When farm foresters became interested in forestry as a diversity in land use, regimes suggested to us were to plant six feet by six (2500 sp) with mandatory blanking up. Then came the killer, a working plan as long as your arm; thin and prune, thin and prune down to 400 sp: far too many. It was a work-heavy and expensive job imposed on busy people. Were these the "robust forests" of the past of which the editor writes? I hope not. I would expect the "robust forests" to be the Fenton board regimes, or some that Sutton advocated for clearwood production.

Agroforestry - Low Input and Simple
Later in his article, the editor writes of a low-input system with its "organic" or "permaculture" connotations and its "hippy" undertones.

Let me set out one of several low-input farm-forestry regimes. Yes, we do have hippies in our midst. I believe they are too, and often stimulating.

This is a common agroforestry regime:
1. Plant 450 s/h a pines in groups of three at 8 metre centres, or in pairs if of aged cuttings.
2. Sail or stability prune any bushy top heavy trees at 18 months - a few hours work per hectare.
3. At three years of age or height 3-4 metres, form prune the selected trees. This is the start of the pre-emptive pruning (as first proposed by Franklin). The method involves removing any rambuncs, correcting the leader if necessary, removing any coarse rogue branches and lightening any basket whorls. If aged cuttings are used, the form will be good and little work is needed. This operation takes less than a minute. A tree selection can be made at this stage and surplus trees removed.
4. A clear lift is made at DBH 12-14 cm and continued up to 10-11 cm, which usually leaves a green crown of three metres or half total height. Under the pre-emptive pruning regime the correction of the residual green crown is then done, tying up basket whorls (the big trouble), leaders and so on. Epicormics are rubbed off, even in the lower whorls of the green crown.
5. This pruning procedure is repeated to a height of either 6.3 or 8.5 metres. Is this high technology? I think not. But it is certainly low-input as to work and capital.

I could go on but I will restrain myself, except to point out to foresters on the Pumice Plateau that they are growing pulp trees. As Mick O'Reilly, one of our Farm Forestry members, said at a seminar: "We do our thinning before we plant our trees". I think timber regimes of the present day are simplistic, keeping basic ends in view. Perhaps a look across the fence to observe what the farm foresters are doing would help.

Farm foresters have adopted other work-easy regimes: the one-shot silviculture of aspen as proposed by Bun; the group plantings of one eucalypt at 10 metre spacings surrounded by four close-planted pines (Terlesk); close-spaced, in-row planted pines and eucalypts widespread between rows (MacKay, Barr, Tombokson and Moore); eclectic thinning of close-planted double rows of pines through gorse; I could go on. All of these regimes are low-input and efficient methods of growing early pruned fat trees.

This is not intensive silviculture, it is "Timely Tending" (Barr and Colley). As Mick O'Reilly, one of our Farm Forestry members, said at a seminar: "We do our thinning before we plant our trees". I could go on but I will restrain myself, except to point out to foresters on the Pumice Plateau that they are growing pulp on some of the most-sought-after dairy land in New Zealand. Large herds of 600-700 cows are being run on that potentially rich no-mud land. The largest cheese factory in the world has been built at Lichfield within sight and smell of Tokoroa. Watch it you lot!

Neil Barr

The Editor replies to Neil Barr

I seem to have nettled some by-catch; certainly the targeted fish aren't biting. My arguments are not with farm foresters, who I think largely display the integrated decision-making to which I was referring.

Though in saying that, only considering agroforestry is also a mistake. Regime choice must relate to individual farmers' objectives, resources, and particularly to their constraints and options. Not everyone has the expertise, time, land or inclination to pursue agroforestry management, nor should they.

I think, more and more, that one of the most important considerations for forest growers is to spread out risk and diversify their operations. Few are the options. It means having some other "less commercially viable" species, or managing for a so-called "non-profitable" production thinning contingency.