

Seeing the forest through the trees

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A municipal forester from Huron County says it's not woodlots that are protected by agriculture, but rather agricultural that's protected by woodlots. Dave Pullen spoke on the subject at the South West Agricultural Conference in Ridgetown on Friday, January 4, 2019. There's money in agricultural woodlots. That was the message that Dave Pullen passed on at a session at the Southwest Agriculture Conference held at the Ridgetown campus of the University of Guelph last Friday. Woodlands have the high potential to generate a more significant part of farm revenue in southern Ontario, said Pullen, who is a municipal forester for Huron County, where his roles include forest conservation, management and extension services. Input costs to manage



woodlands are low and timber production potential is high, he said. There's money in woodlots in the form of financial returns on the timber harvested and protection against soil erosion in adjacent fields caused by both wind and water. Sometimes there is a struggle within agriculture about the value of woodlots, but Pullen said the two can exist very well. "I think woodlands and agricultural are existing very well in a lot of areas," he said. He noted that Huron County has 16 per cent forest cover and a very strong agricultural industry. "We have a lot of people who are maintaining (and

improving) their woodlands while they intensify their production on their best land. Quite often woodlands occur on areas that are not suitable for agriculture anyway, so I do believe that they co-exist very well together," Pullen said. The forester said in today's specialized agricultural landscape, many farm operators are again exploring the benefits of farm woodlands. Not only are there soil conservation and water management benefits, but forest cover provides a home for pollinators and the high potential for carbon sequestration and bio diversity. Maintaining and improving woodlands, in tandem with sustainable food production, provides opportunities for the farm community to provide solutions to pressing environmental issues, Pullen said, . "We know that woodlands and forest cover are a major factor in protecting all those things. We really look at it as woodlands protecting agriculture, not competing with agriculture," Pullen said. Farm woodlands are an integral part of Ontario's agricultural economy and history. In the 19th century, most forest cover in southern Ontario was either cleared or severely degraded. The resulting soil erosion and flooding impacts of excess deforestation left vast swaths of Ontario farmland unproductive for decades. The successful efforts to restore agricultural production through the strategic planting of trees on marginal land demonstrated the value of woodlands for soil conservation and water management, Pullen said. Income diversity and maintaining a renewable source of fuel and lumber are other woodland values that were well known to previous generations in the farm community, he added.

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