

## Woodlots worth their weight; Some Can Be More Profitable Than Farming, Owners Told

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A bush lot at the back of a field can be more profitable than farming the land around it, a group of woodlot owners was told last night.

By the time the trees are thinned out and sold for timber or firewood, or tapped for maple syrup, a woodlot can produce twice the profit per acre of most crops, Steve Bowers of the Huron Stewardship Council said.

In a presentation to the annual meeting of the Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association, Bowers produced figures from case studies of five Ontario farms with woodlots. Data on income and expenses going back more than 25 years were used.

In one case, the farmland was twice as profitable.

Bowers said critics have questioned the study, which is still ongoing, saying land owners liquidated assets to produce good results.

However, in a follow up study, the woodlots were found to be in good shape with many trees still standing. "This shows they're being managed sustainably. They're not being raped or pillaged," Bowers said.

"There are other benefits that were hard to put a value on, that we didn't put a dollar value on," he added, noting that woodlots provide beauty, recreation, a refuge for wildlife and keep groundwater clean and in plentiful supply.

In an interview after the presentation, Bowers said "the intent here is to catch people's interest" and encourage them to pay more attention to their woodlots.

"Too often in an agriculture setting, farmers are so busy farming, the woodlots become a forgotten piece of land. We're saying don't forget them. There's a whole bunch of benefits with them and they're a good source of revenue.

"Pay a little attention to them. Get some advice. They can be a productive part of farmland."

Woodlots, he added, are coming under increased "pressure" from diseases, pests, farmers wanting to clear more land, and the lure of quick money from forestry products.

"We have a fraction of the forest we used to have. We need to keep them healthy and sustained."

Dolf Wynia of Norfolk County told the meeting he knows one of the families that took part in the study. Their woodlot, he said, provided enough money that it "took them through the Dirty 30s when other farmers went broke."

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Illustration:

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