



Strategic Investments to Advance Agroforestry in NYS

Recommendations from the 2026 Agroforestry Summit
convened by the Cornell Small Farms Program





We don't need to choose among food production, farm viability, and environmental protection: agroforestry systems deliver all three simultaneously.

Agroforestry is the integration of trees and shrubs in agricultural systems. It includes growing crops in forests as well as adding trees to existing pastures and crop fields. Agroforestry holds tremendous potential to diversify crops, increase financial returns and expand productive land on NY farms. For example:

- Agroforestry **improves livestock performance** by reducing heat stress
- There are often **higher combined yields** from trees and crops in agroforestry systems than when each is planted separately
- Tree crops add **new farm products and revenue streams**
- Agroforestry on “marginal” lands **supports new farm operations while maintaining ecosystem services**

The Northeast leads the U.S. in agroforestry implementation. To maximize the potential of agroforestry to build farm resilience, we must invest in research, education and services to optimize the systems.

Target crops for expanding NYS agroforestry value chains:

Chestnuts



Currants



Elderberries



Hazelnuts



Mullberries



A CALL TO ACTION

The 2026 New York Agroforestry Summit brought together 120 producers, researchers, educators, service providers, agency staff, and nonprofit partners from across the state to assess the current landscape of agroforestry and identify what is needed to advance its adoption in New York. The discussions clearly revealed the extraordinary potential of agroforestry systems in the state, the enthusiasm of practitioners, and the systemic barriers that must be addressed to unlock that potential.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR IMMEDIATE INVESTMENT TO GROW AGROFORESTRY IN NEW YORK

1

Build Human Capacity: Education, Demonstration Sites, Networking, and Statewide Leadership

WHY IT MATTERS:

Participants stressed that education, training and peer learning networks are essential to increase agroforestry adoption. Interest in agroforestry is growing but the sector is disorganized; Summit participants repeatedly emphasized the need for a “center” or leadership to coalesce the sector.

2

Develop Markets, Value Chains and Processing Infrastructure

WHY IT MATTERS:

Without reliable processing and markets, farmers cannot justify the long-term investments required for profitable, tree-centered agroforestry. Participants described this as a “chicken-and-egg” challenge: markets cannot grow without supply, and supply will not grow without markets.

3

Establish Agronomic Baselines and Economic Decision-Support Tools

WHY IT MATTERS:

Farmers need reasonable assurance of the revenue-generating potential of a crop before they are willing to invest in planting it, especially if that crop takes years to bear. Currently, *there is no baseline agronomic and economic data* that is relevant to NYS climate and soils for most crops grown in agroforestry systems. This information is essential for farmer decision-making as well as for attracting investment, informing policy, and supporting payment-for-ecosystem-services (PES) programs.

LEVERAGING CORNELL'S ASSETS

By leveraging existing assets, Cornell University is poised to lead efforts for agroforestry expansion. The Cornell Small Farms Program leads Agroforestry Work Teams that include over 150 educators and technical service providers from around the state. Many faculty have relevant areas of expertise to boost multidisciplinary agroforestry research and teaching. Cornell crop breeding programs, research farms, the NY Seed Improvement Project, the Climate and Applied Forest Research Institute, the NY Soil Health Team, the Center of Excellence in Food and Ag, and the Food Venture Center offer skills and services needed to demonstrate and scale up agroforestry production, value chains and markets.

THE ASK

The 2026 NYS Agroforestry Summit revealed a community that is energized, aligned, and ready to act — yet constrained by fragmented infrastructure, limited markets, and insufficient research, technical and economic data. Advancing agroforestry in New York will require coordinated leadership, investment in human and economic infrastructure, and a commitment to building shared knowledge systems that serve farmers, service providers, and policymakers alike.

By investing in Cornell to build human capacity, value chain development, and foundational agronomic and economic research — New York can unlock the unrealized potential of agroforestry to strengthen rural communities, enhance climate resilience, and build a more diverse and sustainable agricultural economy.



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Read the full report online.

