



DOLLAR\$ AND \$ENSE

with Blaine Lanier



Financial Opportunities Loom Large For Farmers And Landowners

For the first time ever two new conservation programs have jointly become available to Mississippi's farmers and landowners. Together they offer numerous financial incentives and incomes to restore marginally productive croplands to a conservation practice that inter-plants mixed hardwoods with cottonwoods.

One of the two programs is a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practice being offered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) titled State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), and the second a private program called GreenTrees, created by C2I of Virginia.

The combined financial incentives and income opportunities from both programs offer tremendous economic opportunities to landowners who want to plant trees. For example, during the first year, landowners enrolled in both the CRP SAFE and GreenTrees can expect a cash flow of an estimated \$300 or more per acre after expenses of getting the trees established. CRP rental payments are paid each year for the length of the CRP contract up to 15 years. In addition to, and independent of the annual CRP rental payments, producers can receive all income from cottonwood harvests as early as year 10. If the landowner wants additional harvest income from the cottonwoods, further harvesting can take place in years 17 and 25. The emergence of the new biomass markets could make this fast-growing, high-quality timber resource a very valuable commodity, much more so than traditional pulp and timber supply. More income opportunities to the landowner from GreenTrees can be expected from all future hardwood harvests, all hunting and recreational land uses and a share in potential carbon income created from their forest.

Open enrollment for SAFE is available at local county FSA offices. SAFE offers farmers and landowners the opportunity to enroll whole fields in new CRP practices, to include wetland and bottomland hardwoods. Under the CRP SAFE, these habitat restoration practices will offer an additional 40 percent cost-share Practice Incentive Payment (PIP),

for a total establishment cost-share of 90 percent, plus a \$100 per acre Signing Incentive Payment (SIP). These incentive payments are in addition to the farmer or landowner's annual 10- to 15-year soil rental payments.

The goal of GreenTrees is to assist farmers and landowners with reforestation by helping them receive the maximum economic and environmental value from each acre of new trees planted. New income opportunities from carbon and biomass supplies are combined throughout the lease with traditional timber and recreational income opportunities. GreenTrees also offers substantial payments per acre upfront, assuming the acre's soil is suitable for the healthy growth of hardwood and cottonwood plantings. This cash per acre is



GreenTrees

paid directly to the producer within the successful planting and establishment period of the new trees.

Landowners can enroll marginal farmland, pastures or cultivated acres in the GreenTrees program separately or in conjunction with their CRP-qualified acres. Because the cottonwood-hardwood tree regime from GreenTrees is a state-accepted tree-planting practice for SAFE (and other CRP hardwood practices), a farmer or landowner can enroll acres into SAFE via their county FSA office and also enroll the same acres into GreenTrees directly through C2I. C2I will work directly with the farmer or

landowner to quickly verify whether or not his/her acres contain land suitable for the cottonwood-hardwood planting, and, if they do, work directly with NRCS and the county forester to make sure the 302 cottonwood and 302 hardwood inter-planting is part of the approved CRP SAFE Conservation Plan.

Many times landowners find themselves needing assistance in establishing the trees. The GreenTrees agreement provides the landowner a tremendous amount of additional technical and logistical support. Not only will GreenTrees personnel work directly with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and forestry personnel in organizing the landowner's CRP Conservation Plan for the combined project, but also C2I's forestry personnel will work directly with the landowner. GreenTrees field support includes helping select a suitable tree planter for the establishment work, being on-site during the site prep and tree planting and monitoring the trees' health and growth during the first and second growing seasons. Furthermore, they will help monitor the project thereafter to ensure the optimum carbon growth and payments into the future to benefit the landowner. The landowner does not pay for any of these services.

A very critical point for farmers interested in applying for both CRP SAFE and GreenTrees to know is – they must contact GreenTrees first to determine if they have the eligible soil types. A variety of soils have been identified as suitable for cottonwoods. GreenTrees personnel can directly help to quickly determine what kind of soil(s) is on the proposed acres and whether or not they would meet the criteria for enrolling in GreenTrees.

For more information about GreenTrees enrollment, contact Blaine Lanier, Landowner Relations for Mississippi at 662-560-7362 or Page Gravely, Senior Director for GreenTrees at 866-623-8733, extension 8950. For information about the CRP SAFE initiative, farmers and landowners can contact their county FSA or NRCS office. GreenTrees is a program offered by C2I, LLC.

