

# ATFS Talks Markets on Capitol Hill

As your voice in Washington, D.C., the American Tree Farm System knows how important strong forest products markets are for family forest owners across the country. With the current depression-era downturn in forest markets, many family forest owners can't afford to implement the forest management practices they need to keep their forests healthy and productive.

Yesterday, American Forest Foundation Board of Trustees Chairman & Virginia Tree Farmer John Burke [testified before members of the House Agriculture Committee](#), Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry. During the hearing, not only did John request that Congress continue to maintain family forest owners access to [Farm Bill conservation programs](#), he also highlighted the need for the Farm Bill to help, not hurt forest markets. Currently, the USDA Biobased Markets Program, a Farm Bill program, hurts markets.

*“My situation is an example of the impact of the current program. Some of my hardwood trees grown on my certified Tree Farm are made into wood pallets. The pallet mill I sell to is about six miles from our property. You can't get more sustainable than that, and yet, my products won't get the USDA certified biobased label or federal purchasing preference, but a company importing bamboo or hemp from overseas would,”* said John Burke.

This [Biobased Markets Program](#) is intended to promote biobased products to consumers and to require the federal government to purchase biobased products. Currently, most forest products are not included in the program, meaning your forest products are at a competitive disadvantage in this marketplace. We'd like to see home-grown, American forest products, some of the most environmentally friendly products out there, included in this program.

We've made progress in fixing this program with the [Senate Farm Bill](#) including strong language to fix our concern, and now John Burke made the case today for the House Agriculture Committee to do the same in their Farm Bill version. Thankfully, we have forest champions in Congress that want to see this problem fixed, too. Senators Pryor (D-AR) and Blunt (R-MO) introduced the "[Forest Products Fairness Act](#)" in the Senate. AFF and other partners have also been working with Representatives Thompson (R-PA) and Schrader (D-OR) to build support for a companion bill in the House.

Check and see if your Senators have cosponsored the [Senate](#) bill. If they have yet to sign on, encourage them to support forest products in the USDA Biobased Markets Program!

Stay tuned for an update on what you can do to move this issue forward in the House.

P.S. check out [Chuck Leavel, Tree Farmer from Georgia](#), who celebrated USDA's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this week with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Thank you for your continued support,

Melissa Moeller  
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