

For Sure Profit- Why not Establish Tree Farms

by

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A farm may be made to produce agricultural crops—it may also be made to produce tree crops. Either way is profitable. Whether your farm is on low or high land: on valleys, on slopes or tops of hills and mountains; near or far from the sea—it is prospective forest land. A sure crop would be short-rotation species: trees that grow fast enough that they can be harvested in a few years. The market is assured since our pulp and paper mills still import pulp materials from foreign countries because the local supply of pulp is very inadequate.

Trees have larger and longer roots than common agricultural crops. Even without irrigation the trees can still have adequate water supply. Unlike rice, corn or vegetables which draw most of their water supply from the upper six inches of soil, trees get most of the water needed for growth well below the surface soil and from the air. Tree seedlings, of course, get their water immediately below the soil surface but then this water supply is assured the seedlings if they are planted at the start of the rainy season. As the seedlings grow into saplings, then to poles, and then to standards until finally harvested, the roots below the soil lengthen in proportion to the growth of the stem above the ground. In the process of growth and development, debris is accumulated over the soil to be decayed and form what is called humus—the cheapest fertilizer there is. This humus will store some water and supply surface roots with the necessary moisture requirements.

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In the United States and elsewhere high portions of farms are planted to trees and the lower portions to agricultural crops. If the proportion of the area planted with trees to that planted with agricultural crops is correct or balanced, then the danger from floods, soil erosion and soil impoverishment is minimized. The trees planted on higher areas will store or otherwise hold rain water for percolation into the sub-soil and then slowly supply it to the needy plants below during the dry season. Thus clear almost even flow of rivers and creeks throughout the year. Decayed organic matter in the form of humus will be carried by water, wind or other agencies from the forested portion to the agricultural portions below where it will rejuvenate the soil. In areas managed as ranches, the higher land planted to trees serve as browse area and source of miscellaneous construction materials. Some timber are even sold for much-needed cash. By being a barrier, the forest serves also as a protection against strong winds. Besides, the forest ameliorates the climate by lowering the air temperature several degrees during warm days and by increasing it on cold days. This tempering-the-climate effect of trees, of course, depends greatly upon the type, density and location of the forest tracts.

In the Philippines most farmers believe that the land is agricultural because their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers before them believed so. Because everybody around them believe so. Because nobody has been planting trees extensively. But times have changed since then. Industrialization has come to stay. Look at the tobacco-raising regions, the Ilocos. Some tobacco growers even go as far as Central and Southern Luzon provinces for wood to be used to flue-cure tobacco leaves. Some resort to

using the rachis of coconut fronds (leaves) when their bamboo fences are already exhausted. Some probably even use portions of their houses as fuel—if only to raise somewhat the price of their tobacco thru proper flue-curing. Lucky then will be the fellows who have anticipated this need of wood for flue-curing tobacco and had their lands planted with Ipil-ipil, Madre-de-cacao and other trees suitable for firewood.

Look at the average Filipino farmer of today. He works like a horse from dawn till sunset, sometimes even at night, in order to eke out a living from the soil. Still most can not get past the hand-to-mouth existence. Now, if he is a tree farmer he will be busy only during the planting (rainy) season. He can do other lighter jobs the rest of the year. In 6 years his tree farm, if planted to Moluccan Sau [*Albizia falcata* (L.) Back.] would have produced about 650 cubic meters of pulpwood to a hectare. At ₱9.00 per cubic meter this would give him ₱975.00 net per hectare per year. Granted that this would be not as satisfactory as the amount derived from progressive rice-farming, the fact still remains the efforts he would put into it is not as wrecking as a rice farmers' task. He will not worry so much about the weather because his forest crop is assured provided he plants the species suited to the area, planting is done right, the trees are correctly spaced, and protected from insect pests and diseases.

Moluccan Sau is only one of the probable profitable crop trees. We can raise Benguet or Mindoro Pine for Christmas trees, pulpwood, mine timber and construction wood; Kaatoan Bangkal for pulpwood and veneerwood; Gubas for pulpwood and matchwood; lumbang and baguilumbang for pulpwood and from its nuts the oil extracted used in the manufacture of hardboards and paints; bamboos for pulp as well as general construction material; and Ipil-ipil, Kakawate, Bakauan and several mangrove species for firewood and general construction wood; to mention a few. For further particulars, one

may consult or write the U.P. College of Forestry and the Forest Products Research Institute at College, Laguna; the Reforestation Administration at Diliman, Rizal; the Bureau of Forestry at España, Manila; and some lumber companies maintaining tree farms in their license areas like the Nasipit Lumber Co., Inc. at Tuñgao, Butuan City.

One of the far-sighted and lucky fellows I have met is a tree farmer in Upper New York. He invested most of his earnings, as a factory superintendent for 15 years, into buying abandoned farms and had Red and White Pine planted therein. He has since resigned from his job to take care of his tree farms. Whenever he needs money, he just notifies one of the sawmills or pulpmills near his place to cut some of his trees. These mills are only too willing to pay him a dollar for every tree cut from his tree farm. The fellow does nothing but receive the money—the millhands cut the trees so designated by the State Forester and transported to the mills. He told me that properly managed his tree farms could provide him comfort and luxury for the rest of his natural life. When I met him in 1960 he was a 42-year old contented family man.

So, when you are about to cut a tree in your land better think twice before felling that tree. It might be better for you in the long run if, instead of cutting it down, you plant more trees. Or better yet, convert your farm into a tree farm. A co-worker of mine found out lately that the Gubas in his 4-hectare land, untouched for ten years after purchasing it, was worth ₱4,000.00 to the hectare. Another found out that the Narra and Acacia trees in his 8-hectare unimproved land was valued at ₱3,000.00 a hectare. So, many people have found and will ultimately find tree farming profitable. Why not give it a try? Besides the profit, you might be able to understand why Joyce Kilmer wrote the immortal words:

“... Poems are made by fools like me
But only God can make a tree. . . .”