

A Forest to Suit Every Farm

Farm Forest Owner Profiles

Learn why farmers around the country have chosen forestry and explore their experiences to date





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Foreword

Have you ever wondered why your neighbour planted and what benefits he/she is getting from their farm forest? In this booklet, we talk to a number of forest owners and discuss these issues with them.

Farm forests in Ireland are becoming increasingly important as they mature and provide a wide range of diverse goods and services to their owners and to society. Initially farm forest owners may be attracted by the annual premium payment available that help to stabilise and enhance the overall farm income or they may be motivated by the need to restructure or diversify the farm activities.

As their forest resource matures, many are now discovering new and diverse benefits from their forests. These benefits can range from economic returns, access to an on-farm timber supply, to the provision of environmental benefits and as a recreational resource for family and friends. Owners are also becoming aware of the co-benefits their forests can deliver such as positive lifestyle changes or their forest creating on-farm employment.

This booklet profiles a number of forest owners and provides valuable insights into what motivated them to plant, what their experiences of planting have been and how they are now using their forests for their own and wider benefits. We would like to thank all the forest owners profiled for sharing their experiences and allowing us to use their forests as case studies. We hope that this will encourage others to emulate them or discover new and different ways to benefit from farm forest opportunities.

The decision to plant some of your land is often a multi-faceted decision and Teagasc advisers are available to support landowners in making this decision and progressing, where appropriate, to planting. Our experienced and objective advisors are available nationwide (<https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/staff/>) to give you the most up to date advice and information on forest establishment, forest management and on how to get the best out of your farm forest.

Dr. Nuala Ní Fhlatharta,
Head of Teagasc Forestry Development Department



Forestry can Complement other Farm Enterprises

Andrew O'Carroll from Co. Kilkenny was profiled in 2017 by Michael Somers

Andrew O'Carroll is a Kilkenny drystock farmer who has integrated forestry and GLAS to complement the overall farm.

The inaugural winner of the RDS/Teagasc Farm Forestry Award is Andrew O'Carroll from Rathcash, Clifden in north Kilkenny. His achievement is the result of a land use decision taken in 2005 to plant 19 hectares of forestry. It is a decision which he has not regretted and since their establishment, according to Andrew the trees have "jumped out of the ground".

Andrew explains: "I was in the privileged position of being able to lease good ground in its place, helped by the premiums from the forestry. So I could put my farming inputs into the better ground, it's all positive and all gone to plan". The forestry is also a fast developing family pension pot that is "well ahead of schedule".

Andrew's forest is located in one of the fastest tree growing areas in the country. According to Andrew, he is "looking out at a something that's going to provide a valuable income in time to come".

The forest is highly productive and should be ready for first thinning in 2019, at only 14 years of age. A second thinning is then scheduled to be completed before his final forestry premium is received. The strong growth forecast for the forest indicates it will be producing commercial timber within 30 years.



"I was in the privileged position of being able to lease good ground in its place, so I could put my inputs into the good ground, helped by the premiums from the forestry"

Planting: A Win/Win Situation

In 2005, Andrew, in conjunction with his forester Mick Power, planted 19 hectares of land he had inherited. The planted parcels were on ground that was wetter than the rest of the farm, had a shorter grazing season and presented regular difficulties for farming. According to Andrew: "Tractors have got stuck, animals have got stuck. One would be thinking in the springtime - when will I get out there?" He added: "I spread lime on the land in the month of April and didn't mark it, but the previous June, cattle could be going to their knees in it".

Referring today to his planted land, Andrew can “pass up there now in a completely different frame of mind. The practical running of the day-to-day farm has been greatly helped by having leased ground available as well as my farm forestry providing an income source”.

“You have the land bank and it is up to you to farm it and maximise the use that you can make from your land”

Terry Carroll, Andrew’s Teagasc adviser, summed up the informed decision made by Andrew and his family; “You have the land bank and it is up to you to farm it and maximise the use that you can make from your land”.

He outlined Andrew’s suckler enterprise on 56 hectares of land including an area of 26 hectares that is leased in. His farm carries almost 50 suckler cows, selling mostly as forward stores with a progeny of Limousin and using a Norbreck bull. Calving takes place in March and April. Andrew is “driving the system” well and constantly striving to improve on the good gross margins he already achieves. Andrew is also in the GLAS scheme since its inception in 2015. He has as selected wild bird cover, traditional hay meadow and low input pasture as suitable GLAS options to enhance the environment.

“The practical running of the day-to-day farm has been greatly helped by having leased ground available as well as my farm forestry providing an income source”

Terry referred to opportunities available for less productive marginal land and outlined how it is “great that there are schemes such as the forestry initiative which provide good support measures as well as premiums and planting grants”. He described how the successful integration of “suckler cows, GLAS and forestry are complementing each other” and added that “Andrew made that decision with his family and it has proven to be the absolute best decision”.

Update 2020:

Andrew is very happy with the progress and productivity of his forest. Putting in inspection paths and marking plots were management operations that he carried out last winter in preparation for thinning. He is currently planning for the thinning of his forest by applying for a forest road grant and a felling licence.

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

Michael Deevy from Co. Laois was profiled in 2012 by Liam Kelly

Michael Deevy is a farmer from Ballyroan, Co. Laois who operates a 20 hectare drystock farm and planted forestry with recreational use in mind.

When Michael Deevy and his family at Cashel, Ballyroan, Co Laois, were considering planting in 2008, they also had recreational use in mind. Michael operates a 20 hectare drystock farm and subsequently developed 8.1 hectare woodland under the Forestry Environmental Protection Scheme (FEPS) from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).



Design

The FEPS scheme encouraged farmers to combine the establishment of high nature-value woodland with their participation in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS).

“Together with John O’Connell, consultant forester with Glenasack Tree Services, we put a lot of thought into designing this new woodland,” said Michael. *“I firmly believe that it is important as an owner to be involved with the design of a forest, especially when recreational use is part of it.”*

“I firmly believe that it is important as an owner to be involved with the design of a forest, especially when recreational use is part of it”

The site is relatively flat, with gentle slopes on the upland mineral land, and lower areas of mainly peaty soil. This provided the opportunity to plant a mix of species, which added greatly to the appeal of the scheme. Michael and John laid out a meandering 1.7 kilometre path through the site, which links to good effect with areas of biodiversity enhancement (ABEs).



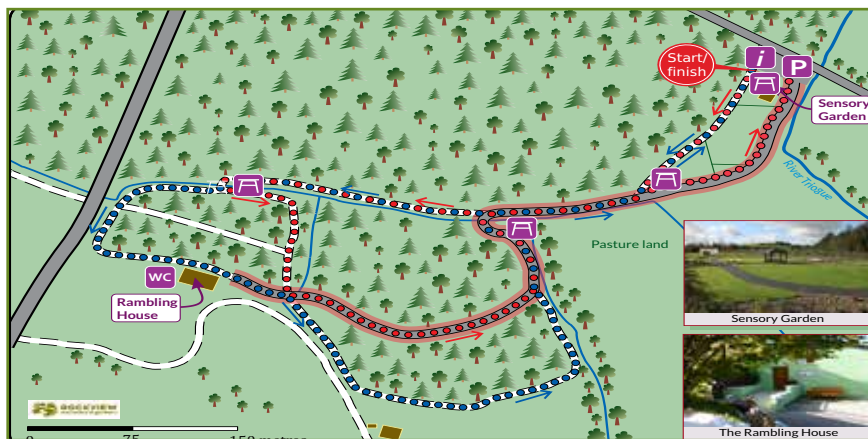
These incorporate retained hedgerows, retained habitat and open spaces. Timber production is the main aim, and the woodland will produce fine crops of ash, oak and Norway spruce with each species planted in large blocks where site conditions best suited them. *“We also planted rowan, hazel, holly, birch, crab apple and Scots pine singly or in groups to add to the diversity and beauty of the site,”* said Michael.

Laois friends

Michael, is chairman of 'Laois Friends', a voluntary group set up in 2000 to help provide social and recreational opportunities for people from the community to use, with a particular welcome for those with special needs and their families. He explains "We will all have special needs at some stage of our lives. With the help of the HSE, local community groups and LEADER support from Laois Partnership, we were able to develop a resource that fulfilled our objectives. In 2010, the path system was finished with a hard-core surface. Picnic tables and benches were installed, wooden bridges were erected, a small car park was developed and 'Rockview Walkways' was established. The site is fully wheelchair accessible."

