

Farm Credit
OF MAINE

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Business Insights for Higher Yields

► Cover Story



△ Forester Jack Wadsworth knows firsthand about timberland ownership: "Through working with Matt Senter, of Farm Credit of Maine, we purchased a package of 5,300 acres three years ago and added another 400 acres since then."

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Maine has had a working coast for more than 300 years. Residents and fishermen alike who cooperate with good neighbor practices ensure that the state's working waterfront will continue to thrive in the decades ahead.

Public efforts help sustain Maine's forests

Of course, fishing is just one part of Maine's resource base. Forests blanket 90 percent of Maine, the highest percentage of any state in the country. Maine also claims the nation's highest percentage of privately owned woodland. In terms of revenues, forestry is the state's largest economic contributor, generating \$5.7 billion of annual product value, and employing 32,000 people. Consider too that the state's timberland also produces incalculable benefits related to biodiversity, watershed protection and outdoor recreation.

Maine residents have long recognized the importance of their forests, says John "Jack" Wadsworth, a licensed Maine forester and president of Wadsworth Woodlands, Inc., a forestry consulting and marketing firm. "Public opinion in Maine," Wadsworth says, "caused the state to enact the Forest Practices Act."

The law, enacted in 1989 and revised in 2004, encourages responsible sustainable forestry practices, good land aesthetics and watershed protection. This comes at a time when there have been substantial changes in the ownership of timberlands in Maine, which has been a concern of residents throughout the state.

Wadsworth further explains, "During the last 25 years, the aesthetics of logging have improved with the advent of whole tree harvesting. This method not only utilizes sawlogs and pulpwood, but also allows the chipping of treetops, limbs and small trees. The resulting timber stand is a cleaner site and more aesthetically pleasing than prior harvest techniques that left debris on site."

Wadsworth notes that he and many other foresters volunteer their time to the American Tree Farm System, an organization that recognizes landowners who perform sustainable long-term forest management techniques.

Wadsworth's consulting firm communicates these and other efforts to the public by sponsoring educational booths at local fairs and forestry meetings. "For example," he says, "each year we take our booth to the Fryeburg Fair. During this year's event our foresters discussed forest management practices with over 2,000 landowners who inquired about our services."

Mass. farmers are proactive at the local level

"One of the biggest issues agriculture faces is dealing with its neighbors," says Kent Lage, assistant commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). "These people have never experienced agriculture and don't understand the noise, dust and odd hours involved."

This is a common scenario when suburban growth encroaches upon territory that has been farmed, in some cases, for centuries. Massachusetts addresses the issue through town agricultural commissions (AgComs), a concept that is being adopted in other New England states as well.

"AgComs are the voice of agriculture in local government," Lage says. "They provide a format to begin a dialog and resolve neighborhood issues on a neighbor level."

AgComs work with other town boards to help resolve farm-related problems, protect farmland and assist with natural resource management. The effort has broad support from state and federal agencies and organizations. But the primary movers — and the people who make AgComs work — are farmers.

Currently, 90 AgComs operate in Massachusetts, and one of the first was in the coastal community of Dartmouth. A decade after it was created, recognizing the importance of farms in their community, Dartmouth voters approved \$2.75 million for a trust fund to preserve, support and revitalize agriculture.

"This is evidence of the support that agriculture has at this time," Lage says. "Rank-and-file people like having agriculture in their community. The support is there if you take it to a town meeting."

"I feel strongly that AgComs are critical to enhancing agriculture," says Douglas P. Gillespie, MDAR commissioner. "Seldom is there such an opportunity for farmers to be proactive to ensure their future at the local level."

Creating opportunity

We have cited just four examples here. Throughout the Northeast, there are hundreds of other situations in which successful farmers, fishermen and foresters reach out to their communities to create dialog and create win-win situations for both sides.

With these stories fresh in your mind, why not take inventory on your current "good neighbor" efforts? Reaching out today can create significant benefits tomorrow for your business, your neighbors and everyone in your community. ♦