

DIRECT MARKETING BY INTERNET

RURAL AMERICA GOES ONLINE

Farmers are increasingly market savvy. As commodity prices drop and the costs of inputs increase, producers need to capture more of the market value of their products. One way to accomplish this is to sell directly to consumers. Direct marketing allows farmers and ranchers to retail products without having to share profits with processors, packers, shippers and brokers. Traditional methods—farm stands, pick-your-own operations and farmers' markets, for example—depend on nearby population centers. So what about the truly rural farmer or rancher, whose operation lies well outside the comfortable radius for day trips and grocery stops? The World Wide Web may close the gap between the small farm and the global market.

For every dollar food products cost at retail, farmers now get only 20 cents. According to Howard Elitzak, agricultural economist with the Economic Research Service, "This figure has declined continuously during the past 20 years. In 1978, the farm value share of the food dollar was 32 percent, and had dropped to 24 percent by 1988." Processing and marketing costs in 1998 totaled \$466 billion. By selling products directly to consumers, farmers and ranchers can increase profitability.

Farmers' markets are one proven method. According to the USDA, farmers' markets will bring \$1 billion in sales in 1999, most of it going directly to family farms. The 1998 USDA directory counted 2,746 farmers' markets, up from the 1994 total of 1,755. It's a grassroots phenomenon, according to Charlie Touchette of the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association: "Nobody has gone to school for it. People are learning on their own, borrowing ideas from one another."

Whereas farmers' markets are located in towns and cities, farm stands and pick-your-own operations bring consumers to the farm. Educational tours, hayrides and petting zoos further engage the consumer and build support for farmland protection by selling the farm experience. Subscription marketing and community-supported agriculture (CSA) make partners of consumers by pre-arranging purchase of produce and advancing capital to farmers. Many CSA members contribute labor as well, getting involved in a more intimate way with the farming operation. *continued on page 6*

INNOVATIONS

HARVESTING THE WIND

Chuck Goodman began harvesting a new product this year: wind energy. "It's like having an oil well in the sky," said Goodman, 71, of the three massive wind turbines towering over his 100-acre corn and seed bean farm near Buena Vista, Iowa. The turbines—200-foot tall with 80-foot blades—are high-tech descendents of windmills that once pumped water and ground grain on farms across the U.S. Despite their size, the turbines take up less than an acre, allowing Goodman to grow right up to their bases.

Eyesores to some, cash cows to others, the new turbines are generating "green" electricity for consumers and greenbacks for farmers and ranchers on windswept landscapes. For producers, wind energy can provide a hedge against fluctuating commodity prices. Farmers receive payments for leasing their land to energy companies for turbines and access roads. They also earn royalties for the power produced. *continued on page 2*

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LANDWORKS

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who conserve
the land

American Farmland Trust

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American Farmland Trust is the only private, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to protecting the nation's strategic agricultural resources. Founded in 1980, AFT works to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment.

Basic membership is \$20 per year. For membership or general information about AFT, contact the National Office at 1200 18th Street, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC, 20036, (202) 331-7300, or connect to our web page at <http://www.farmland.org>

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“Eyesores to some, cash cows to others, the new turbines are generating ‘green’ electricity for consumers and greenbacks for farmers and ranchers on windswept landscapes.”

Innovations *continued from page 1*

Goodman estimates he'll earn about \$2,000 from each turbine, including the \$750 guaranteed lease payments. That \$6,000 a year beats the \$125-an-acre return on his bean crop this year. The checks come every three months. “That’s money in my pocket,” Goodman said.

The agreement is typical, said Ken Hach, Midwest regional manager for Enron Wind Development Corp. “It’s not going to make anybody wealthy, but it’s going to help level out the ups and downs of the markets,” he said. Hach has seen rural communities embrace wind power, taking pride in their role as energy producers. They also gain economically. After the initial rush of construction, large wind farms require dozens of technicians to keep turbines running smoothly. Those are dollars that stay in the community. The Department of Energy predicts that wind power will add \$60 billion in capital investment to rural America over the next 20 years, providing \$1.2 billion in new income for farmers and other rural landowners.