"With the help of the HSE, local community groups and LEADER support from Laois Partnership, we were able to make the site more suitable for people with special needs"

Rockview Walkways, which is also run by Laois Friends, was officially opened in August 2010. Since then, a sensory garden has been developed on an additional 0.6 hectare plot and an old farm shed has been converted into a rambling house. "I am grateful to all involved for helping with fund raising and the Forestry Division, DAFM for facilitating it," said Michael. "This site is now open and free to the public."



This is an ideal example of how the FEPS scheme can be used to maximum effect. The site is a tremendous asset to Co. Laois and other charity groups are looking at the model and how similar ventures may be pursued. The forest is a credit to Michael and his family as this unique project required a lot of vision.

Update 2020:

Michael Deevy is delighted with how his forest has developed and sees a bright future: "Rockview Walkways is benefitting from the maturing trees, and continues to attract more and more members of the public and community groups".

A New Way to Grow

Paddy Rhatigan from Co. Roscommon was profiled in 2018 by Noel Kennedy

Paddy Rhatigan from Co. Roscommon has been farming since he left school. To reduce his workload and improve his quality of life Paddy chose forestry for a section of his farm. He is proud of what he has achieved on his farm and is excited for the future.

Paddy Rhatigan has found that forestry gives him as much job satisfaction, and a better work-life balance than suckler cows. His income is higher too.

Paddy Rhatigan is one farmer who went through this decision process a number of years ago and took radical action in response.

Reared with his sister Katie in Knockhall, not far from the Shannonside village of Rooskey in County Roscommon, Paddy commenced full time farming with his father, managing a small suckler herd, as soon as he left school.



This further heightened his interest in forestry for a number of reasons, not least as a means to reducing a difficult and sometimes stressful workload

Interest in forestry

Paddy always looked positively at forestry as a potential option for their marginal land where heavy soil and wet summers regularly frustrated farming. When Paddy Hanley, owner of the local bacon factory planted his neighbouring farm in the 1990s, he watched with admiration at the fast growth of the young trees that were thriving on similar land to his.

Following the death of his parents, Paddy continued to farm. Now, in his forties and farming on his own, he began to look seriously at his quality of life going forward. This further heightened his interest in forestry for a number of reasons, not least as a means to reduce a difficult and sometimes stressful workload. Over the next couple of years, Paddy assessed his farming, forestry and life style options and in 2012 took the life-changing decision to plant most of the farm. His driving hope was to improve his quality of life while establishing an alternative sustainable farm enterprise.

Following consultation with local forester Joe Tansey, an afforestation grant application was made to plant 45 hectares out of the 53 hectare farm. Planting has made a big improvement to Paddy's income with an annual forestry premium, which will be paid for twenty years while also retaining the full Basic Payment.

“There is no way that I was ever going to make that out of suckling.” Paddy says. “In fact the difference is even greater as my own cost of labour and general inputs are hugely reduced.”

Following planting there was a massive reduction in Paddy’s workload and although he had sold all the cattle he was determined that he would continue to farm his remaining land. In 2015, he put this area into GLAS as traditional hay meadow and each year, weather permitting, he cuts and sells up to 140 bales of hay or silage locally. Unsurprisingly, he also planted 450 native broadleaf trees under the native tree planting option.

While his forest was still under contract, Paddy had his first experience of looking after the young trees, under the supervision and encouragement of local forestry contractor Padraic Kelly. This working relationship developed and since 2014, Paddy has been working part time with Padraic planting, fencing and pruning young forests across Roscommon and Leitrim. As well as gaining huge experience and knowledge from his contractor colleagues, which he is now putting to good use in his own forest, Paddy hugely enjoys the work. *“It is an important diversion, it’s healthy and I’m earning a few bob.”* he says. Since 2016, Paddy has taken on full responsibility for looking after the forest. The trees are in good health with impressive growth across all species but in such a large forest, there are always jobs to be done. As Paddy observes: *“Nature doesn’t stop working when you do.”*



Paddy feels that he has “massively succeeded” in his objectives of improving his quality of life and optimising income from the farm.

Paddy is excited about his forestry and farming future. He is emphatic that the changes to his outlook on life and farming brought about by planting have been fully vindicated and that he has “massively succeeded” in his objectives of improving his quality of life and optimising income from the farm. He looks forward to seeing his young trees, with his help, growing into a high quality forest, producing valuable timber, farming the remaining fields and all the while contributing to the wellbeing of the local environment – all things he feels the generations who farmed in Knockhall before him would be proud of. He has truly turned a new leaf.

Update 2020:

Paddy continues to maintain his forest and has recently improved drainage along access paths. He participated in a local forestry Knowledge Transfer Group in 2019 and is currently at a planning stage to plant some of his remaining land.

Forestry Complementing Dairy Farming in Cork

Donal McCarthy from Co. Cork was profiled in 2017 by Tom Houlihan

Donal McCarthy is a progressive dairy farmer based in Ballydehob in West Cork. Donal's dairy enterprise is concentrated on a fertile platform of almost 27 hectares surrounding the farmyard, sustaining a herd of 70 dairy cows.

Forestry has long been a key part of the landscape in County Cork. Many farmers in the county have engaged in forestry related initiatives from planting to harvesting. County Cork is also the location of many supporting forest enterprises including forest nurseries, forestry consultants/ companies, timber harvesting and haulage contractors, state-of-the-art timber processing mills, educational and recreational facilities.



Donal McCarthy is a progressive dairy farmer based in the scenic West Cork surroundings of Ballydehob with an overall holding of almost 103 hectares. His dairy enterprise is concentrated on a fertile platform of almost 27 hectares surrounding the farmyard, sustaining a herd of 70 dairy cows. Other land on the homestead would be classed as rougher type grazing for sheep with the remaining land in Donal's holding located in out farms. Donal was one of the earliest farmers to join the REPS scheme with encouragement from Teagasc over 23 years ago and is a current participant in GLAS.

In 2009, Donal considered his land use options for an area of 11 hectares of marginal land located 8 miles from his main farm. Knowledge is the key to informed decision making. He considered the location of this land relative to his farm, the cost of reclaiming land with heavy soils and the subsequent returns from farming. Donal also researched the attractions of other options including the attributes of forestry. A range of benefits soon became evident (reduced time inputs, additional income, etc.). The land is close to existing productive forestry. He decided that forestry was the right option for him and the 11 hectares were planted in March 2010 by forester Alan Farrelly of Greenbelt, mainly with commercial forest species combined with additional broadleaves for biodiversity enhancement and landscaping purposes.

Donal sees forestry as providing a secure pension plan of which he says, "I will be in control of myself"

Increasing the farm forest area

Donal went on to plant a further 27 hectares in 2015 on another parcel located almost 6 miles from his main farm. This is also a commercial forestry venture with a 10% inclusion of alder, a native broadleaf species. His more recent forest enterprise provides similar overall payments as before, with a current higher premium paid over a 15-year period (€510 per hectare per annum for the majority of the forest).

“I could have spent over €100,000 on reclamation but would still have land with lower income generating capacity for conventional farm enterprises”

The reasons for his decision to afforest were similar to those that convinced Donal to proceed with his earlier planting in 2010. The potential costs of land improvement measures would have been significant: *“I could have spent over €100,000 on reclamation but would still have land with lower income generating capacity for conventional farm enterprises”*. Donal also says that his capacity to draw down the Basic Payment and forest premiums on the same land parcels is a great advantage. Watching his first forest establish and seeing his forest premium payment arriving each January certainly assisted in his decision to plant again.



Optimising returns on marginal land

Donal is one of the many forest owners nationally who, over the last 10 years, have gone on to plant at least a second time following their initial planting decision. Donal is very happy with his decision to plant and has *“no regrets whatsoever”*.

In addition to attractive premium income, he is very aware of the potential of well-managed forestry to appreciate in value year on year, thereby providing a secure pension plan, which he says: *“I will be in control of myself”*. In this regard, Donal is happy that he can choose the optimum future time to cash in on his enterprise. Analysis by Teagasc has shown the annual equivalised value of a productive, mainly conifer, timber crop expressed in today's money can be in excess of €500 per hectare per year over the forest rotation.

