



## 2023 Annual Joint Conference: Well-Attended & A Wealth of Shared Knowledge

### *In This Issue*

- 1** 2023 Annual Joint Conference Recap
- 2** President's Message  
*Roger Blackwell*
- 3** AgroForestry Land  
*by Brendan Dooley*
- 6** Melanie Jones Interview  
with Roger Blackwell
- 11** Classified Ads

The 2023 Joint Conference of the Northern Nut Growers, Chestnut Growers of America, and the Walnut Council covered a substantial breadth of topics and offered lots of knowledge to be shared. If you want to refresh your memory with respect to all the activities and events, there is an excellent 6-minute-long YouTube video you can view at [youtu.be/FB804miqkYA](https://youtu.be/FB804miqkYA). We need to thank planning committee members Mike Gold, Ron Revord, Caroline Todd, Liz Jackson, Roger Blackwell, Greg Miller, Jerry Van Sambeek, and University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry staffers for all their efforts to make this a successful conference.

More than 325 people registered for the field tour, technical sessions, and/or the companion program. Throughout the conference, we had six lightning talks (aka show and tell); three keynote presenters that were given 45 minutes to develop their topics on chestnut, hazelnut, or black walnut and answer questions; 27 short technical presentations during the concurrent session on Tuesday and 7 technical presentations during the final session on Wednesday. We especially have to thank Shawn Mehlenbacher for making the best of poor AV equipment and acoustics at the banquet for his conference keynote presentation. This does not count the multiple presentations were heard on

*Continued on page 4...*

# THE CHESTNUT GROWER

Summer 2023

## About Chestnut Growers of America, Inc.

The purpose of Chestnut Growers of America is to promote chestnuts, to disseminate information to growers of chestnuts, to improve communications between growers within the industry, to support research and breeding work, and generally to further the interests and knowledge of chestnut growers. CGA advocates the delivery of only high-quality chestnuts to the marketplace.

CGA began as the Western Chestnut Growers in 1996 in Oregon where about 30 or so chestnut growers understood the need to join forces to promote chestnuts in the U.S. Eventually they realized that they needed to be a national organization and solicited memberships from every grower in the country, which took the membership to over 100. The name of the organization was changed to Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., and it was granted 501(c)(5) status. Annual meetings take place around the country in an effort to make it possible for a maximum number of people to attend. A newsletter, *The Chestnut Grower*, is published quarterly and distributed by mail and/or email. CGA maintains an extensive resource site available only to members containing information helpful in growing and marketing. Visit [chestnutgrowers.org](http://chestnutgrowers.org) for more information.

## Board of Directors

<i>President</i>	Roger Blackwell Milford, MI	(810) 923-2954 <a href="mailto:rblackwel@comcast.net">rblackwel@comcast.net</a>
<i>Vice President</i>	Sara Fitzsimmons University Park, PA	(814) 863-7192 <a href="mailto:sff3@psu.edu">sff3@psu.edu</a>
<i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>	Jack Kirk Richmond, VA	(804) 357-1137 <a href="mailto:jackschestnuts@gmail.com">jackschestnuts@gmail.com</a>
<i>Director</i>	Steve Jones Selah, WA	(509) 697-4160
<i>Director</i>	Greg Miller Carrollton, OH	(330) 627-3181
<i>Director</i>	Tom Wahl Wapello, IA	(319) 729-5905
<i>Director</i>	Rick Hartlieb Robesonia, PA	(610) 914-5047

## Committees

<i>Editor/Webmaster</i>	Rita Blythe	<a href="mailto:chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com">chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com</a>
-------------------------	-------------	--

## Annual Membership Dues

Single membership, \$45; Household membership, \$55; Associate membership, \$60. Members receive *The Chestnut Grower* quarterly. Emailed newsletters are included. Mailed newsletters are an additional \$5 per year. A \$10 late fee is applied to membership renewals submitted after April 1.

## Advertising Rates

Full page	\$20.00
Half page	\$15.00
Quarter page	\$10.00
Business card (4 issues)	\$15.00
Classifieds	<b>FREE</b>

Email ads to [chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com](mailto:chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com). Send payment for ads to Jack Kirk, 2300 Bryan Park Av., Richmond, VA 23228. Make checks payable to Chestnut Growers of America, Inc. OR visit [www.chestnutgrowers.org/paydues.html](http://www.chestnutgrowers.org/paydues.html) to submit payment online via PayPal.

## Editorial Opinion

The views, articles and advertising appearing in *The Chestnut Grower* do not necessarily reflect the attitude nor policy of Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., its members, officers, Board of Directors, or Editor. Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., and this publication are not responsible for errors and/or misrepresentations in advertising. The Editor reserves the right to reject or edit all material submitted for publication.

© 2023. Original articles may be reprinted with written permission of the author and this publication.



## Message from CGA President Roger Blackwell, Chestnut Grower

*Hello Chestnut Growers of America,*

This year's annual meeting at the University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry Columbia, Missouri held July 23rd through July 26th, 2023 was well attended. Chestnut Growers of America, Northern Nut Growers Association, and Walnut Council jointly shared the 2023 Annual Conference this year. The first day was spent on field trips at the Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Farm. The next one and a half days of presentations were devoted to talks about nut tree topics: Walnuts, Chestnuts, Hazelnuts, Pecans, and Paw paws. On Wednesday afternoon meeting participants were offered various places to see local operations. CGA wants to give a special thank you to Dr. Mike Gold, who has made this 2023 Annual Conference a wonderful experience.

In this newsletter you will find two articles. The first article is an interview I did with Melanie Jones, talking about my chestnut growing and marketing experiences. The second article was submitted by Brendan Dooley about Agroforestry Land.

CGA wants to thank the individuals who have submitted articles for this newsletter, and I encourage others in our organization to provide articles for future newsletters. We are all learning something new each year about growing chestnut trees in orchards.

Next year we plan to do a joint meeting again with NNGA and CGA, on July 21-24, 2024, in Syracuse, New York. The meeting will feature joint and concurrent technical sessions, an all-day field tour to the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and a Sunday evening reception with social to allow members to mingle and share ideas on growing chestnuts.

Remember the main purpose of CGA is to promote chestnuts. This includes disseminating information to growers of chestnuts; improving communications between growers within the industry; supporting research and breeding work; and furthering the interests and knowledge of Chestnut Growers. CGA advocates the delivery of only high-quality chestnuts to the marketplace.

I hope you all have a plentiful harvest in the fall 2023.

Best regards,

*Roger V. Blackwell*

# AgroForestry Land (AFL): Bridging Landowners and Farmers for a Sustainable Future

By Brendan Dooley | [brendandooley@agroforestryland.com](mailto:brendandooley@agroforestryland.com)

Agroforestry is defined as the intentional integration of trees and perennial shrubs into livestock or crop systems. At AgroForestry Land (AFL), we like to think of it as simply: planting trees with a purpose.

While agroforestry offers a multitude of benefits such as diversifying income, increasing crop yields, reducing labor inputs, and improving carbon sequestration, its widespread implementation across the country has faced challenges. This article aims to address these obstacles and shed light on the solutions provided by us at AFL, a platform dedicated to accelerating the adoption of agroforestry.

## Challenge One: Addressing Lack of Awareness

One of the primary barriers to agroforestry adoption is the lack of awareness among landowners. Many landowners, including farmers, investors, hunters, and recreation enthusiasts, remain unaware of the potential benefits that agroforestry practices can bring to their land and financial well-being. Consequently, they may believe that the

only way to profit significantly from their land is to sell it, often to developers for conventional housing projects. At AFL, we recognize this knowledge gap and have developed a platform to bridge the information divide.

Our website, AgroForestryland.com, serves as a comprehensive listing service connecting agroforestry farmers with private and public landowners to implement agroforestry systems on their land. Using this platform, agroforestry farmers can reach out to landowners who have created listings and work together to form farmland leases or partnerships.

By facilitating these connections, we aim to empower landowners to explore the possibilities of agroforestry and discover how it can transform their properties. Our website also features galleries showcasing stunning visuals of agroforestry demonstration farms in Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin (with more to come), offering landowners a glimpse into the aesthetic appeal and potential of agroforestry systems.

In addition to our online platform, we have and continue to collaborate with

numerous organizations to promote agroforestry through various channels, including social media, blogging, and word-of-mouth initiatives. By leveraging these partnerships, we strive to increase agroforestry awareness and facilitate its wider adoption among landowners.

## Challenge Two: Overcoming Implementation Costs

Another significant challenge faced by those considering agroforestry is the cost associated with implementing such systems. Planting dozens to hundreds of trees can be a substantial upfront investment, and it can vary significantly depending on the type of tree you are planting and the stage of growth it is in.

Moreover, trees and perennial shrubs typically require a minimum of three years to reach maturity before they can be harvested for fruit and nuts (and potentially several decades if harvested for timber). This delay in generating revenue can be particularly burdensome for agroforestry farmers, especially those who rely on farming as their primary

*Continued on page 10...*

## Mark Your Calendars!

*For the 2024 Annual Meeting, a joint meeting with the Northern Nut Growers Association.*

**July 21-24, 2024**

**Syracuse, New York**

*More information coming soon!*

## 2023 Member Directory

An updated Member Directory was sent to all CGA members via email.

If you have any corrections to your listing, or if you would like to receive a printed copy, please send a request to the editor at [chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com](mailto:chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com).

## CGA Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer Position Open Next Year

*If you are interested in serving as the next CGA Treasurer/Secretary, or to nominate someone, contact CGA President Roger Blackwell at [rblackwel@comcast.net](mailto:rblackwel@comcast.net) or 810-923-2954.*



*Continued from page 1...*

the field tours at the Horticulture and Agroforestry Farm or Mike Trial's walnut plantings. More than 20 posters and at least 10 exhibitors lined the halls of the conference venue. For those who could not register or attend, the 60-page Conference Program is posted on the members page of the CGA website. It contains abstracts or summaries for most of the indoor presentations and short bios with contact information for most of the presenters.

Folks on the Companion tour enjoyed themselves much of the time out of the heat. The group car-pooled to the Warm Springs Ranch, the official breeding facility of the Budweiser Clydesdales (it looks like we could not get away from

Thank you to the presenters, organizers, and attendees of the 2023 Joint Conference of the Northern Nut Growers Association, the Chestnut Growers of America, and the Walnut Council for an informative and inspiring gathering at the University of Missouri!

breeding programs at this conference). At noon they stopped at the A-Frame Winegarden on the Blufftop that overlooks the Missouri River. The last stop was the Tasting Room on the Bluff, if they wished, to taste a few of the Les Bourgeois Vineyard award winning selections or beer and spirits from the Broadway Brewery and Rocheport Distilling Company.

Following the conference, Chestnut Charlie and Debbie Milks hosted multiple small groups at their Organic Tree Crops operation. A few of us were surprised that folks from the eastern US were willing to drive an extra five hours to see their operation. The other post Conference tour was to the Missouri Pacific Lumber Company.

Mealtimes offered the best opportunities for networking and was kicked off on Sunday by a welcoming picnic dinner featuring BBQ pork freshly cut from hogs slow roasted outside the conference venue. Special thanks to the Missouri Chapter and John Buchanan for donating and preparing the two hogs.

We had an excellent catered lunch inside the haybarn for the field day at the Horticulture and Agroforestry Farm. Early morning thunder showers kept the temperatures down but forced a few folks to venture early to the HARF haybarn for shelter, shade, and conversation. As





anticipated temperatures rose rapidly late in the afternoon and the programs were adjusted so folks could spend time visiting inside the haybarn or under the Mikes' walnut trees or venture home early.

Tuesday, we observed numerous exchanges of information in the halls over box lunches, presumably over what folks heard in the technical session that morning or earlier in the conference. If not visiting, folks were spending time viewing the posters and exhibits.

As the group photo will attest to, the social/banquet was well attended by members of all three organizations. A show of hands suggested we were nearly equally split among the organizations.

All three organizations shared time after the banquet exposing many of us to the traditional activities from the other organizations. Although initially a source of confusion, having both a live and silent auction profited the research programs for all three organizations. The six-minute YouTube video shows we had some nice items to auction off. 🍷

*This summary was adapted from a summary submitted by the Northern Nut Growers Association Publications Committee for publication in The Nutshell, the quarterly publication of the Northern Nut Growers Association.*



# Melanie Jones of the New Branching Out Podcast Speaks With Roger Blackwell

The “Branching Out” podcast, hosted by Melanie Jones, co-founder of United Chestnuts ([unitedchestnuts.com](http://unitedchestnuts.com)), is an exciting new addition to our community of chestnut growers. Melanie tells us, “We launched the podcast to support our industry’s growing interest in learning, connecting, and telling industry-related stories from different perspectives. The timing is ideal for this.”

Roger Blackwell, President of Chestnut Growers of America, was featured in the first episode. Anyone who has spent time with Roger knows he is passionate, knowledgeable, and invested in the industry’s future. Enjoy his valuable insights in the episode transcription below.

This interview has been edited slightly for length and clarity.

**Melanie Jones:** United Chestnuts Community publishes a weekly blog at [unitedchestnuts.com](http://unitedchestnuts.com) and *Branching Out* podcast. As we work to create a robust chestnut community in the United States, it’s important we all share tips, information, challenges overcome, stories, how-to’s, and events.

And now, we have the opportunity to interview some select industry leaders, such as Roger Blackwell! In fact, Roger just returned from Lugo, Spain, where he attended the International Chestnut Symposium.

