



SUSTAINABLE WORKING LANDSCAPES – THE CONCEPT

- ✓ *Our nation's landscapes are a store of precious and irreplaceable assets and a sacred trust upon which the health, quality-of-life and the economic vitality of our peoples and communities – both urban and rural - depend.*

- ✓ The term “working landscapes” is not new. It refers to all of the lands in productive activity around our nation:
 - agricultural cropland production,
 - farm woodlots, and
 - pasture and rangeland grazing and livestock management.

A new concept also is evolving; a new way of thinking about these “non-developed” lands that are the source of our food and many resources, and on which we are wholly dependent as a nation.

- ✓ **Working Landscapes** marries a number of practices: Sustainable ‘natural resource management’ with ‘sustainable agricultural production’ with environmental conservation with rural community planning and development with suburban and urban ‘smart growth’ planning. The concept recognizes the complex, inter-related nature of the pertinent issues in each of these practices that must be addressed to maintain a decent quality of life -- from the urban core to the rural farm.
- ✓ **Working Landscapes** focuses attention on personal enterprise and the productive capacity of private lands. Voluntary, incentive-based approaches can spur actions that mutually benefit and reinforce the adaptive capacities of urban and rural communities; farming, ranching and forestry economies; and the cycles of nature, at both watershed and regional scales.
- ✓ Working landscapes goes beyond our nation’s current land conservation strategy that focuses primarily on private land acquisition and regulation. Working Landscapes look at ways to couple voluntary, incentive-based policies with landowner innovation and private enterprise.
- ✓ Currently, the barriers to entry and exit from farming, ranching and non-industrial private forestry are so formidable that our youth may be reluctant to stay on the land in family-owned enterprises. With the development pressures of most of our urban fringe areas today and current tax structures, the people of the land have little alternative to selling their land to developers.
- ✓ However, despite the lack of public investment in multiple assets of our working landscapes, families and communities are “betting the farm” on new ways of thinking and acting, designed to recover its diverse ecologically, socially and economically assets.



A Rationale for a National Dialogue to Sustain our Nation's Working Landscapes

- ✓ A shared understanding and need for a new national policy framework for working landscapes is required to weave current piecemeal approaches into a coherent fabric
- ✓ Creating **Sustainable Working Landscapes** in the U.S. may require a number of strategic changes:
 - Integrated collaborative planning between rural economic development planners, urban/suburban 'smart growth' planners, private "working landscape" landowners of all types, city and town officials, and land and natural resource management agencies.
 - Addressing issues at the 'landscape' and regional scales, while taking action at the local level.
 - Public/private partnership and project collaboration at every level: local, regional, state and national.
 - Increasing local, regional, state and national support for private innovation and incentive-based approaches.
 - Revision of public policies, planning practice and federal budgeting to address the integrated needs of sustainable working landscapes.

SUSTAINABLE WORKING LANDSCAPES – NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND ACTING

At a recently held conference, *Working Landscapes in the Midwest: Creating Sustainable Futures for Agriculture, Forestry and Communities*, an unusual cross-section of 200+ individuals met for two days to explore the concept of sustainable working landscapes. Farmers. Activists. Horse loggers. US Department of Agriculture officials. Cheesemakers. Farmworker activist groups. Representatives from USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. Non-profit organizations. Students. Urban and rural foresters. Representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency. Environmental protection advocates. Elected county officials. Policy analysts. Native American representatives. U.S. Geological Survey scientists. Soil Conservation Service Extension agents. Professors. Immigrant farmers. Co-op leaders.

During presentations, workshops and breakout sessions, some 30 topics were explored, from citizen-based planning to the policy implications of the Farm Bill 2002. Discussions yielded convergent definitions for working landscapes; brainstorming sessions produced goals and strategies for transforming working landscapes concepts into action. The energy and enthusiasm generated by this cross-pollination of ideas electrified the conference space. Participants expressed unanimous support for development of a more holistic vision of working landscapes in America.

Activities already are taking place all over the country:

- Trees Forever Working Landscapes: A New Family Farm Program
- Skagit River, Washington Delta Conservation Initiative
- Nitrogen Reduction Strategy for the Mississippi River Basin and the Gulf of Mexico
- Wisconsin's Smart Growth Law: Agriculture and Forest Sustainability
- Minnesota Landscape-Level Planning and Coordination
- Cuyhoga Countryside Initiative
- CROPP/Organic Valley: An Organic Marketing Cooperative
- National Scenic Byways Program: Protecting Our Working Landscapes

In fact, many new opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and foresters are emerging to sustain America's working landscapes:

- Conservation easements
- Biomass fuels
- Transfer of development rights
- Purchase of development rights
- Renewable energy systems (e.g., wind energy farms)
- Agro-tourism
- Wildlife preservation programs
- Carbon sequestration practices
- Forest lands certification and eco-labeling
- Trading markets for water quality effluent

SUSTAINABLE WORKING LANDSCAPES – WHAT'S NEEDED NOW?

For Working Landscapes to truly become sustainable, local, regional and national leadership must converge. A comprehensive examination of sustainable working landscape practices across the U.S. would be useful. Definition of the underpinnings and principles of Sustainable Working Landscapes is essential. And, identification of a broad array of policies, planning tools and practices that will support sustainable working landscapes should be recommended.

A **national dialogue** among all major interest groups could produce these outcomes. A credible group of the leadership of diverse stakeholders could convene in a series of meetings to tackle these tough issues. Interest groups to be represented would include:

- Farmers, ranchers and foresters of a range of commodities and products
- Farming, ranching and private forestry organizations
- Local, state and federal land and resource management agencies
- Environmental organizations
- Rural community and urban planners
- Urban and rural city and town officials

In a well-structured, highly credible collaborative process, stakeholders would pursue an agenda of examining practices, defining principles, and developing consensus recommendations that would be crafted to be useful to their respective constituencies, state and federal legislators and lead agencies of all types.

As leaders in the Funder's Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities stated in April, 2001, "urban-influenced agriculture may be in some of the nation's most product, spectacular historic farming areas...The deep cultural, economic and political divisions between rural and urban interests must be bridged." As must the dichotomies between environmental goals and the activities of our landscape. Dialogue and consensus building can provide a start...

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