Update 2020:

Donal has a keen interest in his forests and takes satisfaction in seeing how trees put on vigorous, healthy growth during regular visits. Donal also looks forward to planning for future forest operations and the development of his valuable resource.

Trees are a Rewarding Farm Crop

Michael Owens from Co. Kilkenny was profiled in 2018 by Michael Somers

Michael Owens runs a mainly dairy enterprise in Castlecomer, Co Kilkenny, milking 125 cows on a holding of almost 80 hectares. Michael's late father planted 2.5 hectares of mainly spruce 29 years ago.

Michael Owens, a dairy farmer from Castlecomer, recently harvested his two and a half hectare forest which was originally planted by his late father 29 years ago. Michael has a very positive story to tell which will be of interest to existing forest owners or for landowners considering the forestry option.



Michael and his brother Martin run a mainly dairy enterprise in Castlecomer, Co Kilkenny, milking 125 cows on a holding of almost 80 hectares, with more than half on very good land. Having trained in forestry, Michael's late father planted 2.5 hectares of mainly Sitka spruce 29 years ago. He actually wanted to plant more but this went contrary to general advice at the time. Michael is now reaping the rewards of his late father's inspired decision, having just overseen the final harvest and sale of his timber, which has matured rapidly following two thinnings.

According to Michael, "We are very happy with the way the harvesting worked out; the whole job was done in three days. It has produced over 750 tonnes and the price we will receive is about €55 per tonne, perhaps even a bit more. We are lucky that timber prices are strong at the moment. It will cost about 10 per cent of the money we receive to replant and put it back; the remainder as you all know is income tax-free anyway."

"We are very happy with the way the harvesting worked out. The whole job was done in three days. It has produced over 750 tonnes and the price we will receive is about €55 per tonne"

With the strong demand for timber at present, forest owners can have a very valuable crop on their land. Michael was impressed with the timber and financial return from his forest, explaining that, “It yielded pretty good, it was fairly straight and the product breakdown is 45 per cent sawlog, 37 per cent palletwood and the remainder is going to pulp. So that’s pretty decent for forestry.”

Returns from harvest	
750 tonnes @ €55/t	€41,250
Minus replanting costs (10%):	€4,125
Total return *	€37,125
Return per hectare:	€14,850
* Note: Subject to relevant Universal Social Charge and PRSI	

Michael, in conjunction with his forester Jonathan Neville, is also conscious of the need for protection and enhancement of the farm environment. Michael describes how, “Number one, the weather was super, the ground was bone-dry and there wasn’t a mark on the ground. But the brash was piled up in rows along the site and the forwarder (collecting the timber) travelled along these. Basically, it doesn’t touch the ground and didn’t impact with the soil in any way.” The existing broadleaf trees in the forest were also retained and Michael will replant a further 10% broadleaves through the site for environmental and aesthetic reasons.

Michael can now make plans for his forestry returns. He is aware that when you are farming you have many options for what you are going to do with money. Michael’s family is top of his priority list and he is keen to invest in their future: “I have four small children and hopefully they will be smarter than me and they might go to college.”

“Hopefully when I am about 70, I will get some retirement money out of it. It’s not like anything else, you get what you get and it’s yours”

Michael is now looking forward to getting his forest planted again and seeing the next forest establish and grow rapidly, adding: “Hopefully when I am about 70, I will get some retirement money out of it. It’s not like anything else, you get what you get and it’s yours.”

Update 2020:

Last winter Michael replanted his forest area, incorporating an additional 10% broadleaves for environmental enhancement. Michael says he is keeping a keen eye on the new trees to ensure there is no pine weevil damage and that they are free from competing vegetation.

Laying Strong Roots for the Future

Stephen Jones from Co. Cork was profiled in 2020 by Dr. Richard Walsh

Stephen Jones is young farmer who is enjoying the Farm Forestry Module at the Salesian College in Pallaskenry. Stephen, along with his father Colman, run a mainly dairy farm near Kanturk in north Co. Cork.

“Gaining knowledge of our farming enterprises, including the potential of farm forestry, has been a great experience,” explains Stephen Jones who comes from a mainly dairy farm near Kanturk in north Co. Cork. Stephen is currently undertaking the Certificate in Agriculture at the Salesian Agricultural College in Pallaskenry. The Teagasc Education Department and the Salesian Agricultural College are partners in the delivery of agricultural education, training and knowledge transfer.



Stephen’s keen interest in optimising the management of his family farm comes across very clearly. Together with his father Colman, he currently farms over 100 hectares, milking 90 dairy cows on a platform of over 40 hectares on the main farm holding. The farm also carries about 30 weanlings on out farms as well as a thriving forestry enterprise of various ages on 34 hectares of land that is considered marginal for other agricultural enterprises.

“Our forestry is literally a growing farm asset as well as an efficient and sustainable use of our marginal land”

“At present, preparations are gearing up for a busy calving season on the farm and we have plans to sustainably increase the dairy herd to over 100 units in the near future,” according to Stephen. “Our family have always had a strong interest in the environment, having participated in REPS and in subsequent agri-environmental schemes.”

Planning for the future

Stephen says he has learnt much from his father over the years and his current involvement with the Certificate in Agriculture course is embellishing this knowledge. Within the Principles of Agriculture module, all students receive a practical overview of the forestry option and its many benefits. In addition, Stephen has undertaken a 5-credit farm forestry module, which provides a more detailed insight into forest establishment and management.

“Our farm forest, which comprises productive conifers along with a mix of other tree species, was planted in three sections, the first over 11 years ago,” says Stephen. At the time of planting Stephen’s father, Colman, undertook farm forestry training provided by the Teagasc Forestry Development Department in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Stephen says: “Our forestry is literally a growing farm asset as well as an efficient and sustainable use of our marginal land.” Before undertaking the recent farm forestry module, Stephen was involved in the establishment of the more recently planted areas of his farm forest. “I had some understanding of the planting process, since we planted a parcel as recently as four years ago and again two years ago.” Stephen explains.



With no formal forestry training prior to this module Stephen says: “I would have picked up most of my knowledge from my father who also has a strong interest in trees. The forestry module has given me a lot more information about our forestry, has given me the confidence to understand what management is needed and has enabled me to plan the next important steps. I can also avail of on-going advice from my local Teagasc forestry adviser John Casey.”

“I would have picked up most of my knowledge from my father who also has a strong interest in trees”

Together with his father, Stephen has plans for their farm forest into the future and identifies how it can enhance sustainability within the farming enterprise. “With thinnings of the older forest coming up in the next three to four years, discussing the timber markets during the module has given me clear insights into timber uses and how we can optimise our timber sales in the future.” he concludes.

Update 2020:

Stephen appreciates the reduced workload required with farm forestry, particularly at busy times on the farm: “We are busy at the moment with calving, but the forest continues to grow and progress in the background”

Swapping the Cows for Trees

Christy Tighe from Co. Galway was profiled in 2016 by Noel Kennedy

Born and bred into dairy farming in Tuam, Co. Galway, Christy Tighe farmed with his brothers until he decided to move away from cows and into trees.

“Forestry has been a positive experience and a rewarding investment.” says Christy Tighe, a dairy farmer from Tuam, Co Galway who went from milking cows to harvesting trees.

Born and bred into dairy farming in Tuam, Christy and his brothers Michael and Peter took over the farm owned by his father and uncle. They farmed together in partnership culminating in the establishment of Tuam Dairies in 1985. At its peak, Tuam Dairies was milking over 800 cows and employing 30 people. By the time the business diversified into the Galway Bay Cheese Company in 1987, Christy had left the farming side and was managing the processing end of the business.

Towards the end of the 1980s, strong downward pressure on milk prices was affecting margins and profitability and in 1992, the brothers took the decision to sell the business to the Kerry Group. By this stage, Christy and his brothers were already exploring the potential of forestry and had purchased three semi-mature commercial Sitka spruce forests.

Convinced of its potential, Christy took a major personal and business decision to begin seriously investing in forestry. Fast forward twenty years and his portfolio now extends to eight forests totalling over 140 hectares.

