

Info

Can innovative land access strategies for agroforestry provide more land management options?

Working Trees



▶ A loblolly pine silvopasture system in Florida. (USDA-NAC photo)

An agricultural lease is a private contract that grants someone (i.e., the farmer-tenant) a legal right to occupy and use the land of someone else (i.e., the landlord/landowner) for agricultural purposes. The long-term lease allows the farmer to secure long-term land tenure without requiring a lot of money upfront. Other long-term land access strategies include easements and licenses.

Long-term land access strategies are particularly key for farmers engaged in agroforestry ventures, as perennial woody crops inherently require extended time before becoming economically productive and can remain productive for a number of years.

These agreements can support a wide range of operations, including those that incorporate the most common temperate agroforestry practices (alley cropping, forest farming, riparian forest buffers, silvopasture, or windbreaks). Understanding how these arrangements operate may increase farmer, landowner, and conservation organization support for innovative land access strategies for agroforestry. This information sheet provides examples of the benefits of implementing agroforestry practices through long-term land access arrangements.



The Silverwood Park Demonstration Farm in Wisconsin has multiple public and private partners. (Savanna Institute photo)

Land Access Examples

Silvopasture: A farmer can thin trees from a landowner's degraded forest to enhance forage production. The long-term lease can be constructed to make it worth the farmer's investment of time and effort to convert the woodland to a silvopasture by thinning the canopy and planting forages, a dynamic process that can take many years.

Alley cropping: A landowner may be interested in converting their existing row crop operation to a system that provides both long- and short-term income. However, the landowner may lack the knowledge or experience to grow and market the tree crops. With a long-term lease, the farmer could add trees that benefit the whole farm system and manage these trees over the long-term. During that time, the farmer would also profit from the venture.

Riparian forest buffer: A landowner may have interest in protecting water quality with a riparian buffer, but may still want income from that piece of land. The farmer could plant the riparian buffer with marketable trees and shrubs and manage the riparian buffer area for the landowner. This arrangement would have water quality benefits while also meeting the economic goals of both the farmer and landowner.

Windbreaks: The farmer could renovate an existing windbreak to enhance the yield of the adjacent field crop. The windbreak could include perennial crops that produces marketable fruit or nuts. With a long-term lease, the farmer could sell these crops once they were productive.

Forest farming: Landowners may live far from their forested lands and may face challenges with theft or trespassing. The farmer can act as a caretaker, providing a regular presence on the site while identifying any problems that may arise. With a long-term lease, the farmer could cultivate a long-term perennial crop in the forest understory, harvesting the crop sustainably while performing other management or caretaking activities.

These agreements between farmers and landowners can support a wide range of agroforestry systems. For more information about this topic, see [Inspirations for Creating a Long-Term Agricultural Lease for Agroforestry: A Workbook](#) at www.fs.usda.gov/nac/assets/documents/morepublications/longterm-lease-workbookbook.pdf, published by the Savanna Institute and Farm Commons, with support from the [USDA National Agroforestry Center](#) at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/nac/>.



Aerial view of a riparian buffer. (USDA-NRCS photo)



Using longleaf pine needles to create baskets. (USDA-NRCS photo by Beverly Moseley)



Pecan and cotton alley cropping study. (USDA-NRCS photo by Jim Robinson)



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