The Perceptions Of Farmers To Afforestation In Ireland

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Background

PAMUCEAF - *Poplar - a multiple use crop for European arable farmers*

EU FAIR-funded project 1999 - 2002

Project Objectives:

- to determine potential for poplar on surplus agricultural land
- to assess attitudes of farmers and public to this
- to examine demand level & markets for poplar
Forestry in Ireland

- Forest Area in Ireland is 9% of total land area
- c. 95% plantation, 5% natural / semi-natural
- 84% conifer, 16% broadleaf

- National Forest Policy is to increase area to 17%
- Land base for further afforestation is private
- Primarily farmers diversifying from agriculture
- Supported by subsidies on establishment and income substitution
Annual Afforestation in Ireland (1932 - 1998)

Source: Redrawn from Bulfin, 1999.

Source: Coggins 1999.
Objectives of Study

- Characterise the respondent & the farm type
- Determine current land uses including forestry
- Analyse farmers' perceptions of farm forestry
- Assess farmers' willingness to further afforest

480 questionnaires posted to IFA arable farmers
44 responses collated and analysed
This was an 8.8% response rate
Age distribution of respondents

How old are you?

- Under 30
- 30-45
- 46-60
- Over 60
Distribution of farm size

![Bar chart showing the distribution of farm size. The x-axis represents the area in hectares (Ha), and the y-axis represents the response rate (%). The chart shows that the highest response rate is for the 25-50 Ha category, followed by the 50-75 Ha category. There is a gradual decrease in response rate for larger farm sizes, with the lowest rate for the >200 Ha category.]
On-farm land-use

Average area (ha)

Frequency

- Spring-sown cereals
- Permanent grass/long leys
- Winter-sown cereals
- Sugar beet
- Woodland/farm forestry
- Short-term grass leys
- Potatoes
- Legumes (e.g. peas, beans)
- Beet
- Field vegetables
- Leased out
- Fodder maize
- Unspecified
- Maize/sweet corn
- Winter-sown oilseed rape
- Flower bulbs
- Waste (hedges etc)
- Set-aside
- Fruit crops
- Spring-sown oilseed rape
Presence of woodland/forestry on the farm

Woodland or forestry present on the farm.

- Yes: 37%
- No: 63%
Composition of afforestation

- Sitka
- Ash
- Norway spruce
- Larch
- Poplar
- Sycamore
- Beech
- Douglas fir
- Oak
- Noble fir

Average area (Ha) vs Frequency
Land-use prior to afforestation

The diagram shows the response rate (%) for different land uses prior to afforestation. The categories are Arable crop production, Grassland, and Woodland/forestry. The response rate is highest for Arable crop production, followed by Grassland and then Woodland/forestry.
Non timber production uses of woodland

- Wildlife conservation
- Shooting or hunting
- Shelter
- Public access for recreation or sport
- Protection of water-course or drinking water supply
- Livestock grazing
- Other
Perceived landscape value of land-uses
Perceived wildlife value of land-uses

![Bar chart showing perceived wildlife value of different land-uses. The x-axis represents different land-uses: Arable crops, Lowland grassland, Conifers, Poplars, Mixed broadleaves, and Short rotation coppice. The y-axis represents the proportion (%). The chart uses different shades to indicate the perceived value: Very low, Low, Medium, High, Very high, and Don't know.]
Perceived economic value of land-uses

![Graph showing the perceived economic value of different land-uses.](image)
### Perceptions on land-uses - summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land-use</th>
<th>Modal response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arable crops</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland grassland</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conifers</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed broadleaves</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poplars</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short rotation coppice</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attitudes towards farm forestry

- I have no interest in farm forestry
- I have actively considered farm forestry, but it was not for me
- I might like to grow trees, but need more information
- I would like to grow trees as an alternative farm crop

Proportion of responses (%)
Conclusions

- Many arable farmers already engaged in farm forestry
- Variety of tree species grown conifer & broadleaf
- Most farmers had multiple objectives for their farm forests
- Perception is farm forestry will increase in future
- Main reason is due to uncertainties in farming.
- Majority willing to consider forestry as an enterprise
- Perception that afforestation reduces value of land