I’m looking at your credentials. You’re the President of New Era Chestnuts, which we’ll discuss in a minute, President of Chestnut Growers of America, President of Chestnut Growers, Inc., and an active Midwest Chestnut Producers Council member.

Your credentials are impressive! How do you manage all of this? Why do you take on the responsibility of these leadership roles?

**Roger Blackwell:** It’s a team effort among people in each of these organizations working together. New Era Chestnuts is my company, and I partner with my brother-in-law. We started our business in 2007 when we bought the orchard we own.



Roger Blackwell

We are growing chestnuts on 53 acres in Michigan.

It’s in an area known as a “fruit belt” -- many blueberry farms and apple orchards. The soil and PH are ideal, along with other growing conditions suitable for chestnut trees. Chestnut Growers, Inc. (CGI) is a cooperative. We currently have 40 members in our cooperative. CGI is growing the commercial chestnut industry in the State of Michigan. We support all our growers and help them get things started and provide coaching along the way. You can only join the co-op once the orchards are in production.

CGI taps into the Michigan State University facility, rents space from them, and processes the chestnuts there. Having refrigeration at that location helps us keep the chestnuts fresh.

If it weren’t for Michigan State University and some of the professors there, I wouldn’t be in this business right now. I’m forever grateful to many, but in particular to Dr. Dennis Fulbright. He passed away in 2019 and was an inspiration, friend, and guide.

The Midwest Chestnut Producers Council (MCPC) is a nonprofit organization to help those interested in the industry. As you know, we started in 2000, putting together a steering committee. We use it as

a vehicle for securing grants and helping to teach the public and our growers about chestnuts and best practices. It’s our learning organization.

**Melanie:** Tell us how you got started.

**Roger:** Starting in 1989, we planted seedlings on a property my father-in-law owned. For about 12 years, we planted over 3,000 seedlings, and at different points, they would die. We’d replant, and this continued for a good while.

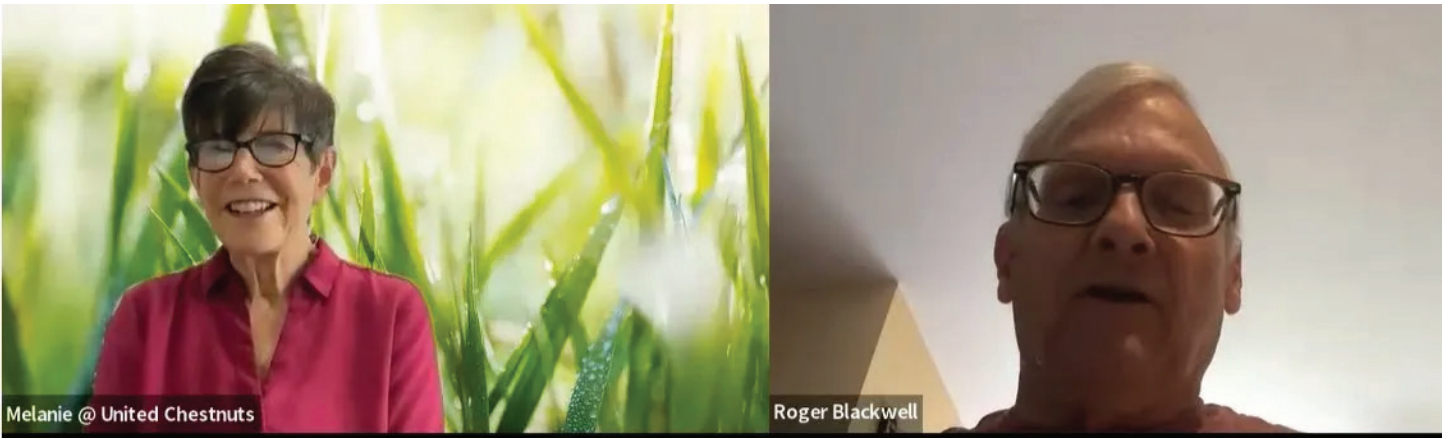
From that experience, I learned many things we were doing wrong. We had the wrong piece of property; the PH was way too high, the soil was heavy clay, infested with deer, and so on. We had many fun times deer hunting, but it needed to be much better to be an orchard business.

In 2004 I suggested to my father-in-law that we sell the place and find a new location. Unfortunately, he died that year, and we didn’t do that. We ended up selling the 114-acre farm. My brother-in-law and I continued to look for a good location. And we met another chestnut grower who was in his nineties. He wanted to sell his property to someone who would continue with chestnuts. In 2007 we bought that farm and started New Era Chestnuts.

