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 approximately the last 30 years.

- What species 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 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),
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**Forest Management** (i.e. invasive species control, oak-savanna restoration, improving recreational or habitat value), managing for 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:** What species of livestock are intended for grazing the site? If the managers currently have livestock, are they rotationally grazed and 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 is required?

- What tree thinnings, tree plantings, shrub clearing, and/or forage seeding might need to occur? 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

Lambs grazing at Early Boots Farm. Photo by Tyler Carlson.