

Update on National Tree Planting Programs¹

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Abstract.-- Tree planting has become a very important part of the Nation's conservation efforts and several new Federal programs related to conservation, in particular the Stewardship Incentive Program, are described. Nursery professionals need to help ensure tree planting programs maintain high quality standards.

Only an ostrich would be unaware of all the recent attention being devoted to trees and the role they are playing in our environment. In the Federal government there has been extensive activity promoting trees and a new tree planting initiative, America the Beautiful (ATB). ATB is one of the Nation's cornerstones for improving the environment. The Federal government is not the only entity advancing tree planting. Many private companies and corporations are becoming actively involved in tree plantings for the first time, especially in urban and community settings. State and local agencies and forest industries are also planting large numbers of trees. This paper will provide a brief update on the status of the new planting efforts and how these programs interrelate with existing Federal tree planting efforts. It will describe the role nursery professionals need to take to ensure these programs are successful and also will briefly discuss the impact these programs will have on nursery production levels.

Title XII, the Forestry title of the 1990 Farm Bill, legislated four key programs that promote the planting of trees and wise use and conservation of forest resources. The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) provides technical assistance to landowners for the writing of stewardship management plans. The Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) provides cost-share funds to eligible landowners to implement the stewardship practices outlined in their management plans. There is also an Urban and Community Forestry Assistance (U&CF) section that promotes technical assistance needed to properly plant trees in the nation's towns and cities. The last element of the Farm Bill related to tree plantings is the National Tree Trust, which was funded with a one-time, \$20 million appropriation. The Trust will solicit additional private contributions which will be dispersed through a grant process

for tree planting across the nation. ATB is incorporated in varying degrees, into SIP, U&CF and the National Tree Trust.

I would like to focus on SIP in this report, because most of the trees to be planted will be accomplished using SIP dollars. In 1991, the implementation plan for this program was completed. SIP will focus on helping nonindustrial forest landowners plan and implement good stewardship of their land by providing up to 75% of the costs for carrying out 9 different stewardship practices. These activities include: reforestation and afforestation; forest and agroforest improvement; windbreak and hedgerow establishment, maintenance and renovation; soil and water protection and improvement; riparian and wetland protection and improvement; fisheries habitat enhancement; wildlife habitat enhancement; forest recreation enhancement; and management plan development.

As you can see this is an ambitious list, which distinguishes SIP from earlier tree-planting programs. Each state will determine the practices to be emphasized within that state, however, tree planting will be emphasized as a national priority. The program will be administered using the existing channels of the State Forestry office and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), as well as Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Extension Service (ES), among others. Landowners will now have an even broader array of cost-share programs to choose from. For some management activities they may apply for cost sharing under existing programs, like the Conservation Reserve Program or the Forest Incentives Program. Other practices may only be eligible through SIP. In other words, a landowner can get assistance for different practices from more than one program at the same time.

Although the impacts of SIP on the nursery industry are difficult to predict precisely, they should be very positive in terms of production levels. It can be difficult for a nursery manager to plan production levels around Federal programs which have been funded in a cyclical manner. However, I believe that because SIP is multi-re-

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source in scope, its support from the President and Congress will be durable. The Farm Bill authorizes funding through 1995 and there is a strong likelihood SIP will be reauthorized for another five years. Funding for fiscal year 1992 is about \$20 million and about \$20 million will be carried over from 1991 funds. This sustained level of support should make it easier for nursery managers to plan appropriate production levels. After the program gets off the ground, I expect a wide and sustained level of interest and participation in the program which should result in record levels of tree planting.

SIP will also bring new visibility to the

nursery industry, and as professionals, our role will be to ensure quality control in all phases of the afforestation and reforestation phase of the program. As we rush to get trees into the ground we must make sure the right tree gets planted in the right place. We also need to make sure others involved in the process, as well as ourselves, pay close attention to using the appropriate seed sources, stock types and handling and planting procedures when planting trees. SIP affords us the opportunity to permanently raise the public's awareness of trees and the beneficial role trees play in improving our lives. This is a program we look forward to and we are confident of its eventual success.