Wind power was the world’s fastest growing energy source in the 1990s, according to the U. S. Department of Energy (DOE). Technological improvements in the last 20 years cut the cost from 40 cents per kilowatt hour (kWh) to between 4 and 5 cents kWh. Already competitive with coal and natural gas, the DOE expects the cost of electricity produced by wind to fall even more as the technology advances. Meanwhile, a push for energy deregulation and concerns about smog, acid rain and global warming are driving policymakers to require utilities to sell electricity from renewable sources. Eight states – Texas, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Minnesota, Nevada and Pennsylvania – require utilities to provide some “green” electricity. At least 36 utilities include wind energy as a component of their green power programs.

Congress, too, is considering a national standard for renewable energy. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson is a strong supporter. His Wind Powering America Initiative sets a goal of using wind to generate at least 5 percent of the nation’s electricity by 2020. That’s up from less than 1 percent now. The goal is “relatively conservative,” said Randall Swisher, executive director of the American Wind Energy Association. In the 12 months ending in June, the U.S. wind industry installed more than \$1 billion worth of new generating equipment able to generate a record 1,073 megawatts (MW) of electricity.

Much of the new wind power was installed on Midwest farms. “We think there is a natural marriage between this technology and rural America,” Swisher said. Three major “wind farms” in Minnesota and Iowa came on line in 1999. Two facilities near Lake Benton, Minn., have a combined 281 turbines able to generate 211 MW. The world’s largest single wind power project is centered in Storm Lake, Iowa, which includes the Goodman property. Its 259 turbines can generate 193 MW of electricity, enough to serve 72,000 homes. Outside of the Midwest, Swisher sees wind power developing in several communities including West Sacramento, California, Umatilla County, Ore., upstate New York east of Lake Ontario and parts of New England.

Most U.S. wind sources remain untapped. Texas and the Dakotas alone have enough wind to power the nation, but that’s unlikely to happen. Variable wind speeds make it unreliable as a primary energy source; energy companies and regulators view it as supplementary to fossil fuels. While places like the Dakotas have the strongest winds, they are far from energy-using population centers and lack suitable transmission grids.

Then again, not every community wants a giant propeller in their backyard. One Georgia college recently rejected three turbines on Lookout Mountain after neighbors complained they would spoil the view. Several federal and private studies are underway to determine what attracts birds to turbines, and what can be done in siting, construction, or operation to minimize or eliminate bird deaths. Round towers, for instance, don’t provide birds with places to build nests.

And this evolving technology might not fulfill its promise. New technologies could advance to make solar or some other power source even more competitive than wind.

Harvesting the Wind
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But in Iowa, Chuck Goodman is satisfied with the turbines on his farm. Enron spent three years measuring winds there. Turbines need at least 13-mph winds; the winds on Goodman's property averaged 17-18 mph. Goodman said noise from the turbines, which bothers some people, seem to keep the deer away. But it doesn't bother him any more than a house fan. "I call them gentle giants," Goodman said. 🐮

USING RESOURCES WISELY

REDUCING RELIANCE ON AGRICULTURAL CHEMICALS

Runoff from agricultural lands, carrying insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and fertilizers, is contaminating surface and ground water. Non-point source pollution—from farmlands, failing septic systems and other dispersed sources—is under increasing scrutiny from environmentalists, lawmakers and the general public. And farmers, increasingly aware of economic, health and market reasons to reduce their use of agricultural chemicals, are taking the lead to find alternatives. Yet producers still bear much of the blame for agricultural runoff, with little attention given to the federal policies and funding that promote chemically dependent agricultural practices.

Since World War II the United States' successful "cheap food" farm policy has depended on the intensive use of agricultural chemicals. The emphasis on hybrid seeds, high-yield production and larger equipment fueled a trend toward large, monoculture and industrialized farms and away from smaller, diversified operations. USDA research concentrated on developing new pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer chemicals to cut losses and increase yields. Although research on alternative pest control tactics has received funding through the USDA since 1985, the \$8 million directed to Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) in fiscal 1999 is less than half a percent of USDA's \$2 billion research and education budget.

According to Mike Fitzner, national program leader with the Cooperative State Research and Extension Educational Service (CSREES), "It's hard to beat a cheap, broad spectrum organophosphate that kills everything," particularly when the alternatives initially may be more costly and not last as long in the field. But with federal mandates now precluding the use of some chemicals and others slated for removal, many farmers recognize the need to find effective—and affordable—alternatives.

