



Agroforestry in Wisconsin



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides assistance to agricultural producers, landowners, and private forestland managers to address natural resource concerns to improve soil health, water and air quality, desirable vegetation, habitat for wildlife, and livestock health. Agroforestry can benefit our natural resources as a unique land management approach that blends agriculture and forestry to enhance productivity, profitability, and conservation. NRCS Wisconsin offers technical assistance and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to implement agroforestry practices and enhancements that provide conservation benefits on private lands. Below are more details on common NRCS agroforestry practices. These practices may be used individually or in combination with other NRCS conservation activities to achieve your conservation goals.



Forest Farming

Forest farming (also called multi-story cropping or food forests) is the cultivation of high-value crops under the protection of a managed tree canopy. It is not just harvesting of native understory woodland plants without management; management is an essential part of forest farming. Shade-loving crops, such as medicinal plants like ginseng or specialty food crops like ramps, are grown under the forest canopy. NRCS assists with establishing a forest farm by planting trees and shrubs on cropland or in urban areas. Initially, more sun-loving crops like garden vegetables can be grown between the trees/shrubs, and as the trees produce more shade, a transition can be made to the desired shade-loving crop.



Riparian Forest Buffers

A riparian forest buffer is an area adjacent to a stream, lake, or wetland that contains a combination of trees and shrubs that is managed differently from the surrounding landscape, primarily to provide conservation benefits. Benefits include filtering nutrients, pesticides, and pathogens from agricultural land runoff, filtering sediment, providing shade, shelter, and food for fish and other aquatic organisms, providing wildlife habitat and corridors for terrestrial organisms, and protecting downstream communities and cropland from flood damage. This practice can also be designed to include trees and shrubs that produce a harvestable crop, providing additional sources of income to the farming operation.



Alley Cropping

Alley cropping consists of planting rows of trees and/or shrubs to create lanes within which agricultural or horticultural crops are produced. The trees may include valuable timber species, fruit, nut, or other specialty crop trees/shrubs. Designs are farm-specific and created to work with equipment and practices already in use. The goal is to provide conservation benefits while maintaining a regular (and eventually more diverse) income stream. In many systems, farmers continue to grow annual crops in the alleys without significant yield reduction as the trees become established. As the trees produce more shade, the alleys are transitioned to other crops, converted to pasture for livestock, or hayed.

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Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation

Windbreaks are linear plantings of vegetative barriers made up of trees and/or shrubs designed primarily to reduce wind erosion of the soil and provide economic and conservation benefits. Windbreaks can protect crops, livestock, and property from wind-related damage while providing shelter and other beneficial resources for wildlife and pollinators. Windbreaks can also provide additional products and sources of income to the farm operation, such as timber and specialty crops.



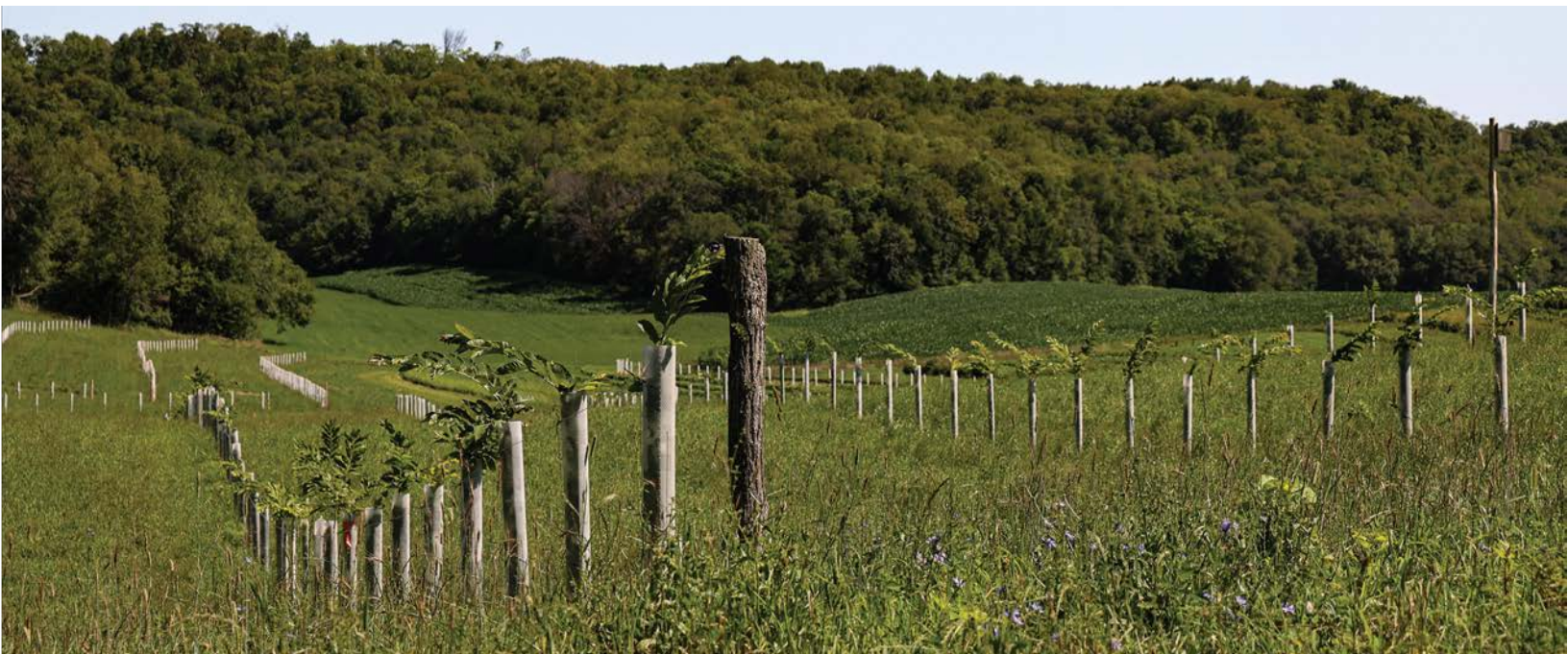
Silvopasture

Silvopasture is the deliberate integration of trees and grazing livestock on the same land. Well-managed silvopasture requires a prescribed or rotational grazing plan and incorporates agronomic principles including the careful selection of forage grasses, fertilization, and nitrogen-fixing legumes to optimize forage use. The NRCS provides technical assistance to integrate trees effectively into farm systems and existing pastures to maximize conservation benefits, extend forage longevity in summer, provide shade for livestock and additional farm income. These systems are intensively managed for both forest products and forage, generating both short-term (annual grazing income) and long-term (forest products) income sources.

Agroforestry Resources

To learn more about agroforestry, go to the USDA National Agroforestry Center website: www.fs.usda.gov/nac

To learn more about the technical and financial assistance the NRCS can provide to private landowners, contact your local USDA Service Center and go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/wi.



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