Focusing on high yielding Sitka spruce, which provides the strong commercial drive to his investment, the average forest size of 17.5 hectares generates considerable economies of scale. Good husbandry is critical whether it involves a good milk producer or timber producer like Sitka spruce.

From the outset, Christy was determined to follow best forest management practice and employed a professional forester to oversee the planting and early maintenance of all his forests. He then went a step further and made an even more critical decision early on to take responsibility himself for the day-to-day maintenance of the forests once they passed the maintenance grant stage after four years.



“Most importantly, it gives me full control over the harvesting operation. I supervise the thinning operation, making sure that the poorer quality trees are removed while the better quality trees are left to grow on undamaged”

With a substantial forest portfolio to manage involving a range of management skills and schemes, Christy keeps himself informed by regular attendance at Teagasc and other forestry field days. Christy also stays in regular contact with foresters including his local Teagasc forestry adviser Noel Kennedy.

“There are a number of obstacles that are hindering the development of farm forestry,” says Christy. “One of the main reasons why I believe there is a relatively low uptake of forestry by farmers is because of the replanting obligation after clearfell and no forestry premiums available at that stage” he added. The large road bonds that are requested regularly by some local authorities are another obstacle.

“Forestry has been a positive experience and a rewarding investment”

“Some county councils I deal with now require large bonds in case roads are damaged before timber can be removed from the forest. Why do I have to pay this money to move timber every five years or so when milk lorries go up and down this road daily?” he asks. “For instance, I had to pay a bond of €5,000 to a local authority before I was allowed to remove the timber. It took months to get my money back.”

However, he feels that farm forestry is worth it. Christy conservatively estimates that the return on investment from his early plantations to date is 10 per cent per annum. Increases in land price have reduced the rate of return on his younger forests, which he estimates at a still healthy 5 per cent per annum.

Thinning drives growth of commercial timber production

From his experience of selling timber, Christy favours ‘roadside sales’. This means that Christy pays a harvesting contractor directly to fell and forward the trees to roadside. Christy will then, in a separate operation, sell the harvested timber on to a timber buyer. The timber buyer purchases the timber ‘roadside’ and pays for timber transport from the forest to the sawmill.

Christy finds that there are several advantages to selling his timber roadside. “Most importantly, it gives me full control over the harvesting operation. I supervise the thinning operation, making sure that the poorer quality trees are removed while the better quality trees are left to grow on undamaged.” he says. “Another very good reason is because I find that selling roadside tends to be a good bit more profitable,” he adds.

Update 2020:

Christy continues to actively manage his forests. He had a successful clearfell of 16 hectares of Sitka spruce in 2018 and is currently planning thinning operations in his other conifer and broadleaf forests.

Plant Trees to Help Reduce your Stress

Gerard Deegan from Co. Westmeath was profiled in 2018 by Liam Kelly

Westmeath farmer Gerard Deegan says planting part of his Mullingar farm has fitted in neatly with his farm enterprises and reduced his day-to-day stress. Up to 2012, Gerard was an organic dairy farmer, milking 35 cows and supplying Glenisk Dairies, while also managing a calf-to-beef system.

Psychologists inform us that connecting with nature, including trees and greenery are generally good for your health. Integrating trees into your mix of farm enterprises can also enhance your well-being.

Westmeath farmer Gerard Deegan says planting part of his Mullingar farm has fitted in neatly with his farm enterprises and significantly reduced his day-to-day stress.



“Since planting trees, I feel my workload is more manageable and I can now fully appreciate and enjoy what my farm has to offer.” says Gerard. *“For the first time in my life, I feel that I am in charge of my time.”* Traditional farm enterprises are demanding in terms of time and labour input, especially if you aim to make a half-decent profit. This is particularly true if you are responsible for the management and welfare of livestock, not to mention the weather.

Gerard Deegan has over 58 hectares of good quality land in Cooksborough, Co Westmeath. Up to 2012, Gerard was an organic dairy farmer, milking 35 cows and supplying Glenisk Dairies, while also managing a calf-to-beef system. He also developed an interest in different poultry species, which he raised organically. As the years passed, Gerard found his main farming enterprise was getting more stressful. After considering many different options including land leasing, Gerard decided he would plant up to 75 per cent of his farm with suitable tree species and continue to farm the remainder.

Forestry as a land use option

“Forestry was a good option as I could still claim my Basic Payment entitlements on the planted land.” says Gerard. *“The forest premium is available for 20 years. As I was in REPS at the time, the Forest Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS) appealed to me.”* In 2012, Gerard planted 43 hectares of mixed woodland under FEPS. This scheme encouraged farmers to combine the establishment of high nature-value woodland with their participation in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS).

Gerard explains: “This scheme suited me from an environmental point of view as I was an organic farmer. Working with my forester, I was able to plan and organise an attractive layout of the forest.” Gerard planted approximately 20 hectares with conifers, mainly Norway spruce along with some Scots pine and European larch. The conifer species were selected to provide an early timber return. He also planted over 20 hectares of broadleaves, predominately ash, plus oak, beech and sycamore. The species were planted in blocks, and each is now easily accessible along the access paths that were installed at planting. The tracks and field headlands are fully maintained by topping two to three times a year to ensure ease of access at all times. Gerard also opted to plant a number of specimen trees along the various paths, with additional featured species added each year for diversity.

“Since planting trees, I feel my workload is more manageable and I can now fully appreciate and enjoy what my farm has to offer”

“In 2012, when I planted the forest I got out of milking altogether,” says Gerard. “I still farm 14 hectares where I keep an organic suckler herd, with a calf-to-beef enterprise. I have also more than doubled the number of poultry (including hens, broilers, geese, turkeys and ducks) which I rear organically in the farmyard along with some pigs. These are for our own use and for selling locally. I really enjoy keeping in touch with some farming.”

Other benefits of forestry

Gerard has also recently become involved with Social Farming Ireland, which has allowed him to develop his love for helping people and their needs. He explains: “The benefits that people with special needs gain by partaking in both the farm and forest activities are brilliant for both the participants and me.”

In the future, Gerard intends to enhance his existing resource by installing some additional leisure facilities within the woodland. This will include seating along with information stations providing insights into the different species of trees, wildlife and walkways through the wood. Even though Gerard changed his main enterprise to tree farming, he is as busy as ever, though the work is not as time critical and demanding. “For the first time in my life I feel that I am in charge of my time.” he concludes.

“For the first time in my life I feel that I am in charge of my time”

Update 2020:

Gerard fondly remembers winning the 2019 RDS/Teagasc Farm Forestry Award as “a brilliant experience for me and one I shall never forget”. With ash dieback in his forest, he believes there is an “urgent need to address the issue” and is exploring methods to replace his affected ash “by implementing a new planting regime”. Gerard also sees the many positive benefits of his forest: “The birdsong has increased volumes with many new nests appearing all over the forest”

Agroforestry- Farming and Forestry in the same Field

Liam Beechinor from Co. Cork was profiled in 2015 by John Casey

Liam Beechinor runs a 20 hectare beef farm in Clonakilty, Co. Cork. Liam was rearing cattle to 30 months, and as a self-described “late entrant” to farming, he had no quota or single farm payment.

In 2009, Liam Beechinor was rearing cattle to 30 months on his 20 hectare farm in Rossmore, Clonakilty. As a self-described “late entrant” to farming, he had no quota or single farm payment. He also had limited options to increase his on-farm income, outside of REPS.

As a REPS farmer, Liam opted to plant 10 hectares of what he considered very marginal land under the Forestry Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS).



The FEPS scheme encouraged farmers to combine the establishment of high nature-value woodland with their participation in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS). He planted 7 hectares of broadleaves and 3 hectares of conifers because he felt that as the conifers would mature earlier, he would get some of the benefits of that final crop by his retirement. As Liam put it: *“Here I was with an enterprise that was making guaranteed money for me, with not much work on my behalf. I certainly couldn’t say that about my beef enterprise”.*

In 2012, Liam decided to plant a further 7 hectares of marginal land: *“In reality I had enough of fighting back the rushes and they were beginning to win the war”.* Liam was approached about trying out agroforestry as part of a pilot scheme that would allow him to combine farming and forestry in the same field. He decided to go ahead and planted a 1.6 hectares agroforestry plot on the better land, selecting ash at 400 trees per hectare. In the spring of 2012, Liam found that he was short of silage ground. He decided to cut silage on his agroforestry plot and found, with a bit of care, it was possible to cut 30 bales of silage without damaging the young trees.