Pesticide costs are rising astronomically. This is due in part to improvements in quality and increasingly specific applications. According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, between 1987 and 1997 the cost of agricultural chemicals increased by 62 percent.
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"Any business must stay on top of what's going on in the field. Now we need more knowledge about environmental and chemical issues rather than new equipment."
—Larry Thompson
Oregon Farmer

LAY OF THE LAND

SOYBEANS 1987 TO 1997

- Increase in total cash production expenses * 33%
- Increase in cash expenses for chemicals ** 134%
- Increase in harvest-period price 29%
- Increase in yield (bu./acre) 26%

* per acre planted

**per acre planted, does not include fertilizer

- Total USDA research and education budget for FY 1999 \$2 Billion
- USDA Funds allocated for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education from FY 99 \$8 Million

Source: USDA Budget FY 99

Using Resources Wisely *continued from page 3*

Agricultural chemicals and commercial fertilizers now account for 11.4 percent of farm production expenses (which include such high-ticket items as labor, equipment, taxes and financing). Over the same decade hired labor costs, which account for 10 percent of expenses, increased 37 percent and taxes (2.6 percent of production expenses) rose 26 percent.

Furthermore, some chemicals are becoming less effective as pests develop resistance to them. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, at least 520 insects and mites, 150 plant diseases and 113 weeds have developed resistance to pesticides meant to control them.

No one is more aware of the hazards of agricultural chemicals than the farmers who use them. They must be certified to apply toxic chemicals, and must "suit up" to protect themselves from direct exposure, or hire someone who is certified to spray. As consumer awareness of environmental contamination has grown, producers are even more wary. "Farmers are more concerned about the environment than they used to be," says Ann Sorensen of AFT's Center for Agriculture in the Environment. "And they are aware of consumer demands. They don't want to grow crops that consumers reject." Increasing cost, diminishing effectiveness and consumer demands for safer foods are prompting farmers to explore alternatives.

Larry Thompson was born and raised on the Oregon vegetable farm he now manages. "I farmed with my Dad originally. We were fairly chemical dependent. But we had to keep increasing the time and money spent on chemicals." New houses built around his 100-acre farm and a change to direct marketing prompted him to limit chemical use. Today, he rotates crops and uses cover crops, eliminating his need for insecticides and fumigants. He sees side benefits to this new approach: "Since the area is really getting built up, there is no farmland available. We must take care of the soil we have. By reducing chemical use the microorganism population is higher, and there are no soil-borne diseases."

Government policies are slowly shifting. In 1994, the Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency and USDA issued a joint proclamation that 75 percent of U.S. cropland must be under Integrated Pest Management (IPM) by 2001. Funds for SARE, allocated at less than \$4 million in 1988, jumped to \$8 million a year in 1995. The Food Quality Protection Act, adopted in 1996, requires EPA to put all pesticides through additional reviews, looking at the cumulative risk of multiple exposure. EPA is now spearheading the search for safer pesticides, expediting a faster review process if a pesticide is biologically based. This is prompting chemical companies to establish biotech divisions and develop safer alternatives.

More farmers are using IPM methods, and monitoring their soils through the Global Positioning System (GPS) to determine supplemental needs more precisely. "That whole sustainable thinking has gone deep," says CSREES' Fitzner. But, as he says, these methods require a new approach to farming: "It takes a sophisticated management system to make a biotechnical solution work. The farmer needs a good ecological understanding."

Thompson agrees. In the winter, he averages a week a month attending continuing education classes and workshops. Is this a lot to expect of a farmer? "Any business must stay on top of what's going on in the field," he says. "This is not just an 8 to 5 job. Farmers are changing. Now we need more knowledge about environmental and chemical issues rather than new equipment."

