

Meet a Timber Harvester

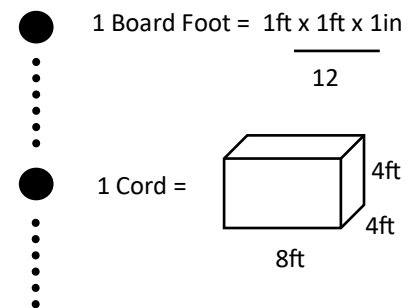
Leo Lacwasan lives in Holyoke with his family



Paul (left), Leo (right)
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Leo's business is a one man operation. He cuts roughly **1,000,000** board feet, a few hundred cords of firewood, and a few hundred tons of pulp wood each year.

Leo grew up in New Salem shadowing his grandfather, Paul, at the sawmill. Leo worked for the Appalachian Mountain Club professional trail crew and a logging crew in Vermont. After a few years of training, Leo got his timber harvesting license and set up his own business in Holyoke.



Leo looks for jobs between **20-150 acres**. Often, it will be a "bid sale", so a forester has already marked the trees to be cut according to the landowner's forest management plan. If Leo's bid is chosen, he is awarded the contract and pays the landowner. It is then up to him to harvest the marked trees and sell the wood in order to make a profit.

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Best Management Practices

Leo uses a forwarder, which picks up the logs and carries them out of the woods, minimizing damage to nearby trees. Leo recently worked with the Greenfield Conservation Commission to create new oak habitat, control deer browse, and further their conservation and forest management goals.

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A Helping Hand

It's a competitive industry, but someone always has your back. A big challenge is when the forwarder breaks down in the woods. If his mechanic can't fix it on site, Leo will call a friend to help him tow his equipment.

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For the Woods

There are slim profits in this business. Without markets for lower quality timber, Leo can't spend a lot of time cutting a tree (even if it's marked) that won't sell. But despite the challenges, he loves spending his day working outside in the woods.

Family History...

Leo's great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather, and grandfather all worked in the forest products industry. Now, Leo is the only one amongst his cousins to work in the woods. In his free time, Leo rock climbs, does Crossfit, and competes in trail races. He and his wife Abby, a visiting nurse, are also raising their one year old son and newborn daughter.

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Home



Leo's grandfather, Paul McGinnis lives near New Salem with his wife Eleanor. One of their four daughters now lives in the house where Paul was born and raised his family. The house sits on **100 acres** of woodland and the family uses about 15 cords of wood each year to heat the home.

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Work

Paul was only **11 years old** when his father drowned in a harvesting accident. He continued the work as a timber harvester using a team of horses, and later a skidder. He retired when he was 65 and continued to help out at the sawmill until he turned 80. The local church and fire station were built with wood Paul harvested. Today, most of the wood Leo harvests is sold to mills in New Hampshire and Canada. Some harvesters even sell directly to China. Both Leo and Paul are sad to see the shrinking of local markets and hope new wood construction in Massachusetts will change this.



Paul served on the Board of Assessors and was a volunteer firefighter for 30 years. He enjoyed competing at the State Fairs in horse pulling and still goes to the fair every year.

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Community