“Here I was with an enterprise that was making guaranteed money for me, with not much work on my behalf. I certainly couldn’t say that about my beef enterprise”

This proved so successful that Liam has taken two cuts of silage off the agroforestry plot each year since, producing 25 large and 24 small bales in total each year. Grass growth is aided by two applications of nitrogen fertiliser, 60 kg/ha and 40 kg/ha respectively per year. He feels that the extra silage yield was a real bonus for him during the fodder crisis in 2013.

A further income generating opportunity presented itself when he rented the agroforestry plot for summer and autumn sheep grazing in 2013-2014. It proved possible to successfully graze upwards of 50 ewes in the forest, since the young trees are protected by tree shelters.

In his situation, Liam explains: “I have the best of both worlds with agroforestry. I have my forestry and yet I am still able to use the land for agriculture, albeit it in a more restrictive way. I think it is the perfect bridge between farming and forestry”. He acknowledges that sheep or calves would be best suited to agroforestry as they would not impact the young developing trees. While agroforestry may not suit every farmer’s circumstances, there are many farmers in a similar position to Liam where the benefits of this option should at least be considered.

“I have the best of both worlds with agroforestry”

Agroforestry scheme criteria

Ideally, sites under the Agroforestry Scheme should contain free-draining mineral soils and should have no requirement for additional drainage. Suitable sites should not in general require additional fertiliser for tree growth apart from an initial manual application at planting.

As long as the trees are protected, the following agricultural activities are allowable;

Pasture: Grazing by sheep or young domestic stock is permitted during the spring and summer months for the first 6-8 years, depending on tree growth, but trees must be protected and tree shelters checked regularly. Thereafter, when tree shelters are replaced with plastic mesh, larger animals may be introduced.



Fodder: Silage and hay production is permitted. It is important that appropriate machinery is used when cutting silage and/or hay to ensure that the trees (including stem, roots and crown) are not inadvertently damaged.

Update 2020:

Liam feels that the agroforestry plot “is drier now than it ever was”, allowing the sheep out to graze earlier. Some pruning of the highest quality trees has been completed and the next task is to remove the tree shelters. Inspection paths for the 12 year conifer crop is also on the “to do” list.

Satisfying Hearts and Minds

Padraig Corcoran from Co Roscommon was profiled in 2017 by Noel Kennedy

Roscommon farmer Padraig Corcoran farms sheep and store cattle on the shores of Lough Ree. Native woodland conservation and diversifying into forestry are helping to sustain the way he and his family want to see the farm develop.

“This was my playground when I was a child,” muses Roscommon farmer Padraig Corcoran as he approaches his 4.9 hectares of two hundred-year-old broadleaf woodland, which is the beating heart of Mount Plunkett Nature Reserve.



Adjoining the canal which links Lecarrow village with nearby Lough Ree, just north of Athlone, the woodland and associated wetlands are the jewels in the crown of Padraig’s farm, which he has been

managing for the past twenty years. With infectious enthusiasm, Padraig has established the nature reserve with the protection of nature and wildlife at the heart of everything he does.

Satisfying hearts - farming conservation

Outside the woodland, Padraig’s farm would be considered small and extensive. He farms almost 33 hectares - 6.5 hectares which are rented - with sheep and store cattle - a typical Roscommon farm. But his impeccable environmental and conservation credentials are reflected in his long-term involvement in agri-environment schemes, from REPS right up to GLAS - planting hedges and trees, putting up nesting boxes, developing species-rich wetland and creating plots of wild bird cover.

“Today’s forests match strong environmental measures with really fast tree growth”

On a breezy sunny morning the woodland is in full leaf – mature ash, oak, beech, sycamore and remarkably, elm look down on hazel, holly and spindle. In brighter gaps, a new generation of younger trees are growing. A handful of ewes and lambs meander through, lightly grazing on the nutritious herb layer in the shelter of the trees. There is a cacophony of birdsong.

Woodland restoration

It was not always this idyllic. “Before I bought it in 2005, the woodland right down to the canal was completely abandoned for more than twenty five years.” says Padraig. “It was a mess and when I got the chance I jumped at the opportunity to buy it and begin to restore it.”

For Padraig, this means restoring and managing both woodland and wetlands in the traditional style of farming – High Nature Value farming in today’s terminology. Because the area is in the Lough Ree Special Area of Conservation this involves consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other agencies to help guide sensitive management of the resource and enhance the multiple services provided by the woodland.

Satisfying minds - production forestry

But for Padraig, farming is also about being a pragmatist. Although he doesn’t have a big farm he appreciates the reality of modern farming – longer hours and reducing returns even with an off-farm job. With the future of his young family to consider, he saw that in order to continue to sustainably manage the land, an alternative secure source of income would be necessary. As Padraig saw it, the environmental focus on farming was only going to get stronger with a particular emphasis on the protection of water quality and reducing his carbon footprint. He set about seeking an alternative farm enterprise with an environmental profile to complement his own farming system.

“Before I bought it in 2005 the woodland, right down to the canal, was completely abandoned for more than twenty five years”

Padraig planted his first farm forest – 8.8 hectares of Sitka spruce, Japanese larch and broadleaves in 2012. Every year since then he has been planting an additional 6 to 8 hectares and is planning a further 4 hectares in the back end of the year. He engaged a local Roscommon forestry company to do most of his planting but in 2015, he planted 3 hectares himself and, not surprisingly, is following its progress with particular interest. *“To get the best from forestry, owners need to be in touch with what’s going on.”* says Padraig. *“Planting a few trees or doing a bit of grass cleaning is great experience and is good for them and the trees.”*

Padraig is delighted with the growth so far in his young forests and their unashamedly strong focus on the production of commercial softwood. *“Today’s forests match strong environmental measures with really fast tree growth,”* he comments *“The trees are carbon neutral and a renewable resource - I see them as complementing the woodland conservation work in Mount Plunkett and helping to sustain the way, we as a family, want to see the farm develop.”*

Update 2020:

Padraig’s forests are growing well and he monitors their progress regularly. In 2019, his Sitka spruce suffered some frost and green spruce aphid damage. Padraig is stoical however, adding: “You have to be prepared for natural set-backs – but know how to best respond”.

“An Investment in Knowledge Pays the Best Interest”

Tim McCarthy from Co. Cork was profiled in 2019 by John Casey

Tim McCarthy is a sheep and beef farmer from Macroom, Co. Cork who has planted forestry in upland areas on a number of occasions.

The above often-used quote is attributed to Benjamin Franklin and it certainly holds true today with Tim McCarthy, a sheep and beef farmer from Carriganima, Macroom, Co. Cork. Tim was “*always interested in trees and there was more money in forestry than from sheep on high ground*”. Starting in 1988, Tim planted further ground in ‘92, ‘00 and ‘03. Over the years, Tim has consciously increased his own knowledge of forest management while also building the capacity of the local forest owner group of which he is chairperson. More recently, Tim has been sharing his experiences with the next generation of potential forest owners.

Fadó fadó in 2006, John Casey, Teagasc Forestry Development Officer based in Mallow, Co. Cork, initiated a series of meetings and field days with the purpose of setting up forest owner producer groups in West Cork. The original LEADER-funded project was supported from

the onset by a cohort of enthusiastic farm forest owners, Tim included. Their consensus was that the formation of producer groups was key to overcoming some of the obstacles that forest owners encounter. These included a lack of market awareness, a low level of forest management skills and small individual forest areas, etc.

To address some of these issues, the West Cork Forestry Group was formed in 2009, amalgamating two groups originally established in Ballyvourney and Dunmanway. The initial focus was on building capacity amongst the forest owners through a series of courses on timber measurement, marketing, operating chainsaws etc. and, equally important, through the sharing of forest owners’ experience of private forestry.

In 2014, the group decided to register as a co-operative and to engage a forester. The group became the Forest Owners Co-Operative Society (FOCS) with members across Munster. FOCS offers their members a range of services from planting to harvesting including development of management plans, processing of road grants, felling licences and supervision of harvesting operations.