**Melanie:** I didn’t realize that was how the name New Era Chestnuts came to be. So that’s interesting. What did you do before getting into this business?

**Roger:** I had a tremendous career at the United States Postal Service. I started as a letter carrier and was in management within four years. I served in USPS management roles for 32 years and moved around a lot. One promotion led to another. I earned my MBA but always had an entrepreneurial vision of owning my own business.

Our extended family was in Michigan, and we’d visit often and help with the chestnuts. The chestnut business sparked my interest and inspired me. I began focusing on the chestnut industry and developed a business plan for a 20-acre chestnut orchard. New Era Chestnuts was eventually born in 2007.



Roger Blackwell of Chestnut Growers Inc. & New Era Chestnuts chats with Melanie Jones of United Chestnuts.

**Melanie:** Do you feel like you've been a pioneer in developing the chestnut cooperative concept?

**Roger:** This is my opinion. We are a true marketing co-op for the chestnut industry. Each member buys a share of the stock when they join. We have an application fee, and each owner, including myself, owns equal shares of stock in the company. We then share the cost of equipment, facilities, processing costs, and so forth. For many, it's the only way to sell a significant portion of their product. They simply bring the chestnuts into the processing operation, and we take care of the rest.

**Melanie:** Do you feel this is a direction US-based growers need to move towards to increase demand and build awareness of the product in the United States?

**Roger:** It's one model that works very well. We're incorporated under the State of Michigan's business law. We have our bylaws, and everything is based on a cooperative. And we can adjust as needed.

For instance, if you're part of the co-op, you cannot sell directly to consumers in any way that competes with the efforts of the overall CGI group.

**Melanie:** That would be competitive against the cooperative rules. You're looking for all-in participation from members, which makes sense.

Brad and I are relatively new in this business. We've been working on this for about eight years, and of course, that's still considered a newbie in the world of chestnuts! Because we also sell trees, we talk to people exploring this business opportunity, landowners wanting to attract wildlife or increase property values, and now even foodies and health food advocates.

That's one reason that we started the United Chestnuts Community. We saw the need for a digital community to exchange ideas, knowledge, experience, and expertise--all within a supportive environment devoted to increasing awareness of chestnut trees, nuts, climate improvements, agroforestry, business opportunities, and so on.

That way, maybe you won't get a call from every person wanting to learn more about chestnuts! There's so much to learn, and rather than talking about the specifics of growing trees, I wanted to get your thoughts on a few other topics.

What's your overall message to new people who are right now looking for land, researching how to create orchards, and so forth? It's hard, but it's rewarding, right?

**Roger:** It certainly is. One of the first things I tell everybody is it's like real estate. If you're buying property, you must look at what's growing already, either on the property or right next door. If there are a lot of chestnut orchards around, that's the first good sign.

Another tip, I look for land near farms growing blueberries, peaches, or apples. Those are good fruit trees. And I'm going to back up here: chestnuts are a fruit, not a nut. Chestnuts are 55% water moisture, and it's essential to recognize that.

The other thing is knowing what type of equipment is required for success—refrigeration, for example. To keep chestnuts fresh, growers must stabilize the nuts around 30 to 32 degrees. The moisture content ensures a fresh chestnut arrives when you sell it in the marketplace.

I've invested so much time in educating buyers. They've learned from me. We've experienced everything from chestnut

dehydration to mold development, to you name it! We can compete with Italian chestnuts with the correct sales strategies because ours should be fresher than their product!

**Melanie:** Are you selling primarily to commercial buyers or individuals? Do you anticipate a change in chestnut sales trends?

**Roger:** Our sales have increased tremendously through internet sales. We must set aside some for the general public because we sell primarily to commercial buyers. We have a specific supply for that purpose.

Interestingly, we supply major brands such as Meijer, Whole Foods, and Detroit Produce Terminal. Some of our customers buy thousands of pounds. That's a vital advantage of the co-op. Not all of the 40 growers will produce chestnuts every year: that's just a reality of the business. So, we have a consistent offering customers can count on. Chestnut Growers, Inc. is hovering around 200,000 pounds annually. I anticipate us reaching about 500k pounds in five years and a million in about fifteen years.

**Melanie:** A million pounds of chestnuts, exciting! One of the things that I love about this industry is the idea of creating more demand in the US – to educate the population about a product and food source that was vital not that long ago in the US. Do you see the untapped potential for us as growers to get busy and share the message?

**Roger:** Absolutely. It is there, but it all starts with putting the trees in the ground. You can't get ahead of yourself. You have to have suitable trees in the ground, in the

*Continued on next page...*

*Continued from previous page...*

right location, and they've got to develop, and after about ten years, you'll have some decent production. After 15 years, you will know what to expect from the orchards. That's my experience.

