



American
Forest
Foundation

Support the Rural Forest Markets Act (RFMA)



Unlocking Millions of Dollars for Rural Family Forest Owners

39% of U.S. forestlands are owned by families and individuals

Family forests can help the U.S. tackle climate change.

Family forest owners care for the largest portion of U.S. forests – 39%, or more than 290 million acres. That’s more than any other ownership group, including the federal government. U.S. forests and forest products currently offset 15% of the country’s annual carbon emissions. More importantly, studies suggest this could be nearly doubled with the right actions. To effectively tap this potential in our forests, we must engage the largest forest ownership group – families and individuals.

While forest owners want to do right by their land, it can be expensive.

Family forest owners care about their land and want to do what’s right for forests, wildlife, and the planet. The fast-growing carbon market can unlock the potential for family forest owners to create meaningful impact, but their goals for improving forest health are often out of reach. As of 2019, the vast majority of small-forest owners were unable to participate in a carbon market project due to high upfront costs and complexity. 1 out of 3 family forest owners have a household income of less than \$50,000, and struggle with the high cost of forest management and conservation.

Unlocking access to the voluntary carbon market for family forest owners can bring economic stimulus to rural America.

Carbon markets help forest owners generate income needed to care for their land. They also appeal to landowners because they offer a voluntary option for action rather than a regulatory approach. Most important, they leverage private-side investment. In fact, the voluntary carbon market alone could generate as much as \$5.6 billion in private dollars that could support rural economies if markets are open to small forest owners.

The Rural Forest Markets Act (RFMA)

What does the RFMA do for rural landowners?

1. Gives the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to issue up to \$150 million in guarantees for loans and bonds that help create carbon markets for small and family forest owners, such as the Family Forest Carbon Program. USDA already issues such guarantees for traditional agriculture markets, and this would expand authorities to nontraditional markets like carbon and water markets.
2. Creates a voluntary incentivize option for small family landowners to adopt climate-friendly forest practices that can be put back into the land to increase the value of the carbon, water, timber, and other commodities that can be sold in a marketplace.
3. Unlocks new revenue streams for landowners to help build generational wealth and keep their land in the family while ensuring the long-term health and value of their forests.
4. Allows the U.S. to achieve the necessary scale of climate impact by bringing the power of private finance from large corporations to rural America.

The Family Forest Carbon Program: a solution for rural landowners and the planet.

The Family Forest Carbon Program, developed by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, is an innovative solution to providing landowners with small forest holdings access to carbon markets. The Program pays forest owners to implement carbon-positive forest management practices that result in increased carbon sequestration and storage as well as improved wildlife habitat and forest resiliency. When fully scaled, the Program could sequester and store as much as 2 gigatons of CO₂ through the end of the century and bring millions to small forest owners for their efforts. But programs like this need federal backing.

Harnessing the Power of His Forests: *Bryce Trezise*

Our family has always shared a mutual love of the outdoors. When we purchased an old 187-acre farm on a wooded property in 2020, little did I know that it would ignite a journey of forest stewardship. Over the next two years, we planted 600 Christmas trees and nearly 500 grapevines for wine in a 30-acre field. Our goal is to plant Christmas trees that can be harvested once every eight years and to tend to about 1,500 grapevines, in addition to producing maple syrup from our forests. An agri-business like this needs upfront cash with delayed revenue streams, even as we were maintaining and expanding our projects on the property.

We needed to explore other ways to generate revenue that we could use to put into the land. Our forester told us about the Family Forest Carbon Program. We decided to enroll. Our agri-business is not just about the vineyard – it's about being good stewards of the land and conservation. I hope more landowners are able to connect with market-based opportunities like this that help them fulfill their personal goals too.



“Starting an agri-business takes more than aspirations. It takes upfront investment and technical assistance – two perks we found in the Family Forest Carbon Program.”