**Reducing Reliance on
Agricultural Chemicals**
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Thompson believes the farmers have taken the lead, and government needs to catch up. "Government needs to truly listen to the organizations that have been in sustainable agriculture for a while," he says. Referring to the SARE's tiny share of USDA's research and education budgets, Thompson concludes, "We need a lot more scientific research money. What they provide is a drop in the bucket compared to the subsidy programs. They need to give growers the tools and research they need to change and they will do it." 🚜

POLICY REPORT

\$3 BILLION PROPOSED FOR CONSERVATION

Nearly \$3 billion in outer continental shelf (OCS) oil and gas drilling receipts will be directed to conservation programs if a bill (H.R. 701) approved by the House Resources Committee in November is passed by Congress. Of the total, \$100 million would be dedicated annually to agricultural conservation easements through the year 2015. The bipartisan consensus version passed the committee in a 37-12 vote. A House floor vote is expected by next summer.

The House bill would create the Conservation and Reinvestment Act Fund (CARA), with \$2.825 billion in OCS receipts each year for 15 years. Starting in FY 01, annual allocations will include \$100 million for farm and ranchland conservation easements, another \$900 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund—half for federal land acquisition and the other half for matching grants to states. The \$450 million for land acquisition would be allocated only after the administration submits a list of projects to Congress with justification for each, and an indication if the landowners are willing to sell. The appropriations committee would then decide whether to accept or reject each item.

Additional allocations proposed in the Conservation and Reinvestment Act Fund include:

- \$1 billion toward impact assistance and coastal conservation for 35 coastal states and territories;
- \$350 million for wildlife conservation and restoration;
- \$125 million for the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery program;
- \$100 million for the Historic Preservation Fund;
- \$200 million for federal and Indian lands restoration;
- \$50 million in incentives for endangered species recovery; and
- \$200 million in interest earned on the fund would be directed to payment in lieu of taxes (\$125 million) and refuge revenue sharing (\$75 million).

With general consensus on the need for the funding, Senators working on a similar compromise bill (S.25) hope the bill's likely success in the House will hasten Senate action.

According to Anna Barrios, Federal Policy Coordinator at AFT, "Title VII (the \$100 million annual allocation for farm and ranchland conservation easements) finally starts to acknowledge the job that private landowners are doing to protect open lands." Although she'd like to see minor language changes that would assure the money would go to productive, working lands, Barrios says "This is the single largest commitment from the federal government to partner with states to protect farmland and ranchland over the next 15 years."

There is some opposition to the bill, primarily from Westerners who think the federal government has acquired too much private land. But since the funds would be funneled into conservation easements, the money would be left in private hands, which should address those concerns. While most wildlife organizations have praised the measure, some environmentalists are concerned that it will promote more off-shore oil drilling. Environmentalists also fear the funding could be directed toward roads, buildings and other infrastructure, and should have tighter restrictions on its use. But a broad non-partisan coalition of conservation, environmental, governmental and business groups strongly supports the measure. 🚜

LAND ON THE LINE Are wind farms a beneficial way to help keep farmers in the black while they generate green energy for the nation, or are they a blight on the rural landscape? Share your opinions with other LandWorks subscribers by sending an e-mail message to landworksonline@farmland.org.

"This is the single largest commitment from the federal government to partner with states to protect farmland and ranchland over the next 15 years."

—Anna Barrios

\$3 Billion Proposed for Conservation
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Rural America Goes Online

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“The Internet is a natural continuation of the more traditional forms of direct marketing because it allows farmers to have immediate contact with consumers.”

—Claire Klotz, USDA

But all these direct marketing methods rely on proximity to population centers. For more remote farms and ranches, the Internet provides a direct connection not dependent upon geographic location.

In fact, says Claire Klotz, who manages the direct marketing page on USDA's Web site (www.amn.usda.gov/directmarketing), the Internet is a natural continuation of the more traditional forms of direct marketing, because it allows farmers to have immediate contact with consumers. As with farmers' markets, the customer wants to get to know the farmer, to understand the farmer's ethics, to make a personal connection. “People are trying to make that happen on the Web. They can ask questions of the producer, and get an immediate response,” says Klotz.


Susan and Bill Rose own the Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, Massachusetts. Susan, a computer programmer, recognized the potential of the Internet to promote their operation. Several years ago, the two bartered some apples and added some cash to hire a nearby consultant to set up their Web site (www.redapplefarm.com). While initial results were disappointing, the site seems to be catching on. Bill reports, “I've seen people come in carrying printouts from the site.” A calendar lets online visitors know when they can pick fruit and vegetables in season, and promotes their farm stand and seasonal events such as hayrides. Bill warns a Web site can catapult a little farm into a high tech world: “I get calls from people all over the world. UPS comes here every day.”

