

Eastern Kentucky Students Learn About Our Forests and Wood Production

By Tim Thornberry, Kentucky Farm Bureau News

In an effort to teach students the value of Kentucky's vast woodland and forestry industry, Harlan County Farm Bureau (HCFB) implemented a plan last fall to reach all 5th graders in the county through a forestry field day.

HCFB partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Kentucky Division of Forestry, Pine Mountain Settlement School, Corum Tree Farm, and the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association to offer students the opportunity to get an up-close look at forestry during the first ever Harlan County Farm Bureau Forestry Day.

During this field trip, every student experienced hands on educational activities including but not limited to: tree identification, discussion of opportunities in the forest industry, the heritage of the forest, protecting the echo system and how to determine tree values in the estimation of board feet.

The students, working in small groups, spent the first half of the day at Pine Mountain Settlement School and the other half at the Corum Tree Farm. Pine Mountain Settlement School Outdoor Education staff took the students on a tour of the campus woodlands and ended up with sessions in the classroom. During their visit to the tree farm, students were taught forestry management, tree identification, and how to determine tree value in the estimation of board feet.

The farm tour instructors included four professional foresters from the Division of Forestry, five members of the HCFB Board of Directors and three of their Young Farmers.

"Many hours of planning went into developing this program, and many resources were spent over the four days," said HCFB President Don Miniard. "We feel like it was worth the effort taken by all involved in bringing it to fruition and we hope the students will grow up to become strong advocates for forestry programs that

help maintain productive sustainable forest resources."

He added that forestry programs help to insure that woodland owners receive fair treatment in the market place and with state and federal governments.

"With forestry programs in place, we can be more effective in dealing with important issues such as property taxes, forest health, government cost-share programs, market news services, insurance and reinvestment of tax dollars in renewable resources," said Miniard.

According to information from the University of Kentucky College (UK) of Agriculture, Food and Environment's Department of Forestry, in 2014, the estimated direct economic impact of Kentucky's forest and wood industry was \$8.3 billion with a total impact of \$12.8 billion.

UK Extension Professor Jeff Stringer said there is an opportunity to make those numbers grow especially in Eastern Kentucky.

"A recent study, that is part of the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) initiative, specifically found the forestry sector in that region of the state could provide about \$1.5 billion in additional direct economic contributions and result in 7,498 jobs," he said. "If induced and indirect contributions are factored in, the economic contributions could rise as high as an additional \$2.3 billion."

Stringer added that while agriculture and the forestry industry are often viewed as being two separate entities, most of the state's timberland (78 percent) is located on private land and produces a great opportunity for further diversification on Kentucky farms.

"Many of our state farmers are taking advantage of the tree crop they have on their land from a production standpoint," he said. "But there is so much more potential



there with approximately \$250 million worth of trees (standing timber) that are typically purchased from Kentucky's private forest owners annually."

Because of the potential and the market that already exist from Kentucky's forest industry, Miniard said the sooner young people learn the facts about tree farming, the better the chances are this industry will continue its growth.

"These students seem so eager to learn about one of our greatest natural resources and the hope is, through events like the Harlan County Farm Bureau Forestry Day, that a new generation will step forward, become involved and continue the growth of this industry, not only here in Eastern Kentucky but throughout the state," he said.

