

## The 2008 Farm Bill Looks Good For Tree Farmers

by Tom Berger

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 brings with it many new opportunities for Tree Farmers. And with the new Farm Bill, forestry is finally getting some recognition in the farm legislation arena. Unlike previous Farm Bills, the 2008 version recognizes forest landowners and provides significant opportunities to encourage management of the family forest. The funding for the Farm Bill's Conservation Title has been significantly increased. During the next five years, an additional four billion dollars will be available to programs within the Farm Bill.

Ohio is very lucky to have a great partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the agency who oversees the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The EQIP program is where the bulk of the forestry practices are placed in the Farm Bill. The NRCS State Conservationist feels that there is a need to manage Ohio's forest resource and is assisting by providing EQIP dollars to woodland owners. The program includes the following practices: tree planting, grape vine control, crop tree release, pruning, thinning and control of woody invasives. One new addition to the Forestry EQIP Program will be a cost-share practice for preparing a forest stewardship plan for a landowner. This practice may not be finalized until the second year of the program.

An offshoot of the Farm Bill has been a special program designed to address a specific need. The NRCS, the Division of Forestry, and the U. S. Forest Service have partnered together to utilize EQIP dollars and create a special three-year project to control woody invasives in a 22-county area in SE Ohio. This project is designed to address a growing problem with woody invasives in that part of the state. Separate EQIP funding will be available for the next three years to control woody invasives in SE Ohio. The main focus will be on two of Ohio's most common woody invasives, Bush Honeysuckle and Tree of Heaven.

Additional programs in the new Farm Bill that have a forestry connection are the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), the Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and two programs in The Energy Title of the Farm Bill.

The WHIP program provides non-industrial forest landowners an opportunity for habitat improvement. This includes tree plantings in open fields, field windbreaks, and riparian forest plantings.

The Healthy Forest Reserve Program provides conservation easements for forest landowners. The easement options for landowners can be 10-year, 30-year, 99-year, or permanent. The new Farm Bill provides funding for the Healthy Forest Reserve for the next five years.

The Energy Bill Title of the Farm Bill also contains the utilization of forest resources for energy production. Three areas included are:

- The Community Wood Energy Program – this would use woody biomass as primary fuel for heat or energy for publicly owned facilities such as schools
- Forest Biomass for Energy – this is for new research and development programs
- Biomass Crop Assistance Program – a new program that will encourage the establishment and production of new crops including woody biomass. Cost sharing will be available to landowners to grow the woody biomass.

Forest landowners have been recognized in the new Farm Bill and the opportunities abound. Tree Farmers will have opportunities to participate in a variety of cost-share programs during the next five years. Consider your options and see if any of the cost-share practices fit your situation. This program is a big plus and will really help Ohio's Tree Farmers and Ohio's forest resource.