There are so many variables. We grow grafted cultivars here in Michigan. That's different from the philosophy of raising seedlings. You are right, Melanie; the demand in the US will continue to grow as we educate consumers about the many benefits of the chestnut.

**Melanie:** As I speak, write, and engage with others on the topic of chestnuts, I've found that 80% of people have rarely even had a chestnut. Imagine when we demonstrate why it was once such a food staple in our country! And now the health advantages - that's a lucrative market.

**Roger:** Right. Another interesting point is that we've been able to raise our prices.

**Melanie:** As you mentioned, some growers have expressed concern that producing too many chestnuts will result in greater supply than demand. If we raise awareness and generate demand, that won't be an issue.

**Roger:** Well, I'm here to tell you that's true. We've been able to keep increasing prices to keep up with inflation, just like everyone else.

**Melanie:** Do you see a day when maybe we own a chestnut co-op in Kentucky? CGI is in Michigan, and there are other regional co-ops nationwide. The co-ops could organize and form a sales and marketing organization to generate demand and revenue for the overall industry.

**Roger:** Great question and perspective. I've thought about it often. We once sold Christmas trees and joined the Michigan Christmas Tree Association. They assessed growers and determined a contribution amount owed to the association. That money was used for national marketing initiatives on behalf of growers.

I can see an offshoot for us all—90-second marketing spots etc. The problem at the moment is we need more chestnuts in production.

**Melanie:** I see a day when we can expect that type of marketing through a council. We need to leverage the talents of the people making up this industry. I'm a national sales director for CORT, a



*Chestnut Orchards at New Era Chestnuts in Michigan.*

Berkshire Hathaway company; you were a senior leader within the USPS; Brad was a mechanic at Delta Airlines; a grower friend of ours is a Financial Advisor and CPA; and there are plenty of experienced growers and academics. The list of talent is immense. As we harness this talent, we can drive growth through innovation and creativity on the demand side of the business. This interests me tremendously.

As you said, we can't get ahead of yourselves. Still, if we're encouraging people to investigate chestnut farming, we want them to know that there's a sustainable growth opportunity and a solid ROI. Chestnut farming is relatively expensive to launch, it's hard work, and there are plenty of challenges, BUT to be part of bringing this product and lifestyle to the forefront in the United States is invigorating.

**Roger:** We're still a young industry. Italy is producing millions of pounds of chestnuts, and they send us millions of dollars' worth of chestnuts.

**Melanie:** Let's change that! How would a marketing council differ from Chestnut Growers of America? This is a good segue into what that organization is intended to be about and your leadership role there as President.

**Roger:** My focus is to educate and help growers throughout the United States. I benefited from learning from so many growers. Number one thing: this is not

a get-rich-quick scheme. It becomes so important to understand the market. And I know a lot about the market.

We are working on value-added products like chestnut chips and flour here in Michigan. The product is expensive because it takes three pounds of chestnuts to make one pound of a dried product, whether chips or chestnut flour. It's hard to justify creating these value-added products when we can sell most of our fresh chestnuts for top dollar. For example, I have breweries that want to buy our chestnut chips for \$5 per pound. I can't sell them for that!

**Melanie:** As more chestnut farms come online with production, increased supply could change that down the road. But right now, that's not the case.

**Roger:** We're not ready. I'm focused on this research because I'm looking twenty years out. Soon, I'll need someone to take up the post of President of CGA, but I look at this type of work as overall industry research.

**Melanie:** That's how we're also looking at it. More and more people are looking to change careers, live in rural areas, work remotely, or perhaps retire from the traditional workforce. Many are exploring opportunities within the chestnut community. I believe organizations like Chestnut Growers of America, MCPC, and NNGA are great places to go and meet other people and learn.

Frankly, there's so much to learn. More and more people are asking us for recommendations and advice. It's better to say here are the resources to tap into rather than "here's what you should do".

Everyone has a viewpoint or perspective. All of us share insights and recommendations based on different experiences and lenses. At some point, people have to do their research. And I wanted to see if you agree with that.

**Roger:** I do agree with that! This is where I reflect on Dennis Fulbright. Bless his soul! If I hadn't met him in 1992, I would not be in the chestnut business. At that point, we experienced a lot of frustration on many fronts. Nowadays, there's a lot more information online. MSU.edu lists things to know, a business plan, a business model to use, research studies, and more.