From the beginning, Tim has been integral to the forest owner group’s development and is currently the chairperson of FOCS. In conversation lately with Tim, a farm forest owner described FOCS as a “*godsend to owners as they ask where they are going with their crop*”.



Forest Certification

In May 2018, twelve members of the Forest Owners Co-operative Society, including Tim, were presented with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for their woodlands. This followed a DAFM-funded pilot project in which FOCS and the North Eastern Forestry Group based in Dundalk, Co. Louth were chosen to participate. Each member had to complete a pre-audit assessment to identify any non-conformities or issues to be resolved. All members agreed that the experience helped to greatly increase their knowledge of their forests both from each other and from the project specialists.

Twelve members of the Forest Owners Co-operative Society, including Tim, were presented with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for their woodlands

Sharing his knowledge

In March 2019, Tim generously agreed to share his experience of growing and recently thinning his FSC-certified conifer forest with students as they completed the new Farm Forestry module in the Teagasc Certificate in Agriculture. Much of the conversation was about aspects of individual tree growth through to forest growth and forest timber production. In terms of practical forest skills, simple methods of tree measurements, forest stocking assessment, yield class calculations, log volume calculations and volume estimations for forest plots were also covered. These crucial skills are central to good quality forest management. They benefit the farm forest by sustainably increasing volume with the intention of generating a greater income for the farm forest owner. Tim is very much looking forward to clear felling his 1988 forest within the next three years.

The impact of forestry operations was also discussed in terms of the best practice principles that benefit the environment, biodiversity and landscape while also providing a stable farm income from the forest. Tim's insight provided a perspective of the factors to be considered when making the decision to plant a forest, experiences learned along the way regarding the many potential benefits from having a forest enterprise on-farm. Tim feels that the biggest issues for owners and the co-op include "how to get information out to our members, especially considering their older age profile, start-up costs for groups and, of course, forest certification". Tim maintains that the co-operative approach has vast potential for first generation forest owners, many of whom are starting from a low knowledge base, as their trees grow in both volume and value.

Update 2020:

Tim is currently in the process of applying for a felling licence to clearfell his 1988 Sitka spruce forest, and to carry out a thinning of another forest planted in 1992.

Diverse Farm Forestry Opportunities in the Southwest

Deidra Doyle from Co. Kerry and Michael Murphy from Co. Cork were profiled in 2019 by Jonathan Spazzi and John Casey

Deidra Doyle farms in the scenic North Kerry/West Limerick area. Michael Murphy is a tillage farmer from Midleton, Co Cork. Both planted diverse forests, availing of attractive supports available.

Deidra Doyle farms in the scenic North Kerry/West Limerick area. Deidra explored forestry options for part of her farm in 2018 and decided an appropriate mix of planting categories would best suit her objectives. A key requirement was to match the right species to the appropriate soil and site type to deliver sustainable growth. As a result, she opted for 4 hectares of mixed oak in combination with 10 hectares of diverse spruce/broadleaf forest. For Deidra, the choice combines the best of both worlds: *“I decided to plant to strengthen both the future environmental and financial sustainability of my farm, to create additional on-farm employment for myself and a legacy for my children”*.

Deidra’s new oak forest will take longer to establish but can be developed as a rich environmental resource. The well-designed diverse spruce forest can also significantly enhance the farming landscape. Fifteen per cent of Deidra’s overall area is designed for biodiversity enhancement. Biodiversity areas are incorporated into all new forests. They include open areas such as aquatic setbacks and retained habitats such as hedgerows. Deidra’s forest will also be an important resource in contributing to carbon capture. This can be achieved through a combination of forest-based carbon sequestration, locking of carbon into future harvested wood products and potential substitution of fossil fuel-based energy.

Although new to forestry, Deidra is determined to learn how to make the most of her new resource. She now intends to join the next round of the DAFM Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group scheme and network with other local forest owners. Advice will also be available from her local Teagasc forestry adviser. With a background in tourism, Deidra also intends to explore the integration of eco-tourism into the farm forest venture and achieve added value in the process.



“I decided to plant to strengthen both the future environmental and financial sustainability of my farm, to create additional on-farm employment for myself and a legacy for my children”

Enhancing Native Woodlands

Michael Murphy, a tillage farmer from Middleton, Co Cork, planted 8 hectares of broadleaf trees, under the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme over the winter of 2015/2016. This scheme supports the establishment of new native woodlands on 'green field' sites.

In addition to his forestry crop, Michael grows 10 hectares of barley, incorporating some wild bird cover, and leases out the remainder of his agricultural holding.

Michael's view was that the 8 hectares were, at best, only suitable for summer grazing because of impeded drainage. *"This particular site has always been very wet and I felt the forestry would help to dry it out and also have a drying effect on the surrounding fields."* was Michael's considered view. Having analysed various land use options and considering his interest in both the



environmental landscape and the recreational benefits of broadleaf woodland, Michael opted for the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme. As well as earning a tax-free premium for the next 15 years, Michael feels that he will (in time) be leaving a living, vibrant legacy to future generations of his family.

Update 2020:

Deidra Doyle concludes: "I attended the Knowledge Transfer (KT) forestry group in 2019 which was a great learning experience and a great opportunity to network with other local forest owners. Forestry is now perfect for me. Since I planted, it has provided a steady income and created additional on-farm employment for myself in the form of tree maintenance work. I now look forward to seeing the trees grow over the coming years"

Michael is pleased that his native woodland crop has recently been approved for the second stage of the establishment grant, at year 4. The spread of furze in the third year proved challenging, but Michael brought it under control with dedication and his own time inputs.

Fuelling the Passion for Growing Quality Oak

Paddy Gleeson from Co. Clare was profiled in 2018 by Jonathan Spazzi

Paddy Gleeson runs a small farm in East Clare. Paddy decided to plant an area of forestry to diversify income and enhance habitats on his farm.

Paddy Gleeson runs a small farm in East Clare, just outside the village of Bodyke. His farm includes a 6 hectare mixed oak forest planted in 1994. I first met Paddy in 2009 and found his enthusiasm and passion for his young forest infectious.

“All my life I had an interest and appreciation for wildlife and nature,” says Paddy. “Some 24 years ago I decided to take advantage of the introduction of the DAFM forestry grant and premium schemes to diversify income and habitats on my farm.

The primary objective was to provide for wildlife while at the same time growing hardwoods for the long term. The natural choice was to plant mix broadleaves with primarily native species. This is what I did!”

“All my life I had an interest and appreciation for wildlife and nature”



The land Paddy selected for planting consisted of heavy mineral soils growing rushes that was difficult to farm. Since then he has taken a very hands-on approach to managing his forest including two commercial firewood thinnings, the development of a local firewood supply from his forest and collaborations with the local school for nature education. *“Working in the forest gives me great satisfaction...and makes money, too,”* says Paddy.

Paddy has fully utilised the forestry support schemes available to him over the years such as a Forest Roads Scheme grant and first thinning support under the Woodland Improvement Scheme. He is now about to apply for a second thinning grant and is also considering the new Continuous Cover Forest Scheme announced this year.



The initial forestry premium payments finished in 2014 but the forest continues to make money for him through regular firewood sales.

The next thinning is planned for 2019 and Paddy is looking forward to harvesting higher value oak as fencing strainers as the trees are now rapidly “fattening”. This is a direct consequence of his proactive management over the past 10 years. Timely intervention has maintained quality trees in a “free growth” dynamic state.

“Working in the forest gives me great satisfaction... and makes money too”

“For me, planting oak on my farm was the right choice as provided me with the right balance of income, legacy and personal satisfaction.” concludes Paddy.

Update 2020:

Since the writing of this article, Paddy has successfully applied for the new pilot Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) Scheme, with work to be carried out from 2020 onwards. Paddy explains: “I received a felling licence in early March and I look forward to availing of this new CCF transformation scheme to continue the selective thinning work. With support from this scheme, we are also planning to under-plant some of the ash/sycamore section with other species suitable for this site”.

Award Winning Family Farm Forests in Cavan

Ann and Paddy O'Reilly from Co. Cavan were profiled in 2019 by Kevin O'Connell

Ann and Paddy O'Reilly from Co. Cavan are happy to have planted part of their farm and create an attractive resource.

