Human and Institutional Dimensions of Agroforestry

In Pinantan Lake, British Columbia, Jennifer and Chris Cunningham manage Jay Springs Lamb Co. (www.jayspringslamb.ca/), which is the story of an evolving four-family, three-generation farm business that mixes agriculture, forestry, agroforestry, and direct marketing. Jennifer and Chris produce free-range lambs from a silvopasture operation in the Southern Interior of British Columbia. The journey began with Jennifer’s parents and is evolving through to this day. Livestock management has progressed from a combination of pasture and relatively passive forest grazing systems to a mix of extensive and intensive silvopasture practices.

Geoff and Shirley Bodman, Jennifer’s parents, purchased Jay Springs Ranch in 1964 from the original homesteader. Geoff was one of the founding members of a local naturalist’s group and an avid birder. Ecological and social values were an intrinsic part of their family life; thus the concept of agroforestry found fertile ground with Jennifer and Chris as they became more involved with the operation.

The original settler ranched with sheep (Ovis aries), which has continued on Jay Springs to this day. In cattle country, one might ask “Why sheep?” The decision came down to two major factors: economics and family. Cattle were too expensive to get into, and due to health constraints affecting Geoff at the time and off-farm jobs, sheep were easier for Shirley and the kids to manage than cattle. Jennifer and her two siblings, Jocelyn and Dean, grew up herding sheep on horseback in a very scenic part of the province, ultimately contributing to their decisions to return to the farm and facilitating their current-day intimate knowledge of every corner of the ranch. In 1985, a woodlot license was awarded to Geoff, adding a forestry dimension to their agriculture business. Currently, the ranch consists of a mixture of private and Crown lands1 requiring and enabling differing management based on the land tenure—private, grazing lease (area-based tenure of Crown land providing for rights to manage the forage resource within the lease area), and woodlot license (area-based tenure providing for rights to manage and harvest crown timber within the woodlot license area). Similar to many producers across North America, Jennifer and Chris, along with various members of the family at times, have supplemented ranch income via off-farm

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1 In the context of British Columbia, Crown land is land that is owned by the Province of British Columbia. The Province is the steward of the land and can lease, license, and sell Crown land for a variety of purposes, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, tourism, and recreational purposes. See http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/clad/strategic_land/leg/index.html (accessed 13 Sept. 2007, verified 13 Jan. 2009).