**Melanie:** I'm unsure of your opinion, so let me throw this out. What's the best chestnut tree to plant?



**Roger:** Here's my opinion, and it's based on my involvement with CGA. I'll use Dunstan as an example.

Some people graft to Dunstan, but it's primarily a Chinese seedling. It's a good tree and has good-tasting nuts. It grows rather well in different locations in the United States. It even grows well in Florida. It's a hardy tree - and quite popular with many.

Let me share an example. There are some other cultivars that aren't too popular on the western side of the country but are in our area. We did a significant planting and decided on Colossal. It's a Japanese-European hybrid. These trees produce a large nut in California, but many said it didn't taste good.

In Michigan, the Colossal grows well and tastes good because of the soil and the environment. The chestnuts from the Colossal grown in Washington State taste less sweet than in Michigan. So there are many variables.

**Melanie:** I read a quote from Amy Miller a while back, something to the effect that it's just smart if you can have different types of cultivars or seedlings of open-pollinated known cultivars and also spread them around various parts of the land. We've had orchards in some upper ridges avoid frost, as an example, while lower areas experienced frost.

**Roger:** Diversity is essential. I have a diverse orchard of different cultivars. Still, I do not mix Chinese with European because the pollination seems to cause a problem called internal kernel breakdown, like a brown rot internally.

I have customers who love Chinese chestnuts. And I wish I had more orchards to plant Chinese chestnuts, especially some of the different products from the University of Missouri.

**Melanie:** Agreed! We have Chinese and Dunstan in our orchards but recently added seedlings from The Chestnut Improvement Network stock. We currently have a nice variety of PQQ, Amy, Sleeping Giant, etc.

During the last Midwest Chestnut Producers Council meeting, the group's President, Corey Allen, said, "Great. Another challenge to look forward to." If it's not one thing; it's another. We keep figuring things out, and with the

ability to share information, it will just help everyone, in the long run, to keep talking about it. I appreciate Erin Lizotte at Michigan State for her work and her team, and I know they just got a new grant for the Green Initiative. We keep learning together.

**Roger:** Lots of help. There are Extension services. And we turn to several people at Michigan State University to stay informed of the reach of things like brown rot, oak wilt, pests and so forth.

**Melanie:** We're working with Clemson on a potential study evaluating and improving chestnut production. It's fun to see the uptick in interest in the universities having staff try to get grants and do research.

I know from my career that how we work is changing, and many of us can now live in rural and/or remote communities. This allows those with an interest to explore farming. And if the industry is to grow significantly, we want to make people aware of these opportunities.

**Roger:** In our situation, we decided to invest \$15,000 each to get things going. We needed to buy the property. We support many people now who already own their property. Maybe they inherited it. Perhaps their parents or grandparents had the property and now the family wants to grow something different on the property. Lots to learn!

From a business standpoint, I told my brother-in-law Doug and our wives that we would invest in the business, but eventually, the chestnuts will pay our mortgage. About six years into it, we had an income. Now it's every year, and we can cover our expenses. And we've been able to do that for the last ten years.

**Melanie:** Fantastic. Many financial models suggest exciting revenue expectations based on orchard spacing, tree yields, selling prices, and associated expenses.

We're not in full total production yet, but we know a lot of other expenses come with this business when you're getting started. It's important to know there's a payoff down the road.

**Roger:** You need some money to start, but, for us, it pays for itself now. We can cover everything we're doing, plus buy new equipment.

**Melanie:** What's your favorite part of the business?

**Roger:** Sales, of course, but also growing trees is what I like. The trees start to leaf out rather late. Then you see the catkins. I love to watch them grow, and before you know it, the burrs appear. By mid-July, the burrs are really growing, and throughout the summer they get larger and larger. Then suddenly, it's September and October, and they start dropping.

We set up a temporary electric fence around the orchard so the deer can't get it, starting in the middle of September. We mechanically harvest the orchard and must keep the deer out so we don't have the deer poop in the orchard!

I enjoy watching the development of the trees each year. I've got three primary sections in our New Era orchards. The older part is about 25 years old. The middle block is eight to ten years old and now a bunch of two-year-olds.

**Melanie:** I look forward to seeing your orchards! We've got about a thousand trees right now, but we just cleared some significant new areas and will plant a lot this winter. It's hard to keep up with the learning curve, but like so many in this industry, it's a bit of an obsession!

**Roger:** I encourage anyone interested in this business to join MCPC and Chestnut Growers of America to develop their knowledge and plan to go to their meetings. It's usually in a different location in the United States. We're working on meeting in New York State in 2024 and then in California in 2025.

