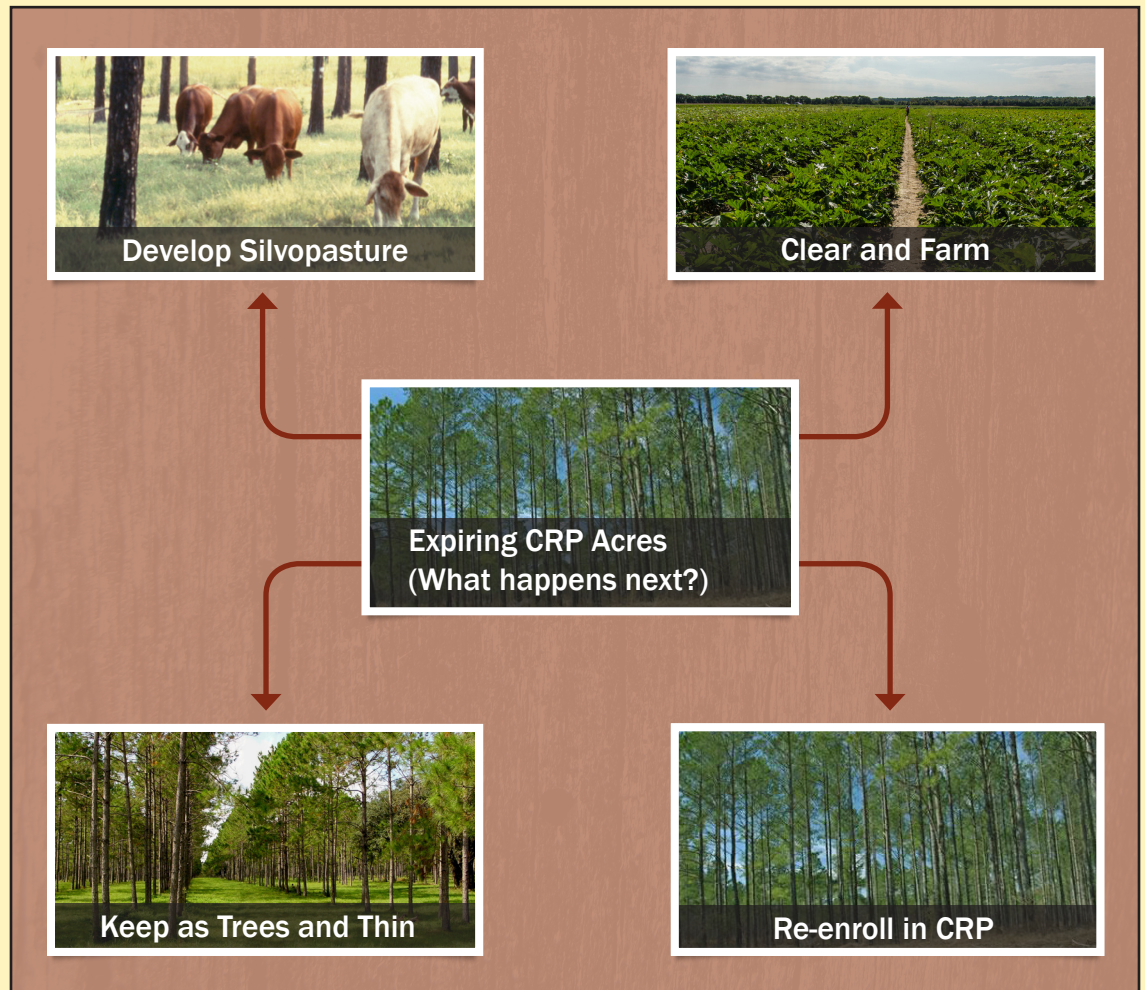


Info

Is converting CRP to silvopasture right for you?

Working Trees



Landowners with expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pine plantings face the decision of what to do with their land after their contract expires. The options include clearing and farming the land, leaving it in trees, re-enrolling, or other land management options. Because CRP lands tend to be marginal for farming, grazing may be the best choice. A system called silvopasture combines forage, grazing, and trees on the same acre.

Silvopasture produces quality timber while also providing shorter-term cash flow from livestock and forage production. The benefits of silvopasture on expired CRP land in particular are protecting the land from erosion by maintaining tree and grass cover, improving water quality by reducing and filtering runoff, and enhancing recreational opportunities by maintaining habitat and landscape diversity. Added to these are the benefits common to all silvopasture systems. These include:

- ‡ Diversified income and risk from added livestock, hay, grazing, and hunting revenues
- ‡ Reduced wildfire hazard
- ‡ Delayed forage maturity in the fall and earlier green-up in the spring
- ‡ Increased livestock protection from summer heat and winter cold
- ‡ Recycled nutrients from animal waste
- ‡ Healthier and faster growing trees along with improved forage quality

Land recently in CRP pine plantations has an additional built-in bonus. Typically, the trees need thinning to provide enough sunlight for optimum grass growth. To offset the cost of establishing the forage, revenues may be generated from a timber sale.

However, silvopasture may not be for everyone because it requires relatively intensive management. It is important to consider all your goals for both the land and your life when making land management decisions. So here are a few “Do I have the…” questions to ask before you jump into silvopasture:

Do I have the time? The benefits listed above require intensive management of cattle, trees, forage, and infrastructure. This means carrying out many tasks, including monitoring grazing to ensure it is not destructive to the forage or trees.



Do I have the infrastructure? While the trees were enrolled in CRP, the only infrastructure they may have required were firebreaks. A working silvopasture system requires fences and watering facilities in addition to firebreaks.

Do I have the knowledge? A list of resources is provided at the end of this publication, but a general understanding of trees, forage, and livestock is essential to making a silvopasture system work.



Do I have the finances? Although thinning of the trees may offset up-front costs, it is important to think through all the steps needed to get a silvopasture operation up and running, as well as the costs required for ongoing management. Young CRP plantations may be non-commercially thinned.

Do I have the flexibility? Silvopasture is never static because it depends on several living components. For example, maintaining enough sunlight to grow the grass will eventually mean an additional thinning, which in turn, means disrupting and altering the grazing plan.



Do I have the technological savvy? There may have been advances in fencing and watering facilities, as well as changes in timber markets, since your trees were first enrolled in CRP.

Do I have the dedication? A successful silvopasture system requires long-term commitment to the timely managing of the timber, forage, and grazing components.

Author: Ray Stoner, retired Forester, NRCS Central Technical Support Center, Fort Worth, Texas

More information on the web

If silvopasture is right for you, more information may be found on the following websites along with consultation from your State forestry agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension, and Conservation District offices:

- <http://nac.unl.edu/silvopasture.htm>
- <http://nac.unl.edu/documents/morepublications/silvopasturehandbook.pdf>
- <http://nac.unl.edu/documents/workingtrees/brochures/wts.pdf>
- <http://nac.unl.edu/documents/agroforestrynotes/an08s01.pdf>
- <http://nac.unl.edu/documents/insideagroforestry/vol20issue2.pdf>
- <http://nac.unl.edu/documents/insideagroforestry/vol16issue3.pdf>
- <http://www.silvopasture.org/>

Contact: USDA National Agroforestry Center, 402.437.5178 ext. 4011, 1945 N. 38th St., Lincoln, Nebraska 68583-0822. <http://nac.unl.edu>

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