State policies for agroforestry in the United States

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Abstract. Existing state legislation and programs pertaining to agroforestry were determined in a 1995 nationwide survey of state-employed natural resource professionals in the United States. At that time, only 20 of the 50 states had legislation that could be identified as pertaining to any of the five major agroforestry practices: windbreaks, riparian buffers, alley-cropping, silvopasture, or forest farming. Nine states had direct legislation specifically referring to one or more of these agroforestry practices, while the remaining 11 states had indirect legislation that could be construed as pertaining to agroforestry. Cost-sharing was the most commonly employed incentive in the direct legislation states and windbreaks were the most common practice in those states. Tax incentives and cost-sharing were the most favored approaches in the 11 states with indirect legislation.

Introduction

Agroforestry in all its varied forms has been an accepted land management practice in tropical regions for many years, if not centuries. However, the adoption of any or all of the forms of agroforestry in temperate regions such as the United States has been slow at best. Often, the reluctance to adopt new (or what are perceived to be new) agricultural practices – such as agroforestry – is assisted by the reluctance of governmental agencies – both state and federal – to support these practices. While federal legislative policies (Conservation Reserve Program – CRP, Stewardship Incentive Program – SIP, Forestry Incentives Program – FIP, Agricultural Conservation Program – ACP, Environmental Easement Program – EEP, etc.) are usually readily apparent and uniformly applied, adoption and implementation of similar policies at the state level varies widely.

State governments administer a variety of programs designed to encourage forestry-related activities by private landowners. Such programs may be either independent of or in addition to state participation in federal incentive programs. Henly and Ellefson (1987) identified six types of state forestry programs – tax incentives, financial incentives, educational activities, technical assistance, voluntary guidelines, and legal regulations. Programs were employed in major forestry activities such as water quality protection, reforestation and timber management, forest protection, and wildlife and aesthetic
management. The most frequently used state programs involved technical assistance and educational activities; least used among state governments were tax and financial incentives. Resource protection is the primary reason for program development and implementation. In 1987, only two southern states offered financial incentive programs to landowners who applied Best Management Practices (BMPs) for control of forestry non-point source water pollution (Siegel, 1989; Lickwar et al., 1990). North Carolina had a state cost-share program for nutrient-sensitive lands that covered three separate watersheds. Virginia had an agricultural cost-share program which paid landowners for stabilizing erodible woodlands, leaving woodland buffer strips, and reforested erodible pasture land. Haines (1995) found that state cost-share programs had been established in 19 states. The programs were concentrated in 10 states in the southern pine belt and six Midwest states. Programs also had been established in California, Hawaii, and Oregon. The total contribution of state cost-share assistance programs for tree planting impacted over 150,000 acres in 1993.

Ellefson et al. (1996) identified 38 states with various forms of forest regulatory programs. The focus of regulation is usually non-point source of water pollutants. Ten states were identified as having comprehensive forest practices regulatory programs. The legislative intent of these laws is to protect forest soils, fisheries, wildlife, water quantity and quality, air quality, recreation and scenic beauty while at the same time maintaining an economic atmosphere that is positive to healthy wood-based industries. All 10 states have developed detailed rules that describe permit application procedures and forest practice standards and related restrictions. Provisions are also made for site inspections, enforcement procedures and penalties for violations. In addition, since 1989 almost all states having comprehensive forest practice laws have revised their practice rules, generally making them more focused and more intent on protecting natural resources (Ellefson et al., 1996).

Nair (1995) asserts that agroforestry is compatible with the non-common themes in the United States for sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, ‘green’ consumerism, new forestry, rural-urban interface and buffer zone management, land stewardship ethics and carbon sequestration. Agroforestry directly addresses key issues such as soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, field and landscape buffer zones, rural economic diversification, land retirement, ecosystem management, and rural/urban interface conflicts (Rietveld, 1995). However, translating the perceived desirable benefits of adopting agroforestry practices into reality requires research, communication, and institutional and political support (Henderson, 1991).

In the United States, several land-grant universities have established major research initiatives – University of Missouri-Columbia, Purdue University, Washington State University, University of Florida, Iowa State University, Michigan State University and Cornell University to name a few. Communication and/or technology transfer at the federal level has been enhanced through the establishment of the joint interagency USDA FS/NRCS National Agro-