

# Forest Certification: Case Study of a Combined Research and Outreach Effort in the Southeastern United States

H. Glenn Hughes (corresponding author)<sup>1</sup>, Richard P. Vlosky<sup>2</sup>, Michael Dunn<sup>3</sup> and Priyan Perera<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Extension Forestry Professor, Mississippi State University, Purvis, MS, USA, [ghughes@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:ghughes@ext.msstate.edu)

<sup>2</sup> Professor and Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center, Louisiana State University Agriculture Center, Baton Rouge, LA, USA, [Rvlosky@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:Rvlosky@agcenter.lsu.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Agricultural Economics, Louisiana State University Agriculture Center, Baton Rouge, LA, USA, [MDunn@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:MDunn@agcenter.lsu.edu)

<sup>4</sup> Research Assistant, Forest Products Marketing Program, School of Renewable Natural Resources, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA, USA, [pperer2@lsu.edu](mailto:pperer2@lsu.edu)

Forest certification continues to generate promise, discussion, and debate. The major certification systems focus on large ownerships, whether industry, government, or non-governmental organizations. In the U.S., these systems include the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council, and International Organization for Standardization. To be successful, certification systems must be acceptable to private, non-industrial forest (PNIF) landowners in the southern U.S., as these landowners hold 71% of the forestland. Certification systems designed for PNIF landowners include the Tree Farm and the Green Tag programs. We present the results of a combined research and extension effort on forest certification. The research component focused on two mail surveys. The first surveyed 1,000 randomly selected PNIF landowners each in Louisiana and Mississippi. The second surveyed the top 500 home center retailers in the U.S. The extension component consisted of forest certification workshops conducted in Mississippi and Louisiana. Seventy-seven percent of landowners surveyed would not pay to become certified, and an additional 13 percent would spend \$0.50 to \$1 per acre. Most landowners felt that certification would improve the forestry profession. Private landowner organizations and approved professional foresters are the most trusted parties by PNIF landowners to administer forest certification. NGOs were the least trusted. Of the 123 home center retailers responding to the survey, 33% sell certified wood products. Of the 67% respondents who do not sell certified products, 19% plan to do so in the future. For those selling certified products, FSC and SFI are the certification programs accepted and preferred by most retailers. Of those selling certified wood products, 69% feel that the sale of certified in the next 5 years will increase either somewhat or drastically.

Evaluations from the forest certification workshops are reviewed, with an emphasis on landowner perceptions of certification, and the certification system deemed most preferable to landowners.