

Laying down strong roots for the future

This young Cork dairy farmer is enjoying the Farm Forestry module at the Salesian College in Pallaskenry



Richard Walsh, Tom Houlihan, Michael Somers
Forestry advisors in the Teagasc Crops, Environment and Land Use programme

“Gaining knowledge of our farming enterprises, including the potential of farm forestry, has been a great experience,” says Stephen Jones, who comes from a dairy farm near Kanturk in north Co Cork and 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 management of the family farm comes across very clearly. Together with his father, Colman, he currently farms over 100ha, milking 90 dairy cows on a platform of over 40ha on the main farm holding. The farm also carries 30 weanlings on out-farms, as well as a thriving forestry enterprise of various ages on 34ha of land, which is considered marginal for other agricultural enterprises.

“At present, preparations are gearing up for a busy calving season and we have plans to sustainably increase the dairy herd to over 100 units in the

near future,” he says.

“Our family have always had a strong interest in the environment, having participated in REPS and subsequent agri-environmental schemes.”

Stephen says he has learned 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 five credit farm forestry module, which provides a more detailed insight into forest establishment and management.

“Our farm forest, which comprises productive conifer 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 undertook farm forestry training provided by the Teagasc Forestry Development Department, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

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

Before starting the farm forestry module, he 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 recently planted a parcel four years ago and again two years ago,” he says.

“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 advisor, John Casey.”

Together with his father, Stephen has plans for their farm forest going



Stephen Jones and Richard Wallace.

forward 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 insight into timber uses and how we can optimise our timber sales in the future,” he says.

Farm Forestry Module

The farm forestry module within the



Teagasc Certificate in Agriculture course aims to broaden the level of knowledge and awareness of forestry topics amongst current and future farm forest owners. The introduction of this module is one of a wide range of initiatives undertaken by Teagasc to promote sustainable afforestation.

It's also designed to increase awareness of the potential of farm forestry and to create a positive environment for potential future forest plantings. The farm forestry module covers

seven key topics, which include:

- Incentives for farm forestry.
- The benefits of sustainable forestry as a land use.
- The physical and performance indicators of forestry.
- The silvicultural requirements for success in establishment and management.
- The effects of farm forestry on the environment, biodiversity, landscape, climate and land mobility.
- Common forestry tree species and utilisation of timber/products.
- Forestry establishment options for a given site.

Forestry can be an excellent addition as an on-farm enterprise that also provides multiple environmental benefits. It is important that farmers and landowners are clear about their land use objectives and understand the implications of establishing a farm forest, including the replanting obligations.

When undertaking the farm forestry module, students learn about the growth of forests, the markets for timber and the potential returns, as Stephen outlined. Sustainable forest management is also emphasised, including thinning, harvesting and environmental enhancement. The thinning of a forest can be beneficial to the forest owner, by providing a source of fuel, periodic income and improving the growth rate of future crop trees, due to the provision of additional growing space.

In the design process of a farm forest, the impacts on the environment, biodiversity, landscape and climate must be considered. Students are made aware of the various designations such as Special Areas of Con-

servation, Fresh Water Pearl Mussel catchment areas, archaeological sites, etc., and how these may influence species choice, forest design and on-going management.

The role of forests in sequestering carbon is also highlighted, from carbon uptake during forest growth through to carbon storage in harvested wood products.

A key part of the module involves fostering students' ability to identify some of the common tree species found in Ireland, including matching the right trees to the right place with appropriate objectives. Students may already have an awareness of common timber uses and this module embellishes their knowledge with practical information and demonstrations. For example, European Beech can be found as a material for wood-working benches or mallets.

During the module, students are taken on site visits to nearby farm forests, where they can experience this exciting enterprise at first hand, while also availing of the forest owner's considerable experience. Additional insights from the forest owner provide invaluable perspective on the important factors when making the decision to plant, experiences learned along the way and additional benefits gained by having a forestry enterprise on-farm.

The Teagasc Forestry Development Department provides research, advisory and training/education support to the forestry sector in Ireland. For more information on a range of forest topics/available courses, log onto www.teagasc.ie/forestry or contact your local Teagasc Forestry Advisor.