

Farm forestry – integrating for resilient farming

Successfully integrating forestry and farming can have rich sustainability dividends, but it can also be challenging. The RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award recognises farmers who are leading the way

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More than 19,000 farmers have already chosen to diversify their farming enterprise by planting forests. The area of farm forests has grown to over 300,000ha and now contributes to a forest industry worth more than €2bn annually.

The successful integration of forestry and farming presents a golden opportunity to fully realise the many benefits of trees and boost farming resilience. More recently, the dual emergencies of climate change and declining biodiversity have brought into sharp focus the many intangible ecosystem services forests can offer for farmers, from carbon sequestration and habitat protection, to biodiversity enhancement and protecting water quality.

For those farmers who are success-

fully meeting the challenge of integrating forestry on their farms, the annual RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award presents an opportunity for their achievements to be properly recognised by their peers and wider community. The award aims to recognise excellence in the sustainable use of land that incorporates both farming and forestry through the successful adoption of a whole-farm planning approach

Making the most of forestry

The process of integration can be challenging and not all farmers are getting the maximum reward from their forest.

Planning to integrate forestry and farming should begin before any trees are planted, with a vision of the future and a “whole-farm planning strategy” for the proposed planting. This should encompass not only the farm, but also the family and work life balance and the following questions should be considered:



- Where and how will a forest best fit physically, economically and environmentally into the farm?
- Can I utilise forestry with other farming schemes – for example, Basic Payment?
- What do I want my farm and farm-

Forestry ‘allowed me breathe again’

Gerard Deegan won the RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award in 2019. The Westmeath farmer successfully combines an organic calf-to-beef enterprise and poultry farming with an integrated forest enterprise.

In 2012, with farming getting more stressful, Gerard decided to plant three-quarters of his 58ha farm, to give himself more quality time to develop the farm and other activities.

“As an organic farmer, forestry suited me from both environmental and financial points of view,” he says. “I worked



Gerard Deegan in his plantation.

with my forester to select the type of trees and organise the layout of the forest.”

Gerard focused on enhancing the farm landscape, optimising biodiver-

sity opportunities and providing good access to facilitate management and timber production. He planted 20ha with commercial conifers and 20ha with predominantly oak, beech, ash and sycamore and has continued to be hands-on in looking after the young forest.

Seven years later and Gerard's role in integrating his forest enterprise with his organic suckler, calf-to-beef and poultry enterprises was recognised when he was named the winner of the RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award. In accepting the award, Gerard said: “I feel privileged to accept the award and will enjoy it. Forestry has allowed me to breathe again.”



Pioneers of forestry promotion

The RDS pioneered the promotion of tree planting over two centuries ago, the legacy of which can still be found around the country.

The Dublin Society, now the Royal Dublin Society, was formed at a meeting of the Dublin Philosophical Society in 1731. As part of the philanthropic desire to modernise Irish agriculture, forestry was encouraged at an early stage. The first ever premium for planting trees was introduced by the Reverend Dr Samuel Madden in 1739.

Records of the Society show that premiums were increasingly awarded for afforestation and stocking of nurseries from 1742 onwards. Gold medals were awarded by the Society to landowners, in recognition of their tree planting endeavours and quality of young forests.

In 1783, "a sum of £40 is offered by the Society to each person enclosing a quantity of ground not less than ten acres, with a sufficient fence proof against cattle, and planting the same with a number of oak, ash, beech, elm, maple, sycamore, chestnut, larch, fir or pine at not less than two thousand plants on each acre".

Support for tree planting continued for seven decades, with records showing that between 1766 and 1806 over 55m trees were planted across Ireland on foot of the Society's initiatives. The modern RDS Forest and Woodland Awards are a fitting acknowledgement of the forward-thinking RDS members whose support for tree planting and forest creation remains a legacy to enjoy over two centuries later.

I acknowledge information provided by Dr. Michael Carey from his book "If trees could talk – Wicklow's trees and woodlands over four centuries" (Coford 2009).

Now in their 33rd year, they recognise and reward farmers and woodland owners who are employing the principles of Climate-Smart Agriculture on their properties, including sound commercial management, environmental protection, and encouragement of bio-diversity.

In addition to the Teagasc Farm Forestry Award, there are also award categories for production forestry and community woodlands. All woodland owners, managers and communities, large or small, are encouraged to enter the awards, as all woodlands are of merit.

ing to look like in 10 or 20 years?

•Finally, and critically – what can I do to get the best results from my trees?

Trees will quickly have a meaningful impact on the farm, whether it is sheltering stock, creating a new landscape, protecting an existing habitat or producing timber. To achieve this potential, and successfully integrate new forests with farms, farmers need to plan the logistics in the short-term.

What's more important is for farmers to stay the course with the growing trees, by being actively involved with their management and growing their own forestry knowledge over the longer term.

Getting advice from Teagasc advisors and working closely with an experienced forester are key elements to the achievement of a successful integration strategy.

RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award

The 2020 RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award is now open for entries. Working farmers who believe they are

doing a good job in managing their forest as an integral part of the farm are strongly encouraged to enter.

Eligibility criteria:

- Forest area minimum 4ha.
- Forest ages five to 15 years.
- Open to farm forests – mainly conifer, mainly broadleaf and mixed woodlands.
- Forest owner must be an active farmer, i.e. have DAFM identifier/s or other evidence of farming.

The winner of the RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award will receive €2,000 and an RDS Silver Medal. The runner-up will receive €1,000 and an RDS Certificate of Merit.

Award information and application forms are available at www.rds.ie/forestry. Information is also available at www.teagasc.ie/forestry

RDS Forest and Woodland Awards

The RDS Forest and Woodland Awards, Ireland's National forestry awards, celebrate the best forests and foresters in Ireland.