



Stafford Capital Partners has been awarded a \$100 million mandate to invest in timberland and agriculture by the \$13.3 billion Swiss pension ASGA Pensionskasse

The mandate includes a commitment to Stafford International Timberland Fund VIII (SIT VIII), timber co-investments and a separate account devoted to agriculture, the first such vehicle established by the fund for an LP.

Group chief executive Angus Whiteley declined to specify how much of the \$100 million investment will be devoted to each approach.

Whiteley told *Agri Investor* that SIT VIII will use a variety of techniques to deploy capital into the timber sector, with a focus on secondaries and scope to include co-investments, commitments into existing funds and fund restructurings.

The fund has a target of \$500 million and is soliciting investments from institutional investors across Asia, Europe and North America. In November, Stafford simultaneously announced a first close on \$180 million for SIT VIII and its first investment: a secondaries transaction buying five stakes in US timber funds – worth about \$50 million – with diversified US timberland assets.

The previous fund in the series closed on \$484 million in May 2015 and the firm currently manages timber investments in the US, Canada, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Central America, New Zealand and Australia.

Whiteley said that Stafford's focus on secondaries is important, given that quality timber assets come to the market infrequently and some LPs have recently expressed difficulty in finding attractive opportunities to invest in the sector.

“You can see in comments like [those from] Ohio Police and Fire that there’s some pricing discipline being maintained, which is important,” he said. “We maintain that, but we look for other ways in which we can make investments.”

The agriculture-focused separate account for ASGA is the first established by Stafford, which launched its agricultural strategy in conjunction with Zurich-based environmental investment firm EBG Capital in August 2015. Stafford supplemented this partnership in February, when it hired two agriculture-focused executives to join its real assets division in London.

Whiteley said that agriculture is well-suited to the firm’s diversified approach and that Stafford would look provide primary support to managers, make co-investments and explore the nascent market in agricultural secondaries.

In addition to a focus on a mixture of permanent crop investments, Whiteley said Stafford would look to invest in the dairy, livestock and other sectors in regions similar those where the firm makes timber investments.

Stafford is an investment and advisory firm with \$4.8 billion in assets under management. In addition to timber and agriculture, the firm has specialist teams devoted to credit, infrastructure, private equity, and venture capital. Founded in 2000, Stafford maintains offices in London, Austin, Boston, Hanover, Zurich and Sydney.