

## **Clear-cuts mean cash for landowners**

By Matthew S. L. Cate Staff Writer

SPRING CITY, Tenn. — Rhea County farmer Paul Tallent said about 40 acres on his farm would be useless had it not been clearcut.

"If I let it grow up, it wouldn't be worth anything," said Mr. Tallent, 63, who raises cattle on a 300-acre farm that's been in his family for more than 100 years.

Although some take issue with clear-cutting done on the Cumberland Plateau and elsewhere in Tennessee by the timber industry, 57 percent of all clear-cutting in the South is done on non-industrial private forest land like Mr. Tallent's, according to federal statistics.

People in the timber industry say most clear-cutting is done by the book, with professional loggers following the best-management practices established by the state to protect water sources.

Like other states in the South, however, Tennessee's best management practices are voluntary. But now some state lawmakers are beginning to consider regulating timber activity, from the big industrial operations to harvesting on a few dozen acres owned by a local farmer.

State Sen. Doug Jackson, D Dickson, favors regulating the timber industry. He said small landowners would be protected if loggers were required to go through the Tennessee Forestry Association's master logger program and file a basic plan that outlined what techniques they were going to use to remove timber.

"I'm not anti-farmer," he said. "I'm trying to propose reasonable steps to protect farmers."

Mr. Tallent said a lot of farmers in the Southeast Tennessee area rely on a few extra dollars from their farms' trees and that replanting some acreage in profitable pine trees is a good long-term investment.

He said he sold the timber off 44 acres for \$37,000. He paid a contractor \$4,600 to plant 17,500 loblolly pine trees on about 25 acres, five of which were already cleared. The rest of the land will be converted to pasture or left to regrow naturally.

Mr. Tallent said he doubts he'll be the one to profit from the pine trees, but he's certain his grandchildren or someone in the family someday will make some money.

Farmers say that because they want to protect their investment and often don't have the financial resources to make it through a tree crop failure, they are more likely to make sure their land is not harmed by poor clear-cutting techniques.

"Local landowners are awful particular about their timber because it's a resource," said Clifford Cordell, president of the Grundy County Farm Bureau.

He said a farmer is as much an environmentalist as a card-carrying Sierra Club member and would never do something to hurt his land.

"He's the closest one to it as anybody else," he said. "That's like saying he'd burn his own house down."

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