

IOWA HISTORY

by Cheryl Mullenbach



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Iowa's forests were in danger in 1922

Farmers and ISU Conserve Forests

The Forestry Department at Iowa State University (ISU) issued a report in 1922 that offered some advice to the state's farmers. It contained valuable information and a word of warning about the state's forests.

The report stated that Iowa farmers used between \$6 and 10 million worth of lumber annually. And, that amount could double in the near future ISU scientists predicted. The farmer was the largest user of wood in the United States the report stated. It was estimated that 46 percent of all wood used annually went to farmers.

What was all that lumber used for on the farm? Much of it went to fence posts and fuel. The report said every year Iowa's farmers used 2,000 feet of lumber just for buildings.

ISU extension service forester, I.T. Bode, warned that better grades of building lumber—such as pine, cypress and oak—were “getting scarcer each day” while the demand by farmers had increased. He warned that farmers needed to economize in the use of the better grades of lumber and pay more attention to “the treatment of forest products.”

Mr. Bode offered some advice to help farmers economize and conserve. He advocated use of a “farm woodlot.” He recommended that every farmer plant different varieties of trees on “waste land”—soil that would not produce a good agricultural crop and unused “wasted corners.” Mr. Bode said by planting “rapid growing, soft wood” trees “serviceable lumber” would be ready for harvesting in about ten years. He suggested treating the softer lumber from these trees with “creosote or other preservatives” to help it last as long as lumber from the better grade hard woods.

In the report Mr. Bode outlined steps that the university’s Forestry Department planned to take to help farmers. He said they would increase the use of soft-wood fence posts by experimenting with various treatments such as creosote. They would help farmers establish more woodlots throughout Iowa. And he said ISU would help farmers learn techniques to manage their woodlots. In addition, the university would help farmers construct “shelter belts” for animals—helping to reduce the need for farm buildings made from wood.

With all these forward-thinking steps ISU’s new Forestry Department believed the state’s forests would be conserved for future generations of Iowans.

Sources

“Forestry in Iowa,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1922.

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