With the help of a SARE grant and the Land Stewardship Project, five Minnesota farms jointly developed www.prairiefare.com to market their beef, lamb, chicken and produce. Audrey Arner of Moonstone Farms admits, “Sales from the Web site have not been substantial for us.” But she finds the site helpful as a resource for those who would like to learn more about their operation. “It's like a very fancy brochure at this point.” It has put the farmers in a marketing mindset, which she considers necessary, but it also requires a lot of fine-tuning to keep it current. “Not all the farmers are net-savvy,” she says, adding, “You have to become a marketer and a webmaster.”

Rather than invest time and money to establish individual Web sites, farmers advertise products on a marketing bulletin board, such as www.smallfarms.com. Hawaii sheep farmers Glenn and Kathy Oshiro created this Web site when they lost the wholesaler for their lambs. Now, says Glenn, “We're attempting to build a place that's specifically designed for small farmers, ranchers, market gardeners—the small folks—to market the individual products of their farms.” They especially hope to serve North American farmers without a Web site or even a computer. The \$29 annual registration fee is an affordable alternative to a full Web site.

While many Web sites are being launched, USDA's Klotz also sidesteps the issue of how many sales these sites are generating. According to Klotz, “The people who are doing it well are integrating it into what they are already doing,” such as sending out a catalog as a follow-up to an Internet query.

Whether Web sites increase sales has yet to be determined, but there is no question they are extremely effective at public relations. In addition to listing products and events, the most engaging sites profile the entire farm family, feature photographs of the rural landscape, and share the underlying management goals and farming philosophy. Using the Internet to promote and protect productive agricultural land may be the most important outcome.

Glenn of smallfarms.com acknowledges, “Internet marketing isn't the be all and end all for the small farm,” but he believes it plays an important role. “Individual farmers have to begin thinking like corporate entities, and take control of our marketing. We can tell everyone exactly what went into growing our products—the fact that our sheep are grass fed, and are raised without hormones. The Internet lets the farmer let the consumer know, ‘we've got the best stuff in the world!’” 

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GOOD DEALS

755,000 ACRES OF MAINE FOREST PROTECTED

If New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) can raise \$30 million by December 31, 2000, 1,180 square miles of Maine forest – an area 20 percent larger than the entire state of Rhode Island – will be protected by the largest conservation easement in U.S. history. The easement, to be purchased by NEFF, prohibits all structural development not associated with ongoing forest management, and promotes sustainable forestry practices on 754,673 acres of Pingree family land. The land includes over 2,000 miles of river frontage. More than 85 lakes and ponds over three acres in size will have 215 miles of shorelines protected. Portions of the property abut other protected lands, including 286 square miles of forest owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The extensive acreage and complex ownership of the land make this easement remarkable. The Pingree family has owned the land since 1841—seven generations—and current ownership is multigenerational. Trustees of the holdings must consider the financial interests of all beneficiaries, including those as yet unborn. Thus, the purchase of conservation easements had to be at or above appraised value. “This type of ownership can be a real obstacle to overcome if you are trying to put restrictions on the land,” according to Keith Ross, vice president and director of land protection for NEFF. “They can’t make gifts or offer a bargain sale.”

Steven Schley, president of Pingree Associates, which manages the timberland holdings says, “Within each of the multiple forms of ownership comes a different demand or legal requirement for recognizing values and for maintaining income. To generate agreement among more than 50 family members is something.” However, the family has what Schley terms “an incredibly strong family heritage of exemplary forest management.” Indeed, the Forest Stewardship Council recently recognized the Pingree forests as exceeding “green certification” standards for sustainable forest management.