Ann and Paddy O'Reilly are the proud owners of two award-winning forests in County Cavan. These forests are now maturing on-farm assets that have also enhanced the picturesque surroundings near Crossdoney and Belturbet. Both Ann and Paddy have no regrets about their decision to establish their farm forests. *"The soil is good here and the trees have done well for us. We also believe we have established a valuable resource as well as a nice legacy for the future".*



Ann's Farm Forest

Ann O'Reilly established a 10.6 hectare forest at Bellahillan, near Crossdoney, Co. Cavan in 1997. Her forest won first prize at the RDS Forestry Awards in 2010 and subsequently second prize at the 2017 awards. Ann's forest is part of her home farm, situated between the river Erne and the Doney river. Over the years, her family farm enterprise had changed from dairying to cattle rearing. After she married Paddy, the farm was initially rented, as it was not practical to manage a cattle enterprise from her new home, located 25 km away in Belturbet.

"The soil is good here and the trees have done well for us. We also believe we have established a valuable resource as well as a nice legacy for the future"

Ann's late father Michael Sheridan loved trees, so in 1997, she discussed the benefits of a farm forest with a local forestry consultant. He advised her to plant a mixture of species that suited their objectives and the local growing conditions. This species mix included 6 hectares of oak woodland on the hilly land and 4.6 hectares of Norway spruce on the lower ground with larch included for further landscape enhancement. The farm is three kilometres from Lough Oughter, which forms a complex of lakes on the Erne water system. This area is renowned for its biodiversity supporting a wide variety of fauna and flora. The lake system and nearby forests in Killykeen and Trinity Island makes this area a major attraction for eco-tourism visitors.

Ann describes how the farm forest option in Bellahillan particularly suited the family situation. Along with Paddy, she was busy rearing their four young children; Eamon, Máire, Niall and Patricia. The financial benefits of forestry were also important: *“The forest premium income was very attractive and surpassed that of our previous cattle enterprise,”* she says. Ann also recalls how *“excellent advice was available and the forestry contractor took care of all the ground preparation works, planted the trees, looked after vegetation control for four years and replaced a small number of trees, a routine part of management”*. The forest itself has thrived since its establishment and received a first thinning in 2015.

Paddy’s Decision to Plant

As co-ordinator of the Ranks Pig Bank for seven years, Paddy travelled all over Ireland and was frequently away from home. This meant that there was limited time for livestock farming on his 24 hectare home farm at Legan, near Belturbet. The great success of Ann’s forest enterprise was one of the drivers of Paddy decision to plant 20 hectares of his Belturbet homestead. According to Paddy: *“The land is excellent for growing trees as it has a favourable nutrient status from previous farming activity. I now have a vigorously and productive forest. The forestry premiums are very attractive and makes for a good cash flow”*. Like Ann, Paddy also established a mix of tree species including Sitka and Norway spruce along with 5 hectares of oak. *“We were very satisfied with the establishment work that was done and since we are receiving good advice and technical support from Kevin O’Connell, our local Teagasc forestry adviser.”* adds Paddy.

“The decision to plant should not be taken in isolation but should be part of the whole farm planning process”

Paddy has also put in bird boxes through his forest to help wild life and has hosted quite a few visits by local schools, walking groups and forestry students from the nearby Teagasc College in Ballyhaise. It is little wonder that Paddy’s forest also achieved an RDS Awards accolade in 2012.

Teagasc Forestry Adviser Kevin O’Connell explains: *“The decision to plant should not be taken in isolation but should be part of the whole farm planning process. It should also include both parents and children due to the long-term nature of the investment. Trees, and forests in particular will have a very important role in the future not only in providing environmental benefits but also in mitigating against the effects of climate change by reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere”*.

Update 2020:

Ann intends to carry out a second thinning on her Norway spruce and oak this summer. Paddy thinned his forest in October 2019 - the pulpwood went to the ESB (as biomass for co-firing), the palletwood to Balcas (sawmill), in Enniskillen and the stakewood was sold to McHugh’s Timber Products in Co. Cavan. The sycamore & ash thinnings were sold locally for firewood.

Cash your Chips now, or Sell your Woodchips Later?

Tom Hickey from Co. Waterford was profiled in 2017 by John Casey

Tom Hickey from Stradbally, Co. Waterford planted a Sitka spruce forest on a wetter part of his farm that was difficult to drain.

Tom Hickey from Stradbally, Co. Waterford is an example of a farm forester keen to get the most out of his thinnings. He is also fully aware that the forest crop remaining at clearfell stage is the priority.

In the winter of 1997, Tom planted 7.3 hectares of mainly Sitka spruce after two unsuccessful attempts to drain parts of the land. In fact, he remembers turf being cut in one area in his father's time.



The decision to plant part of his farm was not taken lightly and Tom estimates that there was a three-year lead-in time between first considering forestry and finally planting. The size of Tom's spruce forest is quite representative of farm forestry in general which has an average planted area of 7 to 9 hectares.

Tom felt that with no personal tradition of forest crop management, he "knew very little about timber". As his crop approached thinning stage, his concerns grew about selling timber standing.

Tom felt that, with no personal tradition of forest management, he "knew very little about timber" as his tree crop approached thinning stage.

In 2010 Tom was one of the founding members of the Waterford Forest Owners Group (WFOG), initiated by local Teagasc forestry adviser John Casey. Tom is currently the secretary of the group. Training events and information days offered the group the opportunity "to learn as we went." says Tom. Today the WFOG is very active, organising site visits with Teagasc to demonstrate harvesting and chipping and running clinics at Dungarvan mart to engage new members. They also actively promote the group ethos and the importance of active forest management so forest owners can get more from their resource.

Tom is a board member of Irish Wood Producers (IWP), which delivers events, training and forestry services to approximately 700 members in five counties. The group is a registered, non-for-profit, forestry company with a contract forester, a general manager and a part time office manager with the capacity to deliver forestry services. These range from afforestation to clearfell operations, working with 34 sub-contractors.

An initial site visit to a new member starts with a forest inventory and site assessment. When the group has a number of sites ready for thinning in an area, a harvesting cluster is organised. IWP provides a cost estimate based on the plantation and sales contracts. Safety assessments are completed before the harvester and forwarder/chainsaw team arrive on site. When the timber is assorted and stacked, the commercial portion is sold to sawmills and offset against the cost of harvesting. By 2017, 2,314 tonnes of saw log and 5,674 tonnes of pallet wood have been sold to sawmills.

Training events and information days offered the group a great opportunity “to learn as we went”

IWP encourage the retention of pulpwood for biomass to increase timber value. A network of small depots has been established and, depending on site access, biomass is processed into woodchip either on site or at a depot. This sales system requires the forest owners to part-fund the timber harvesting instead of a standing timber sale and may involve a possible year-long wait until the pulp is dry enough to chip. However, this does increase the return from the timber sales and has encouraged forest owners to learn more about the sector so they can optimise their forestry resource. Up to 2017, 10,045 tonnes of woodchip have been produced and supplied to end users, with Danone’s infant milk formula plant in Co. Wexford being one of its major customers.

In Tom’s case, selling his timber using this system proved very beneficial. In autumn 2015, he completed the first thinning of his 7.3 hectare Sitka spruce forest under the auspices of Irish Wood Producers, at an overall cost of €11,735. This was paid for by the sale of 131 cubic metres (m³) of pallet wood valued at €5,862 and by Tom paying the harvesting contractor the remainder. The thinning harvest of 131 m³ of pallet wood and 255 m³ of pulpwood came to 386 m³ in total. This is equivalent to approximately 60 m³ per productive hectare, when open spaces, ride lines, etc. are taken into account.

If Tom had sold the crop standing at a flat price of €10 per tonne or per m³, he would have earned €3,500-€4,000 minus the Universal Social Charge (USC), without any time commitments or other inputs from himself. Having sold the remaining pulpwood as woodchip for €17,615 ex-costs, Tom earned an impressive €11,000 profit (minus USC) from the overall sale of his first thinnings, while keeping a degree of control by selling through a forest owner-owned grouping.

Update 2020:

Tom thinned his 7.3 hectare spruce crop for a second time in 2020. Whilst the volume removed was small, he described the price he received as “fair”. He went on to say: “My gut feeling is that I do not want to clearfell my Sitka spruce and that I will be looking into the suitability of a Continuous Cover Forestry option in the future”.

