

Being a Crew Leader on a Poplar Farm

In 2017, the Advanced Hardwood Biofuels Northwest (AHB) team started reaching out to the people who take care of poplar farms. We wanted to learn from you about the poplar trees and see what we could share with you. Here is what we learned:

Crew leaders are a critical part of the team!

"What have you noticed about crews that work together well and crews that don't?"

Contractor: *"Well, I mean the really common denominator is that they have a good crew leader."*

A good crew leader is the link between the workers and the contractor or customer.

Crew leaders are responsible for:

- Training
- Conflict management
- Encouragement
- Problem solving
- Trying new, better techniques

The workers want:

Someone who respects and helps them.

"The supervisor is supposed to motivate people and give them a word of encouragement and not leave them behind."

"There was an error in the supervisors who tightened the work and wanted us to go to the rhythm of those who had experience and did not explain how to do the work and most of the workers did not resist and preferred to resign."



Someone who is not too bossy.

"It's not us against them- encourage their attitudes and watch for their weaknesses. Not an adversarial type of thing, 'I'm the boss and you're not, so my way or the highway.' That doesn't get you far any place and it sure doesn't get you very far with those workers."

Someone who does not try to please the customer at the expense of the workers.

"And the other one, he's just too gosh-darned bossy. He wants to be a foreman, but the crew would probably leave if he was the foreman very long. He wants to please the customer too hard."

The contractors and customers want:

Someone who wants to learn.

Someone who is interested in the crop.

"Some of the workers are more excited, have a real curiosity for [the crop], and I would think there would have been times where explaining what the goal is, that would help them improve the process."

Someone they can trust.

"Well they do the same kind of work, and they tell the guys how to do the things. When they plant trees they keep the row straight and they use a line. Things like that. He knows exactly how to do it. They have more experience doing the work."

"I had one man here, for years and years he led the crew of gathering side branches for our stick cutting. Our management required us to go out there and look at this and inspect these sticks- we've got to have perfect quality. After a few years with this man anchoring that crew, I never looked at another stick through the cutting process. I'd just say, is he coming back to run that crew? That's all I need, meeting over."

Someone who wants to improve work practices.

"The strong crew leaders, they could see things that I couldn't see that expedited that whole process."

"I'm going to show you how I want it done, but please take that a step further and make it better."

Someone who is a leader.



What do YOU want?

Some contractors provide more training for their crew leaders. Ask the contractor what kind of management training they provide!

If you are interested in the science of growing trees or other crops, there are educational options, even if you do not speak English well or do not have a GED. Many community colleges have English as a Second Language options, including extra help with classwork.

University of California Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources has a great Spanish language news and information program (<http://ucanr.edu/sites/Spanish/>). You can call 800-514-4494 to get up-to-date information. Araceli Hernandez is a community outreach professional for Orange County Extension (949-653-1809) and Dr. Lupita Fabregas is the Assistant Director for Diversity and Expansion (530-750-1273).

Oregon State University(OSU) has programs for the Latino community. For assistance, you can contact Anna Brown (541-567-8321), Ana Gomez (541-737-8803) or Mario Magaña Álvarez (541-737-0925). Juntos, part of the OSU Open Campus program, provides support for students and parents.

Washington State University (WSU) Extension has programs specifically for Latino community members. To learn more, contact José L. García-Pabón at 425-357-6008 or garciajl@wsu.edu.

If you want to learn more about energy and renewable fuel, AHB's website (hardwoodbiofuels.org) has many information sheets translated into Spanish.

Why do we plant poplar trees?

When we talked to workers, we found that almost none of them knew why the poplars were planted, but they wanted to know.

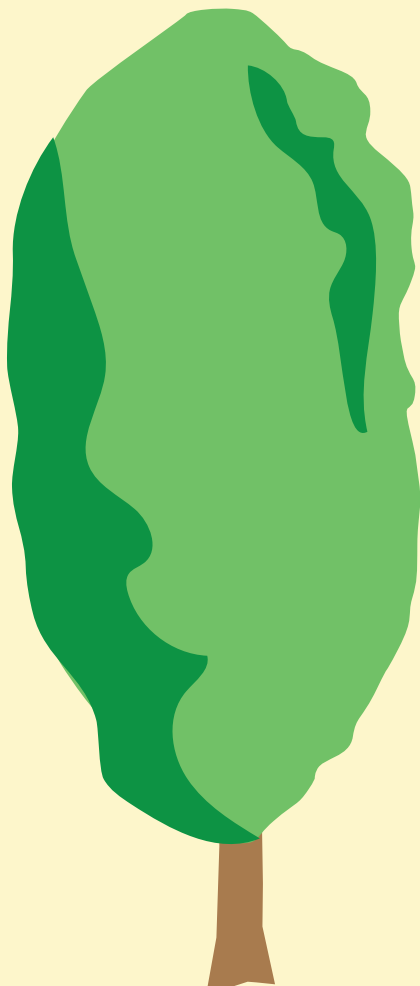
"We did not know what the trees were for, but what I knew was that the pay was good and the work was good and fair."

"We always call them paper trees and use them for paper and wood. We did not get to investigate much because we are all going to work. That is why we do not know much."

"I had heard a rumors that they were trying to make oil. I don't know what kind, and they didn't tell us directly, only rumors. Now it is affirmative the rumors that I listened today."



Crew leaders can talk to the contractors and customers and find out more about the trees. Then, they can share that information with their crew.



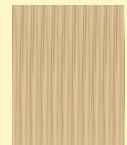
Poplars can be used for a wide variety of applications, such as:



Biofuels



Biochemicals



Veneer



Furniture



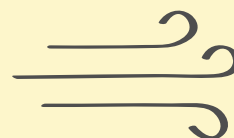
Hog Fuel



Sawdust



Kraft Paper



Oxygen



Income