

Ohio Woodlands Journal column  
David Lytle, State Forester and Chief  
Ohio Division of Forestry

### Consumer choices influence woodland management

The choice between a cherry, oak, or hickory cabinet can dramatically improve the look of a kitchen. Each wood has its own unique color and grain pattern bringing a different and special feel to a home. Recently, consumers in growing numbers have been choosing the lighter-hued, smaller grain of maple cabinets for their remodeling or new home projects. Not since the 1970s have maple cabinets supplanted oaks and cherry as the favorite pick for remodeling.

Perhaps unbeknownst to many consumers is that their choice of cabinet, trim or hardwood flooring may not only impact the look of their home, but also influence the health of Ohio's forests, and the economy of the heavily wooded areas of our state.

Ohio lies amid one of the greatest and highest quality forests found anywhere. Known as the Central Hardwoods, it stretches from Missouri to New Jersey and south to Tennessee. It is unlike other forests in the World for many reasons, including the great diversity of species that make up its canopy and understory.

Walk these forests and you'll quickly see a wide array of the 150 different tree species that make up our woodlands. In addition to this great biodiversity that benefits so many other plant and animal species, is some of the world's highest quality timber.

Ohio is at the center of this unique forest region and produces hardwoods of such quality that companies from China, Saudi Arabia, and Europe buy our valuable timber on a weekly basis.

While quality cherry and walnut are found across the state, Ohio is noted for producing red and white oak. The tightness of the grain and the color of the wood are unlike anywhere else. These qualities are the foundation of a \$15 billion wood industry that supports a thriving cabinet and furniture business in our state.

But as the popularity of maple cabinets has increased, the value of oak – and specifically red oak – has plummeted at the sawmills and on the larger market. Red oaks are among the most prevalent, high value species in Ohio woodlands. As their value has dropped, so has the income of Ohio landowners, loggers, sawmillers and wood processors.

More than 100,000 Ohioans make a living in some way connected to the high value hardwoods of our state. No where is this more important than Vinton County with one of the state's highest rates of unemployment. This Southeast Ohio county is the heart of the state's timber industry where four of the top ten employers in the region are modern sawmills. A recurring theme from these sawmill managers is that due to depressed red oak markets their profit margins are increasingly tight.

Economists predict that until an upswing is seen in the demand for oak cabinets and flooring, the depressed prices for red oak will continue.

Consumers can help support the vital, wood industry jobs from these areas, and encourage the use of a renewable resource, by asking for Ohio raised or processed woods. Installing red oak trim and flooring in a home is not just a way of adding beauty and value, it's also a way of supporting jobs in our state.