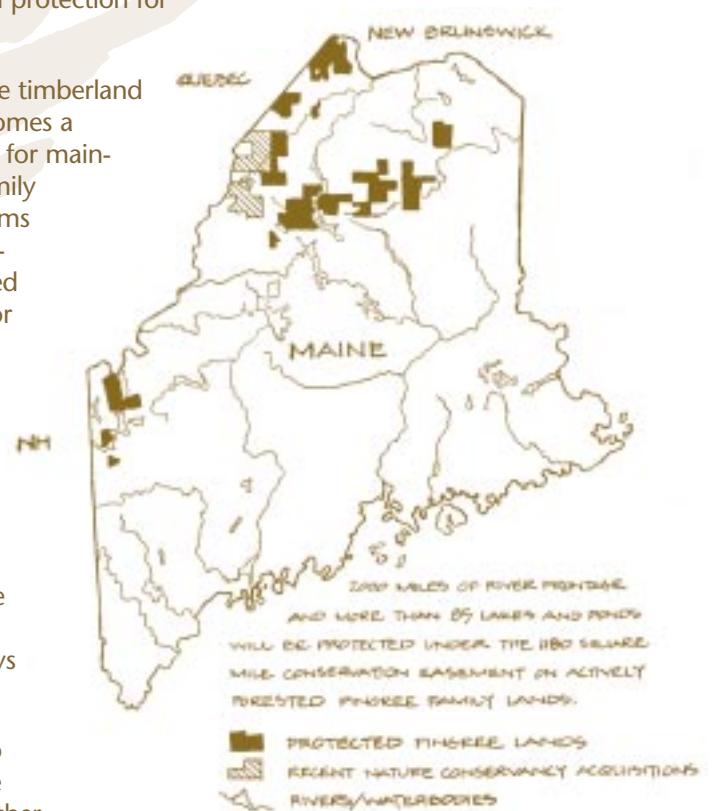
The Pingree family was interested in permanently protecting their property and maintaining sustainable forestry practices. Crippling estate taxes and varying business interests within the family prompted the dialogue with NEFF. Says Ross, “We needed to develop an easement to fit their economic goals as well as their conservation goals.” While the final price of conservation easements was only \$37.10 an acre, that made the total purchase price nearly \$28 million, plus an additional \$2 million to establish a monitoring fund. But focusing on the cost misses the point, says Schley. “It is the resource that is the issue, not the money.”

Monitoring land management can be another stumbling block to closing a deal of this scale. “For many landowners who own large acreages, the idea of having their management approved by another organization can create a lot of potential conflict. It can be difficult and costly to do. And it is a little unnecessary,” Ross adds. So instead of including specific requirements within the easement, NEFF attached a set of forest management guidelines roughly equivalent to “green certification” guidelines. The easement requires the landowner to maintain forest diversity, protect riparian ecosystems, incorporate wildlife management practices, minimize or eliminate dependence on pesticides and in other ways work with natural forest processes while they harvest sawtimber of superior quality and value over the long term.

NEFF will monitor the forestry practices using satellite and aerial photography, as well as ground reconnaissance, to determine the impact of timber harvesting on forest health. The information will be shared annually with the family so they can modify their management practices. “It becomes an aid to them rather than a mandate,” says Ross.

“We needed to develop an easement to fit their economic goals as well as their conservation goals.”

**—Keith Ross,
New England
Forestry Foundation**



**755,000 Acres of
Maine Forest Protected**

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Good Deals *continued from page 7*

Closing this deal will resolve what Schley calls "the constant battle between the efforts to maintain the traditional farm or forestry pursuit and the opportunities that are ever growing. When you own as much waterfront as we do, the opportunities (for development) are immense." By taking away that opportunity, Schley says the family will focus on the primary goal of forestry.

There is another benefit to selling the development rights: the family now has a pool of capital to invest in related business opportunities, such as improving silviculture practices and processing their own lumber. The family invested in a new sawmill, and is planning to invest in a new flooring mill. When finished, the two mills will employ more than 80 people, redirecting jobs to Maine that had previously been exported to Canada. The added value of the forest resource will remain in northern Maine.

In many ways, says Schley, the issues that affect foresters are the same that farmers face; "our crop merely takes more than one year to grow." There are strong disincentives to maintaining family land. "Generally, the farmer is more proximate to immediate development opportunities than some of our lands are, and therefore could more quickly recognize a shift in their business." Since an easement like this does limit future options, Shley says the landowner must have a compelling personal reason to keep the land in a productive state. "It needs to be a permanent commitment they are willing to make," he says.

Details about the Pingree Family Project and a summary of the easement can be found on the NEFF web site: www.neforestry.org/pingree.htm. 

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