**Melanie:** I appreciate you joining me here, Roger! It will be fun to share this with all the curious people entering the chestnut community. 🍓

*You can subscribe to the Branching Out podcast on YouTube, Spotify, and other social channels or sign up for the United Chestnuts weekly blog at [unitedchestnuts.com](http://unitedchestnuts.com). If you want to tell your story, contact Melanie at [melanie@unitedchestnuts.com](mailto:melanie@unitedchestnuts.com) to explore.*

Continued from page 3...

source of income and/or lease the land they cultivate.

To address these financial challenges, we strongly advocate for the establishment of customized farmland leases or partnerships between landowners and agroforestry farmers. Such agreements allow both parties to share the initial investment costs, share profits from crops, and establish long-term commitments (five years or more) that enable them to maximize the benefits of agroforestry. By fostering these cooperative arrangements at AFL, we look to alleviate the financial burden associated with implementing agroforestry systems for landowners and agroforestry farmers.

### Conclusion

Agroforestry offers landowners a unique opportunity to generate income while retaining ownership of their land. Instead of resorting to conventional options like selling their property, clearing more acres, or adopting labor-intensive farming practices, landowners can embrace agroforestry to improve the profitability and efficiency of their land.

In addition to this, with the increased demands for food production and climate resilience, agroforestry emerges as one of the most practical and cost-effective solutions available. Recognizing this, numerous organizations, including the United States Department of Agriculture, have actively embarked on public education campaigns to promote agroforestry and encourage its widespread adoption. By embracing agroforestry practices, landowners not only secure a sustainable future for their land but also contribute to crucial agricultural and environmental goals.

If you are a landowner seeking to invest in one of your most valuable assets, we invite you to create a free listing on our platform. Remember, they say money doesn't grow on trees, but with agroforestry, it can. 🌳

Visit AFL online at [agroforestryland.com](http://agroforestryland.com).



*Figure 1. 18-acre agroforestry alley cropping system of white poplar oak trees at Silverwood Park in Edgerton, Wisconsin. The trees were planted in 2018 by the nonprofit Savanna Institute and other partners of the park*



*Figure 2. Field of chestnut saplings planted at the Savanna Institute's agroforestry demonstration farm in Spring Green, Wisconsin.*



## Chestnut Growers of America Flyers Available Upon Request

CGA has developed a flyer for our organization that nursery owners can hand out to customers or include with orders. All members are welcome and encouraged to use the flyer as well.

The flyer can be downloaded and printed from the members-only page of the CGA website. CGA will also print flyers and ship them to you at no cost.

To request flyers, email the editor at [chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com](mailto:chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com) and include the number of flyers you are requesting and confirm your mailing address.

## For Sale / Seeking

### 80-Acre Piece of Land with Chesnut Farm in Moscow, IA

Wears Auctioneering in Solon, IA is auctioning off an 80 acre piece of land with a chestnut farm in Moscow, IA. Reach out to Lynn Pinneke ([wearsofficecoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:wearsofficecoordinator@gmail.com)) with questions. Details here: [www.wearsauctioneering.com/auction/80-acre-oasis-in-cedar-county---live-public-real-estate-auction-69072/](http://www.wearsauctioneering.com/auction/80-acre-oasis-in-cedar-county---live-public-real-estate-auction-69072/) details.

### Looking for Information on Bulk Chestnut Peelers

Looking for info on, recommendations for, and product descriptions of bulk chestnut peelers. Have looked online, but not a lot of info, especially the ones made in China (which we really don't want to buy). By bulk, I am looking at 25 to 200 pounds at this time. Any advice or help appreciated. Contact John & Jennifer Shank of Chestnut Acres Farm at [jenohn@charter.net](mailto:jenohn@charter.net).

### Seeking Torakuri, Kaibutsu, and Jenny Scion Wood

I am searching for Torakuri, Kaibutsu, and Jenny scion wood. If you can help, please contact Davor Juretic at [juretic.davor@gmail.com](mailto:juretic.davor@gmail.com).



Chestnut Growers of America  
2300 Bryan Park Ave.  
Richmond, VA 23228

# THE CHESTNUT GROWER

Summer 2023

## Chinese Chestnuts Proudly Grown by Family Farmers in America's Heartland!

Prairie Grove Chestnut Growers is an association of over 60 chestnut growers from Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri!

### Harvest



Our Chinese Chestnuts are harvested and brought in fresh by our growers

### Cleaned + Sorted



Next, our chestnuts are cleaned, sorted by size, bagged, and refrigerated to maintain peak freshness and flavor.

### Delivered for Your Enjoyment



Lastly, our chestnuts are delivered to you and over 1,800 other happy customers across 46 states and counting. No matter how you enjoy them, our chestnuts are guaranteed to satisfy!

**(563) 260-6333**