Converting Wooded Area into a Silvopasture: Initial Site and Resource Assessment

Is silvopasture a good fit for this site at this time?

**Site history and current conditions:** Observe the site, describe the vegetation, and discuss its management over the last ~thirty years.

What species of trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses are present? Are any of these non-native invasive species you are looking to control? Are any of the tree species particularly valuable for timber?

Has the site been logged or thinned recently? Is there an open canopy? What is the percent tree cover? Is the shade level cast by the trees low, medium, or heavy? Is there a dense under-story shrub layer?

Is the site currently being grazed by livestock? If not, can you estimate when it was last grazed by livestock?

For the species of livestock you intend to graze is the current forage production low, medium, or high?

**Special Considerations:** Identify sensitive areas or flora that may require exclusion from grazing or other adaptive management.

- Are there persistently or seasonally wet areas within the site whose soils could be prone to damage if grazed during adverse conditions?
- Are there highly-erodible soils that may warrant consideration for specific management in the grazing plan?
- Are there plants present that are potentially poisonous to the species of livestock you intend to graze that would require special management considerations?
- Are there threatened, rare, or endangered species present within the site?

**Producer or Land-owner/manager goals:** Identify goals for the site that silvopasture may help to accomplish. Of the many possible benefits to silvopasture adoption, prioritize desired outcomes.

What are the primary objectives in considering silvopasture adoption for this site? Are the primary goals related to livestock performance (i.e. forage production and quality, average daily gain, animal comfort),
forest management (i.e. invasive species control, oak-savanna restoration, improving recreational or habitat value), managing for high-quality, high-value timber?

Is it important or required to utilize only native plants in any understory seeding or tree plantings?

**Management Skills and Labor:** Assess the experience, knowledge, interest and availability of the manager(s) to work with livestock and forestry in a silvopasture system.

Livestock: Do the managers of the site currently have livestock? What species of livestock are intended for grazing the site? If so, are the livestock rotationally grazed? How often are the animals moved to new pasture? Are the livestock managers familiar with high-tensile electric fencing and temporary electric fencing tools and techniques? Are the livestock well-trained to electric fencing? Does the management team have sufficient labor available to move animals under a management-intensive model? How willing is the land manager to learn and develop the skill set to intensify management on this site?

Forestry: Do the managers have experience with plant identification, timber management, tree harvest and brush clearing, and crop-tree identification?

**Preliminary financial considerations:** Estimate the costs and opportunities of transitioning the site from its current state into an active silvopasture system.

Is there currently a working fence and livestock watering system at the site? What fencing and water system installation needs to occur?

What tree thinnings, tree plantings, shrub clearing, and/or forage seeding might need to occur? What labor or equipment is required to do so? Can livestock perform some of this work or is machinery required? What, if any, markets exist for timber and forest products from these operations?

What sources of funding are available for conducting the above operations?

**OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM SFA:**

- Silvopasture Handbook
- Fact Sheet: Silvopasture in Minnesota
- Fact Sheet: Silvopasture Design & Establishment – The How-Tos
- Webinars, podcasts & more

Visit sfa-mn.org/silvopasture-agroforestry