

What is State's Voice, State's Choice?

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) is diverse. United in our efforts to promote stewardship on America's family woodlands, we have learned that one size does not fit all. The *State's Voice, State's Choice* is designed to embrace diversity with creative, multifaceted solutions and asks each State Tree Farm Program to engage in a collaborative discussion to make an informed decision and select a pathway relative to third-party certification.

What is Third-Party Certification?

All Tree Farms in the ATFS network manage to the ATFS Standards of Sustainability. Under certification, a third-party assessor assesses on-the-ground management to the ATFS Standards, along with the performance of the Tree Farm Program as a whole, to verify that we embody our commitments to forest sustainability.

What are the Benefits of Third-Party Certification?

Recognition: Rigorous third-party certification offers additional validation and assurance of the good stewardship practiced by Tree Farmers.

Objective Feedback: Certification is a continuous improvement process. Third-party assessors often provide insightful observations that can drive innovations, improvements and efficiencies to forest management and the ATFS Program.

Credibility: Because assessments are conducted by impartial, objective third parties, certification adds a supplementary layer of credibility to forest management and the ATFS Program. For many of ATFS's partners, including state agencies, forest product companies landowner associations and conservation organizations, this additional rigor is essential.

Market Recognition: A central benefit of third-party ATFS certification is market recognition. Fiber that originates in third-party certified Tree Farms may be recognized and sold as "certified" in the global market place under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) or Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) labels. Market demand for certified fiber varies widely. In some situations, certified fiber enjoys access to markets that uncertified fiber does not and, in some cases, may even bring a premium. Several forest products companies including Weyerhaeuser, NewPage, Plum Creek, Idaho Forest Group and MeadWestvaco have issued supply chain preferences for fiber originating in third-party certified Tree Farms.

What are the Costs of Third-Party Certification?

ATFS certification is designed to minimize the barriers and costs of certification for landowners and partners. It is structured to be the most assessable option for family woodlands in the US. State programs choosing the Certification Pathway will generate revenues to help offset the costs of third-party certification. These contributions may be generated in any number of ways, through donations, support from partners, member dues or other means. The American Forest Foundation (AFF) heavily subsidizes ATFS third-party certification and will continue to do so under State's Choice.

Direct Cost: Third-party certification involves additional financial costs. These include the costs of contracting with third-party assessors and maintaining certificates.

Time and Coordination: Third-party certification requires additional time and coordination for State Tree Farm Programs and volunteers. This includes preparing for, implementing and responding to third-party assessments, coordinating with the AFF and third-party assessors and carefully maintaining certification documents.

What are the Choices?

Currently, all Tree Farms enrolled in State Tree Farm Programs are third-party certified. State Tree Farm Programs may choose to maintain their third-party certified status (the Certified Pathway) or forgo third-party certified status to focus on recognition and outreach (the Recognition Pathway).

What are the Timelines?

Each State Tree Farm Program must make a choice regarding third-party certification by the end of 2015. States choosing the Certification Pathway begin contributing to financial sustainability at the end of 2019.