

Trees Promise A Bright Future

“There’s one. Over there are two more. On your left are three others,” Ron Fullenkamp says.

He’s standing on the edge of the town square in West Point, Iowa, and pointing out red oaks, white oaks and ash trees that he’s donated from his tree farm to the community.

“I’ll give a tree to anyone who wants to pay to move it,” he says.

Fullenkamp guesses more than 150 good-sized trees have been transplanted with a large tree spade from his farm. Some have been for memorials, others have been for the city park and others just to dress up the front yard of a residence. The trees are part of the 54 different species of trees on the Fullenkamps’ 140-acre tree farm in Lee County in southeastern Iowa. Fullenkamp has been in the insurance business for over 44 years, but it’s easy to see his passion is the family’s tree farm.

Realizing A Farm Owner Dream

Fullenkamp grew up on a farm and has always wanted to be a farmer, but says

he couldn’t afford it.

“I wanted land I could experiment and play with,” Fullenkamp says. “When I saw this land come up for sale, I couldn’t pass it up.”

Wood production and creating wild-life habitat are Fullenkamp’s goals for his tree farm.

“I do like to hunt,” Fullenkamp says. “I’ve experimented with planting tall sawtooth oaks. Some people call them gobbler oak, because wild turkeys are supposed to eat their acorns.”

Fullenkamp takes pride in owning a tree farm, and welcomes the chance to help others enjoy what he’s been enjoying for the past 15 years.

“I love the forestry field days where we can show other people what we do here,” Fullenkamp says.

100,000 Trees and Counting

Counting seeds and seedlings, the Fullenkamps have planted more than 100,000 trees on 15 acres of CRP since 1990. They did much of the work themselves; some trees were planted from seeds gathered by hand.



A transplanted red oak from the farm is a defining feature of a pond and recreation area on the Fullenkamp Tree Farm.

“I wouldn’t have imagined when we started that I could have what we have here now,” Fullenkamp says.

While he gets personal satisfaction now, Fullenkamp points out the financial payoff is further down the road.

“Tree farming is much longer range than crop farming in terms of a return on your work and investment,” Fullenkamp says. “You’re doing this financially for your great grandchildren. There is no money in it for you.”

The Fullenkamps are forming a limited liability company as the tree farm owner and making all 8 children and 20 grandchildren shareholders. Both the children and grandchildren regularly help out with maintenance and timber stand improvement work.

CRP Helps Offset Costs

Fullenkamp says programs like CRP are a big help in starting and running a tree farm, where the upkeep can be expensive when the trees are young.



Master woodland managers Ron and Carol Fullenkamp began planting trees with CRP assistance in 1990. They are giving shares of their 136-acre tree farm to their 8 children and 20 grandchildren.



Carol and Ron Fullenkamp were named Iowa's outstanding tree farmers in 2002.

“For starters, spraying the grass competition is \$25 an acre a year, and mowing is another \$15 an acre,” Fullenkamp says. “Then there are taxes, pruning and thinning charges, disease control and other expenses. The CRP payment helps.”

Fullenkamp says that without CRP, he would have left more of the farm in cropland. He is thankful that CRP allowed him to put trees where they work best.

“The land is erosive and is best suited for trees,” Fullenkamp says.

Tranquility on the Tree Farm

The Fullenkamps have done most

of the tree planting and maintenance themselves. “We’re out here about every day after work until dark,” Ron says. But he also points out how peaceful it can be.

“I can relax at the farm,” Fullenkamp says. His wife, Carol, shares the sentiment. Carol has always liked trees and has spent many days in the woods, hunting mushrooms and watching birds. Her father was a big influence on her, teaching her how to identify different trees.

“Now I like to come out here and sit and watch the birds,” Carol says. “Relaxation is the thing I get most here.”

Their Pride and Joy

When Fullenkamp purchased his second farm, a 40-acre tract, much of it was standing timber. He sold a few walnut and hickory trees as logs, but other black walnuts and red oaks are still growing. Among them is an especially large black walnut tree.

“Foresters tell us there may not be a better black walnut tree in the state,” Fullenkamp says. “It’s 34 feet up to the first branch, all veneer quality, and has a 21 inch dbh. It’s our pride and joy.”

According to Fullenkamp, a recent estimate of the standing tree’s value is \$7500. And that value will likely double every five years as the tree continues to grow. Asked if he will sell it, Fullenkamp remains true to form.



Ron Fullenkamp’s pride and joy is a veneer quality black walnut with a 21-inch dbh, that’s 34 feet up to the first branch.



Sawtooth oak, whose acorns are favorites of quail and turkey, are among the 100,000 trees the Fullenkamps have planted.