

Award-winning approach to

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“A managed forest is a valuable asset to a family and its future generations. Timber values outperform inflation. Forestry is better than many other investment asset classes and represents a low-risk, secure, pension.” So says Ross Buchanan, the most recent winner of the RDS/Teagasc Farm Forestry Award.

Ross manages 48ha of diverse forest, planted in 2006 on an outlying farm in Glentogher, in the heart of the Inishowen Peninsula.

From traditional Donegal sheep farming stock, Ross continues to farm with his father on the main holding, over 30km away.

Prior to establishing his forest, Ross carefully considered his farm resources before deciding on the optimum mix of enterprises for the family farm. He set clear objectives and designed a farm forest in Glentogher to meet both economic and environmental goals. It contains 11 tree species, including 14ha of broadleaves and 10ha of diverse conifers.

About 40% of the forest is spruce. Within the spruce area, species such as Scots pine and birch were established on small hills to enhance the landscape and promote biodiversity.

Ross says: “The Sitka spruce area is an important component as it will deliver medium-term economic returns. These returns will support our future farm plans.”

Recreation plans

Ross is investigating how best to develop the strong on-farm recreation potential, making best use of the beautiful natural landscape features present on the farm. The farm boasts an ancient oak woodland with a stunning 10m waterfall within it.

The oak wood is traversed by an ancient road, once an important link between the monastic sites of Donagh and Derry. Open areas have been retained, offering great views over Inishowen and out to the North Atlantic.

Ross has designed a series of walkways as part of forest road-building activity. Plans include the addition of log cabins and interpretive trails that will illuminate the fascinating history of the farm.

However, Ross does make the point that, “Our cabin venture will depend on arranging reasonable insurance



cover. The current high insurance premiums inhibit access to some of the more interesting parts of Ireland for tourists and locals alike.”

Management approaches

For Ross, forestry and timber are “in the blood”. His maternal great-grandfather operated a sawmill in Carndonagh. His paternal grandfather emigrated from Ireland to North America in the 1920s and worked as a lumberjack in Alaska. Ross studied forestry at UCD and currently works as a forestry consultant.

Ross established the farm forest in 2006, using a range of silvicultural approaches, putting his experience working as a forest manager in Scotland to good use. A substantial area is planted with an oak/Scots pine/European larch mixture. He is currently in

Table 1: Area planted

Tree species	Area	%
Sitka spruce	19.6	40.58
Mixed broadleaves	7.1	14.69
Pedunculate oak	5.1	10.56
Common alder	2.6	5.38
Scots pine	2.5	5.18
Japanese larch	2.5	5.18
European larch	2.1	4.35
Western hemlock	1	2.07
Norway spruce	1	2.07
Ash	0.7	1.45
Lodgepole pine	0.6	1.24
Beech	0.4	0.83
Open ground	3.1	6.42
Total	48.3	100

farm forestry in Donegal

Ross Buchanan is the most recent winner of the RDS/Teagasc Farm Forestry Award. From left: Steven Meyen, Teagasc, with Ross Buchanan. Picture: Clive Wasson



RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award

In July, the Royal Dublin Society announced that the winner of the 2020 RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award was Ross Buchanan. Patrick Rhatigan, Roosky, Co Roscommon, received the Special Commendation Award in the 2020 RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry category.

The award is usually presented in front of a packed audience in the RDS Concert Hall as part of the annual Spring Livestock and Forestry Awards. This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the award was made to Ross on his farm and forest near Carndonagh, Co Donegal.

In congratulating Ross Buchanan and Patrick Rhatigan on their awards,

Professor Gerry Boyle, Director of Teagasc, said: "Teagasc is delighted to be associated with the RDS Forestry Awards through our sponsorship of the Farm Forestry Award Category.

This award recognises farmers like Ross and Patrick who are achieving sustainable integration of their forestry and farming enterprises. This will help farming families and the communities in which they live to build resilience by optimising the many economic, environmental, practical and social benefits that can accrue from farms and forests working together."

For more information on the RDS Teagasc Farm Forestry Award, visit www.teagasc.ie/forestry.



Ross established 48ha of diverse forest in 2006. It contains 11 species, including 14ha of broadleaves and 10 a of diverse conifers. Picture: Clive Wasson

the process of removing the conifers while selecting and shaping oak trees.

He recently completed construction of an extensive forest road network. This improved access allows him now to carry out a pre-commercial manual selective thinning of the spruce parcels. The next phase will be to prune selected trees to improve future timber quality.

In another area, he planted a mix of Norway spruce with numerous pockets of oak. The spruce provides side shelter to the young oak. The spruce will be removed gradually as a cash crop so that this area can develop into an oak woodland over time.

Some good advice

Ross strongly believes that it is a good idea to have a forest on the farm. "Many farms in Ireland have

ground suitable for planting to meet a range of objectives, from production through to biodiversity and/or recreation.

"The premium offers a great short-term income that can be focused on expanding other parts of the farm enterprise while the forest itself represents a source of growing capital. In continental Europe, the farm forest is seen as a bank account where some timber can be felled and sold when machinery is required for the farm."

He adds a note of caution: "Owners don't always understand the value of forestry and what the timber is going to be worth. Too many sell off the farm forest once premiums are up allowing someone else to realise the value of the timber and for future rotations too."

Looking to the future

Ross's story shows how forests can be a valuable resource on the farm. His carefully designed forest and his innovative approach help to diversify income streams. This, in turn, has opened up new opportunities for farm diversification.

Forestry is now very much an integral part of the farm.