

Feature Story

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Silvopastures and the NRCS Improve Yield from Prentiss Farm

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Prentiss, Miss. — Some farmers raise trees. Others raise cattle. Larry Rogers does both – in the same place. Called a silvopasture, Rogers’ grazing lands combine grass with rows of loblolly and longleaf pines, giving the scientist-turned-farmer the opportunity to benefit from different harvests – beef and lumber.

Rogers, with the help of programs and expertise from USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is converting his Jefferson Davis County farm into one where several enterprises exist in the same place simultaneously. Rogers has benefited from two NRCS programs as well as from the technical assistance of the NRCS’ Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI).

“It’s an old concept that has been re-energized,” said Walter Jackson, a grazing lands specialist with the NRCS in Mississippi. Rogers’ farm uses rows of pine trees and open fields to provide grazing lands for the cows. The farm consists of a strip of pine trees (two rows 10 feet apart) and then 40 feet of grass, and then another strip of trees and then another strip of grass.

NRCS state forester, Alan Holditch, said forest landowners and cattlemen have been excited about the silvopasture system because it allows them to extend the grazing season in the spring and fall and the trees benefit from organic and synthetic pasture fertilization and maximized growing space. An additional benefit is cutting hay during the first three years and harvesting pine straw after the tenth year.

Rogers worked in agroforestry when working for Louisiana State University. He recalls a study done by a LSU scientist that shows agroforestry land raises as much timber as a solid planting of pine trees and as many cows as traditional pasture land.

“I decided when I came back here, that’s what I would do on my farm,” Rogers said. Rogers retired from LSU in 2001 after working 33 years as a professor and researcher. “This is my roots,” Rogers said of his pristine land, with rolling hills, bottomland forests and pastures. “I spent a lot of years away from here – gone. But I always knew I would come back.”

“The NRCS has been a real partner throughout the years,” Rogers said. “A lot of the land I have bought was neglected, and NRCS helped me repair it and improve it.”

Rogers agroforestry endeavors are unique in Mississippi, and farmers from across the state come to see his farm. “It’s been exciting,” he said. “This has been an opportunity for me to play scientist again.”

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Rogers said he was taught at a young age the success of agroforestry. Watching his grandfather and father farm, he learned of the symbiotic relationship between forests and pastures.

“It was obvious to me there was a synergism growing trees and raising cows,” he said. “Think about it: running cows in the woodlands allows for them to suppress some of the weedy growth.”

Rogers’ land is planted in loblolly and longleaf pines. Cows can be run in pastures with the trees after about three years, giving the trees time to grow to a height where the cows will not destroy them. From Rogers’ experience, the longleaf trees grow slower, and it may be best to wait longer before running the cows among those trees.

The NRCS approached Rogers about seven years ago about the program and about using his farm as a demonstration site for silvopastures. “He told us he always dreamed of doing that,” Soil Conservationist Elvert Cole said. “It has become a real good program for this county.” As a result of demonstrations such as this MS NRCS has added silvopasture as a cost sharable practice through its Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).

“There are over 50 grazing lands efficiency demonstration sites across the state,” Acting State Conservationist Al Garner said. “Farmers like Rogers have cost shared on these sites with NRCS and allowed the agency to host field days, tours and pasture walks to educate others on best management practices that may benefit their individual operations.”

Rogers is enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The two programs have helped Rogers fund pasture plantings, cross fencing, ponds, prescribed burns, firelanes and food plots. He also benefits from the technical assistance provided through GLCI.

About GLCI:

The Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working to maintain and improve the management, productivity and health of the nation’s privately owned grazing land.

This process has formed coalitions that represent the grass root concerns that impact private grazing land. The coalitions actively seek sources to increase technical assistance and public awareness activities that maintain or enhance grazing land resources.

For more information on GLCI, visit your local USDA service center or [this website](#).

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Top: Larry Rogers watches his cows roam the silvopastures at his Prentiss, Miss. farm.

Above Left: Cows feed among loblolly pine trees at Larry Rogers' farm in Jefferson Davis County, Miss.

Above Right: Rancher Larry Rogers and NRCS Grazing Lands Specialist Walter Jackson talk about the advantages of silvopastures while examining the growth of Rogers' longleaf pine trees.

Photos by Justin Fritscher, NRCS-Mississippi Public Affairs

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