

Opportunities within the Afforestation Programme

The Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme supports forest establishment and is designed to accommodate a variety of sustainable timber production, social and environmental objectives. The afforestation scheme incorporates 12 separate Grant and Premium Categories (GPCs), providing different options including productive conifers, broadleaf species, native woodland initiatives as well as agroforestry and forestry for fibre options.

Grant and Premium Categories numbered 1-8 funds the establishment of 'conventional' forests with the main objective of supporting sustainable commercial timber production. Additional objectives such as environmental enhancement are also very relevant to these categories.

GPC 3 (10% diverse mix) is the category of choice for many landowners establishing new forests and it carries an annual premium of €510 per hectare over 15 years. It usually comprises a mix of Sitka Spruce together with at least a 10% diverse species mix. Broadleaves adjacent to roads and/or watercourses may also form part of this 10%. Options are also available for those wishing to diversify their species range. Suitable diverse conifer species (GPC 4) can produce high quality and valuable timber suitable for a range of end uses while GPCs 5 to 8 provide options for broadleaf planting, depending on the species selected. GPC's 9 and 10 support the establishment of native woodland, which may be considered on suitable land in designated areas and acid sensitive areas, such as South Kerry, where conventional forestry may be restricted. The annual premium here is €635 per hectare.

The design and make up of new forest should be strongly guided by owner's objectives and be based on informed consideration and decision making. Careful consideration should be made in matching tree species to site types. It is important that landowners are aware of species choices, appreciate the difference between tree species and the different time scales required to achieve economic and other objectives. Other important criteria which affect species and GPC choices include: relative proportions of suitable land types, environmental constraints such as landscape, water quality, archaeology, area of proposed planting, drainage status of soils, performance and quality of forestry in the vicinity, access and distance to roadway, exposure levels that could affect growth and timber quality and the presence of pests such as deer or squirrels.

A land use change to forestry will raise many queries for those considering it. Access to independent and objective advice will empower you to make informed decisions on the many relevant issues. In January 2017, Teagasc will commence a significant 4-year campaign to promote the establishment of forestry as a sustainable and rewarding land use. One of the early initiatives of this campaign will be a regular series of Forestry Clinics to be held in Teagasc offices around the country. A one-to one consultation can be arranged by appointment at these clinics. For further information and to book an individual consultation contact Tom Houlihan on 087-6184353 or email tom.houlihan@teagasc.ie.

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