

Agroforestry Network Continues to Grow with Completion of 4th Training Academy

The MU Center for Agroforestry hosted its' 4th Agroforestry Academy from July 25-29, 2016 in Columbia, Missouri. Twenty seven highly motivated trainees from twelve states (coast to coast - MA/NY to WY/OR) spent a very full week learning about agroforestry practices and agroforestry planning and design on campus and in the field.

New to the 4th Academy, a number of "hands-on/how-to" activities were built into the schedule for 2016 including: bee keeping, soil identification, tree grafting, and laying out silvopasture plots in existing woodlands. For the second year, there was a special emphasis on providing agroforestry training to US military veteran farmers. Twelve military veteran farmers received scholarships from UMCA through a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program "Armed-to-Farm" grant subaward from the University of Arkansas. Fifteen of the twenty seven academy trainees were farmers/landowners.

In addition to a visit to the MU Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center showcasing germplasm collections of numerous specialty crops and agroforestry practices, three different landowners were visited during the Academy demonstrating different agroforestry practices (e.g., silvopasture, alley cropping) and specialty crop options (e.g., chestnut, black walnut, pecan, oak, elderberry, pine straw).

Supported by an expert group of trainer/mentors drawn from UMCA, MU Forestry, USDA National Agroforestry Center, Lincoln University, the Savannah Institute and selected farmer educators, groups of trainees participated in an "agroforestry case study design exercise" throughout the week in order to apply what they had learned each day to their case study plan. This culminated in five individual group presentations to the entire Academy including active participation by the "case study farm landowner" at the close of the week.

A post-academy evaluation revealed that 93% of trainees rated the academy as excellent (82%) or good (11%). Trainees ranged in age from ~25 to 65+. One trainee commented *"Great job! This is a well thought out course presented by people that earnestly enjoy teaching. I really learned a lot and had a great time."* To date, the Agroforestry Academy has trained 108 individuals over four years.

Stay tuned for dates and details on the 5th Agroforestry Academy to be held July 23-28, 2017.