Further Integrating Profitable Timber Production with Forest Conservation

Liam Bresnan from Co. Limerick was profiled in 2020 by Jonathan Spazzi

Liam and Helen Bresnan own and manage a 22 hectare mixed farm forest in Co. Limerick. It was planted as part of whole-farm restructuring to improve overall farm efficiency.

Liam and Helen Bresnan own and manage a 22 hectare mixed farm forest in Limerick, complementing a further 37 hectares of grassland. Comprising Sitka spruce, Norway spruce and mixed broadleaf species, the forest was planted in 1999 as part of whole-farm restructuring with the objective of improving overall farm efficiency.



Since then, Liam has developed forest road access and carried out first

thinning, availing of forest road and woodland improvement supports available from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM). Early thinning is very important as it offers an opportunity to remove inferior quality trees and provides appropriate space for the development of remaining trees. It also encourages tree rooting for long-term wind-stability. This is a key factor for Liam who is managing his plantation under a Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) system. In this approach, trees are retained for longer periods and achieve greater size when compared to conventional management.

Recent European and national forestry policy is promoting a range of management systems known as CCF which allow continued commercial timber harvesting while retaining forest cover. CCF is not an option for all forests as factors such as elevation, exposure and soil quality may pose forest stability issues (e.g. wind damage) during the development process. A pilot scheme was launched in 2019 by the DAFM to fund transformation of existing forests to CCF.

Liam is very hands-on in the management of his forest and over the years has hosted a number of open days for forest owners in association with the local Teagasc forestry adviser and the Limerick Tipperary Woodland Owners (LTWO) group. He and his family greatly value their forest resource and spend a good deal of time in it. Liam's daughter, Aoife and her husband Colm live next door to the forest and their children use it for play. Liam's son Lee and son-in law Colm often join forces with Liam as all enjoy helping with the tending of the forest.

Liam's objectives include achieving a balanced mix between timber production, enhancing personal satisfaction and provision of a lasting legacy. For this reason, and given the forest suitability, he has chosen CCF as an appropriate management option.

He applied under the new CCF pilot scheme to assist him through the early transformation period for a 10 ha spruce/broadleaves mixed section. Grant approval and a felling licence were secured in 2019. A plan of action was then put in place for 2020 by “the management team”. Initial works took place earlier this year. These included selecting, marking and pruning of quality “crop” trees for retention, selecting and marking trees for removal, thinning of spruce and broadleaves and under-planting of small groups of trees (beech and Douglas fir).

“If you can’t measure, you can’t manage it. The success of the system relies on regular monitoring and review”

The final operation was the completion of a forest survey to provide baseline information to inform future management. Unlike conventional spruce thinning, where removal focuses on smaller, poorer quality trees, under CCF, thinning focuses instead on removal of the large poorest quality trees.

Liam and his forester, Padraig O’Tuama, collaboratively carried out the selection and marking of trees for retention and removal, while Padraig facilitated the forest inventory. As Padraig puts it: *“If you can’t measure, you can’t manage it. The success of the system relies on regular monitoring and review”*.

Local forestry contractor Sean Ryan carried out the first thinning of the spruce section 4 years ago and was contracted again this year for the second thinning, using conventional purpose-built forestry machinery. Sean was new to this management approach. *“This is new to me but the fact that trees are marked with paint makes it easier for the operator,”* he says. *“The fact that larger trees come out first also helps as it results in good proportion of higher value logs (e.g. palletwood material) which gives better harvesting efficiency. For us, it was straight forward and I look forward to coming back for the next thinning and seeing the whole process develop”*.

“I am happy with the thinning returns and I can see the value of the forest increasing with every thinning while it also gets brighter and more diverse”

Liam is happy with the progress to date: *“The work is progressing well and the forest in being thinned carefully. I am happy with the thinning returns and I can see the value of the forest increasing with every thinning while it also gets brighter and more diverse”*. The next thinning intervention will be needed in 3 to 4 years with some natural regeneration expected to emerge with possible additional under-planting also carried out then. The last job for Liam this year will be to tidy the brash from the footpath and cycle path so his grandchildren can return to play in the forest.

Update 2020:

Liam and Helen Bresnan have just recently thinned their forest with the next thinning coming up in 3-4 years. They also look forward to seeing the progression of natural regeneration over the next couple of years under their on-going management.

Generations Planting Towards Continuous Cover

Bryan Hennessy from Co. Wexford was profiled in 2019 by Frances McHugh

Bryan Hennessy from Ballymacar, Co. Wexford inherited his forestry and love for trees from his father. Bryan and his wife Helen took the decision to plant more trees around the farm.

Planting began in Ballymacar near New Ross in County Wexford 85 years ago. A hill field was planted with larch and Scots pine when planting forests by farmers was almost unheard of. This began a lifetime of tree planting which continues to this day. Bryan Hennessy remembers his father's love of trees. He also inherited that enthusiasm for planting both woodlands and individual trees around the farm.



Taking into account, the steep terrain and heavy soils of some other fields on the farm, Bryan and his wife Helen took the decision to plant more trees in 1997. Forestry offered a better return than sheep on this difficult ground and so Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, oak, and ash were planted. Planting continued in 2003 when an area of beech and Scots pine was added.

Knowledge and interest in trees

Bryan has a huge appreciation of the responsibility landowners have to manage farms with an eye on the future. This involves taking a whole farm approach to improve and maximise income but also improving environmental sustainability. Additional tree planting over many decades along with the installation of a pond in a wet part of the farm provides a safe haven for many species of wild animals and birds.

There is rarely a year goes by that Bryan does not plant a tree to complement his mixed woodlands and there are many trees are dotted around the farm. As well as planting native species, he has also planted more unusual species. These include Southern beech, Coastal redwood and Spanish chestnut among others. Brian admits, "Planting trees where you have cattle and sheep is tricky, you need to protect your trees with proper fencing; you can't just plant them and walk away."

As well as native trees, Bryan planted, Southern beech, Coastal redwood, Spanish chestnut among others

Learning to manage farm woodlands

The original forest was thinned in the 1970s using horses to extract the timber. It was never clearfelled; but instead was under-planted with Western hemlock, beech and Scots pine. Even then, the idea of 'continuous cover' was embraced. This approach allows for the production of commercial timber while retaining a forest cover at all times.

Bryan believes that there is a responsibility on forest owners to acquire basic knowledge of forest management. He avails of every opportunity to learn, including attending Teagasc forest walks and events, Irish Timber Growers Association events, active involvement in the Irish Wood Producers (IWP), a local forest owner group and more recently attending events presented by Pro Silva Ireland. The latter is an organisation that promotes the development of continuous forest cover in Ireland. Bryan also took part in the new Forest Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme which facilitates forest owners to discuss forestry issues and experiences.

Armed with this knowledge, Bryan worked with IWP to help harvest and market his thinnings. The conifers were thinned and produced pallet wood and pulpwood. The pulpwood was stacked on site to dry and then chipped and delivered to local energy users in Wexford. The broadleaves were also thinned for firewood utilising a Woodland Improvement Scheme grant. Bryan stresses the importance of supervising timber harvesting and sales saying that: *"No farmer would allow any other product to leave their farm without being clear as to how much you have and what it is worth - why should timber sales be any different?"*.

"No farmer would allow any other product off their farm without being clear as to how much you have and what it is worth; why should timber sales be any different?"

The Future

Bryan is very proud of the value he has added to his farm through planting. This value comes in many forms - the timber produced now and into the future, the added value to the landscape with the many hedgerow and parkland trees along with improved habitats that exist alongside the day-to-day farming. He enjoys nothing better than to talk about trees to anyone who will listen, but especially passing on his knowledge to his grandchildren.

Bryan does not envisage clear felling his forests at any stage. He hopes that through careful management, tree cover can remain as new generations of trees are encouraged to grow. He welcomes the recent launch of the new Continuous Cover Forestry Scheme, which will

Update 2020:

Bryan and Helen report that the trees are growing well. They are delighted with the outcome of a recent thinning that took place in the Sitka spruce forest in 2019. They now look forward to planning future management operations to further benefit their forest.

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