FARM WOODLOTS IN SASKATCHEWAN

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Farm woodlots in Saskatchewan are a relatively minor factor in the agricultural economy of the Province. Although reliable information is not plentiful, figures for three northeastern settlements suggest that woods may constitute up to 20 per cent of the area on farms and that the stands on these wooded areas contain 1000 cubic feet of wood per acre in trees four inches in diameter and over. The pattern of occurrence of these woodlots is irregular and indications are that they supply mostly fuel and lumber for use on the farm, and a small amount of these products for sale. Poplar is by far the predominant species and the volume of spruce present over fairly large areas may range from 3 to 20 per cent of the stand.

All phases of land use in Northern Saskatchewan have been affected by the newness of the settlement in most areas and by the necessity settlers have been under to clear the forest so that crops might be grown. Many of the newer settlements date from the 1930's when drought conditions on the prairies brought about an enforced migration to the wooded areas of the north. In the early phases of settlement the forest provided food and shelter and a means of cash income when there was little else to be taken from these homesteads. Nearby crown forests also afforded outside employment and continue to fulfil this function up to the present time. Widespread and uncontrolled forest fires in these settlements in the thirties destroyed large areas of native tree cover and badly damaged much of the rest. In recent years much of the clearing has been done with large mechanical equipment which has resulted in an accelerated rate of land clearing, but also in a more orderly and controlled pattern of clearing.

In some of the older settlements there are farmers who have no woodlots left whatever. On these farms there is not even wood for fuel and wood is either bought from neighboring districts or coal used to keep the home fires burning during the winter. Some farms have what is known as a "spruce bluff", from which a supply of lumber for farm needs is produced from time to time, but this is only of rare occurrence. Interest in tree planting chiefly for snow fences and field shelter belts is steadily increasing. While such plantings will produce little in the way of forest products, they constitute a type of forestry which is suited to the needs of the community and which has great educational value.

The present land policy of the provincial government aims to encourage the retention and wise use of farm woodlots. New land suitable for agriculture falls far short of the demand for it. Homestead grants have been replaced by a policy of long term leasing, ownership of the land remaining vested in the crown. Windstrips of the native vegetative cover 100 feet in width are left around each quarter section and a designated portion of each 320 acre unit is set aside as a permanent woodlot which may not be cleared by the settler. Encouragement is to be given to the settler to utilize this

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woodlot on a continuing basis as a part of his farm enterprise. Trees may be harvested under permit on these woodlots, free of dues for the farmer's own use and for sale upon payment of dues.

The absence of a market for the sale of the products of farm woodlots has been one factor which has led to their destruction in the past. Market conditions are improving in some directions. Spruce pulpwood is bringing a very attractive price at the present time and the existence of one veneer mill utilizing poplar and several others in prospect may provide another good market for the products of farm woodlots.

One important need is for reliable data on the area and contents of present farm woods and on the rate at which they are going out of existence as more land is cleared. The provincial forest inventory now under way should provide some of these figures. As markets for forest products continue to improve in Saskatchewan and the government devotes some effort to extension work with farmers, it may be possible to have more and better woodlots as a permanent feature of the local farm economy.