

AGROFORESTRY

What is agroforestry?

Agroforestry is the integration of trees with either crops or livestock on the same land. It aims to achieve additional benefits in comparison to keeping agriculture and trees separate.

Across the world, agroforestry encompasses a wide variety of practices ranging from simple shelterbelts of trees around fields to an intimate integration of food crops and trees.

Benefits of agroforestry

- Farming and forestry working together in the same field, providing additional sources of sustainable on-farm revenue;
- growing high-quality timber managed to integrate with livestock production and grass growth;
- promoting animal welfare and contributing to better livestock productivity;
- enhancing grass growth, biodiversity and water quality with improved shelter, soil health and nutrient capture;
- enhancing the capacity for on-farm carbon sequestration; and,
- availing of attractive establishment grants and annual premiums in addition to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) on eligible land.

Supports for agroforestry

New agroforestry planting is now supported with generous funding available under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme administered by the DAFM. Agroforestry can be planted standalone or in combination with other afforestation options, providing

an opportunity for farmers to achieve additional environmental, economic and practical objectives.

As with all afforestation schemes, the switch to agroforestry is a permanent land use change.

Types of agroforestry in Europe

1. Silvopastoral: trees and livestock (currently funded in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Forestry Programme).
2. Silvoarable: trees and crops.
3. Hedgerows/shelterbelts/trees for water protection.
4. Forest farming: crop cultivation within a forest, e.g., harvesting of forest fungi.
5. Homegardens: tree and food production in small areas.

Agroforestry in Ireland

Trees have a very important role in the farming landscape and agroforestry is now a specific grant category within the DAFM Forestry Programme. A landowner can apply for grant support to plant an area of agroforestry. With the continued need to increase the level of tree planting in Ireland, agroforestry is seen to have a role in contributing to this into the future.

Agroforestry support

- **Establishment grant:** supports the cost of planting and establishing new agroforestry, with current total available funding of €6,220/ha.
- **Annual forestry premium:** up to €660/ha/annum. Currently paid for five years.
- **Choice of trees:** oak, sycamore and cherry, including 15% fruit and nut trees with other

species considered on a site-by-site basis.

- **Individual tree protection:** each tree is protected by a tree shelter.
- **Tree numbers:** to accommodate farming activity, trees are planted at wide spacing ranging 400-1,000 trees/ha, e.g., 400 trees/ha = 5m x 5m spacing.
- **Minimum area:** 0.5ha with a tree-to-tree width of 20m.

How do I apply for the agroforestry grant?

Agroforestry planting applications are submitted to DAFM using a registered forester. Registered foresters may also offer a planting and establishment service. The list of registered foresters is available from your local Teagasc Forestry

Development Officer, the Teagasc Forestry website www.teagasc.ie/forestry, or from the Forestry Division, DAFM, Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford. Contact 1890-200 509 or 053-916 3400.

Compatible farming activities



Sheep are a suitable option for grazing on agroforestry land.

- **Grazing:** during spring and summer for the first six to eight years, restricted to sheep, poultry or young domestic stock to enable tree-root establishment. Later years are unrestricted.
- **Grass production:** silage and hay production are also permitted using appropriate machinery to ensure that the trees are not inadvertently damaged.



CASE STUDY

The best of both worlds

In 2009, part-time farmer Liam Beechinor was rearing cattle to 30 months on his 20ha beef farm in Clonakilty, Co. Cork. A self-described late entrant to farming, he had no quota or single farm payment and had few options to increase his on-farm income, outside of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS). Liam decided to plant 7ha of very marginal land under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, planting a combination of broadleaves and conifers. Since the conifers would mature earlier, he felt he would get some of the benefits of that final crop by his retirement.

Under the agroforestry measure, Liam decided in 2011 to plant 1.6ha of better land with ash, at 400 plants/ha. Liam found that, with a bit of care, he could cut 30 bales of silage without damaging the young trees. In fact, he could take two cuts of silage off the plot annually, producing 25 large and 24 small bales each year, aided by two applications of nitrogen (N) fertiliser at 60kg/ha and 40kg/ha, respectively. He felt that the extra silage yield was a real bonus during the fodder crisis in 2013. Since the young trees are protected by tree shelters, a further income opportunity

presented itself, as he now rents the agroforestry plot to graze upwards of 50 ewes. Liam feels that the agroforestry plot "is drier now than it ever was", allowing the sheep out earlier. Some pruning has already been carried out on the ash and the next task is to remove the tree shelters. Inspection paths for the conifer crop is also on the to-do list. Liam describes his situation: "I have the best of both worlds with agroforestry. I have my forestry and yet I'm still able to use the land for agriculture, albeit in a more restrictive way. I think it is the perfect bridge between farming and forestry".

Further information

For further information please contact the Teagasc Forestry Development Department at:
✉ forestry@teagasc.ie

The following resources are also helpful:

- 🌐 www.teagasc.ie/forestry
- 🌐 www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service
- 🌐 www.teagasc.ie/agroforestry

Fact sheet produced by the Teagasc Forestry Development Department.

www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev

