

forestry

Co-operating to avail of opportunity

Locally grown woodchip is fuelling local industry in Wexford

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Mary Maher, who was left a 39ha mixed woodland near Enniscorthy, Co Wexford, by her late father, John in 2011, says: “Inheriting any asset is a privilege but with privilege comes responsibility.”

The woodland originated with the planting of a small area of Sitka spruce in 1995. Four years later, four additional plots were planted. These consisted of ash, sycamore/alder mix, Sitka spruce/Norway spruce mix and an oak/pine mix.

“When I assumed ownership of the woodland there was a steep learning curve as I hadn’t previously been involved in its management,” says Mary. “The woodland had been established well by a local forestry company, but their contract and involvement was well over.”

With most of the trees approaching the requirement to thin; Mary knew she needed to gain some forest management knowledge, fast.

Local growers gaining knowledge

Mary’s father had attended Teagasc forestry events to learn about the early management of forests. These Teagasc-led events attracted a core group of very interested and proactive forest owners who enjoyed meeting and sharing experiences as their forests grew.

This core group became more organised and with Teagasc facilitation; the Wexford Forest Owners Group formed. Over time, many of these woodlands began to produce timber and discussion at meetings turned to timber markets.

The main question posed was; how could owners work together to ensure economies of scale and access a local market for their initial small-scale forest production?

The Vulcan project

The Wexford Forest Owner Group began discussions with LEADER about how small dimension timber could be kept local in order to return maximum value to the owners and the local community.



Frances McHugh, Teagasc, discusses wood chip quality with Mary Maher, forest owner, and Alex Kelly, Irish Wood Producers.



Fortuitously, Danone, a baby nutrition company located outside Wexford town, as part of its ambition to achieve carbon neutrality had installed a new woodchip boiler to supply high pressure steam to their factory. They had also approached LEADER looking for a sustainable and local energy supply.

The Vulcan project was born. Its role was to provide financial support to coordinate the development of this local supply chain, and its operation, from “forest to furnace”.

The Wexford Forest Owners Group amalgamated with other forest owner groups in Kilkenny, Laois and Waterford and today they trade as Irish Wood Producers. This amalgamation was necessary to upscale supply and develop and supply other energy customers in the region.

Irish Wood Producers is a not-for-profit company managed by private forest owners to support almost 800

Teagasc forest research showcase

16 October 2019
at Teagasc,
Oak Park, Carlow

This outdoor event will be an opportunity to see the role forest research has in contributing to addressing the challenges and opportunities across many aspects of forestry and forest management in Ireland.

Among others, the following research topics will be discussed on the day:

- Broadleaf tree improvement; birch and alder.
- Broadleaf silviculture.
- Ash site restocking options.
- Sitka spruce provenance trials.
- Alternative conifers.
- Thinning conifers.
- Ash dieback resistance breeding.
- Integrated pest management of pine weevil.
- Continuous cover forestry.

This forest research day is approved as a Forestry KTG event. Please contact Frances McHugh, Teagasc to register your group for attendance. frances.mchugh@teagasc.ie or 087-6222111

Further details see www.teagasc.ie/forestry

Timber air-dried roadside at Mary Maher's forest is chipped on site and delivered straight to Danone's boiler.



members with the sustainable management and development of their forestry. It was Irish Wood Producers that Mary contacted when she needed to 'tap into' the local forestry scene in Wexford. Alex Kelly, manager at IWP, called to her site and explained what services were available.

With such a very mixed woodland, different operations were timed for different plots.

Soon after, a felling licence was applied for along with a woodland improvement grant to support the thinning of broadleaves. When the licence and grant was approved; steps were taken to organise the thinning operation.

In 2014, first thinning commenced. A local chainsaw operator was engaged to thin the ash and oak; the alder/sycamore mix was not ready at the time. A harvesting machine was brought in to thin the spruce.

A variety of products came out of

the various plots. Spruce pallet wood was sold locally.

The spruce pulp wood was air dried on-site to 34% moisture content so that when a chipper was brought in the chip could be delivered and fed directly into the boiler in Danone. This returned Mary a net payment of €22.60/tonne. A second thinning in the spruce was carried out this year; again organised by Alex and her team in IWP. This time products were similar but Ash thinnings from previous thinning was blended with the spruce pulp which was very successful in reaching a high quality chip at 40% moisture content. This time the net payment per tonne delivered was €24.21 per tonne.

Mary keeps in constant contact with IWP and attends events and meetings organised by the group. Last year she joined one of the first forest Knowledge Transfer groups, a scheme that continues this year.

Chatting to Mary, she reflects on her now eight years managing her forest. "Even though trees seem to grow relatively slowly; a mixed forest within the thinning cycle requires lots of timely management."

She laughs when thinking back on her first steps into forest management: "I didn't even possess a phone number for a forester. I had no idea who was out there to help. It was only when I went to a few Teagasc forest walks and found out about IWP that I finally made some progress and began to understand what needed to be done."

Since those early days, Mary has completed a chainsaw course with IWP and is confident in discussing forest management with her fellow forest owners in Wexford. This is the type of Knowledge Transfer that will help the development and success of private forestry in Ireland.