

# SUSTAINING DIVERSITY: LIMITED-RESOURCE FOREST LANDOWNERS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the southern United States, small farmers with limited resources are steadily losing ground. This land loss trend has been particularly notable for minority farmers, who are traditionally underserved by both market and government institutions. Many of these farmers own small areas of woodland, which we contend is an underutilized resource. By combining productive and sustainable woodland management with farming systems, these farmers could increase their incomes. Thus, improved woodland management could help sustain both socioeconomic diversity and biological diversity in the rural landscape. In an on-going research project in the coastal plain of North Carolina and Virginia, we are identifying opportunities for and constraints on participation by limited-resource landowners in timber and alternative forest products sectors. While the general perception is that limited-resource landowners do not take full advantage of their forest resources, we have found that a small proportion of these landowners do in fact earn substantial income from timber, pine straw, game leases, and other forest goods and services. We examine the reasons for their success, drawing on both interviews with case study families and a large sample survey. Characteristics of the landowner, local market conditions, and the quality of the resource all affect the probability that a limited resource landowner will earn income from their forest. Importantly for policy, both informal (social networks) and formal (government agents) sources of information and assistance are also significant correlates of forest income among this population.

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