

# Forest harvesting and timber sales – five key steps

Forests and woodlands are a sustainable and potentially lucrative farm resource. Careful planning of timber harvesting and sale is absolutely essential to reap the full rewards

**Michael Somers**  
Forestry Development  
Officer, Teagasc Nenagh



can then be made on thinning and harvesting.

**1** Know your forest: sustainable management enhances forest productivity, profitability and environmental benefits. Your forest should be assessed for the following:

- Age, growth rate, and productivity.
- Forest stability (e.g. soil type, drainage conditions, exposure levels and tree heights).
- Suitability for harvest/appropriate harvest type/timing of harvest.
- The amount of timber present and to be removed, if appropriate.
- Environmental/archaeological features and appropriate protection measures.
- Options to certify timber.

Inspection paths are essential in young conifer forests when trees close in. They facilitate forest inspection, assessment (e.g. of species, timber quality, productive area and environmental features) and timber volume estimation. As your forest grows and increases in value, appropriate pre-harvest knowledge of what is in your forest becomes increasingly important. Informed decisions

**2** **Preparing for harvest:** planning for the harvest should commence one to two years in advance depending on criteria such as the forest location, environmental sensitivities, forest area and harvest type (e.g. first or subsequent thinning or final harvest). Allow yourself time to seek assistance, as required, for:

- Health and safety/risk assessment.
- Harvest planning.
- Felling licence application and approval.
- Forest road or loading bay requirements (allow time for potential grant application/ approval, road construction and settlement).
- Possible co-ordination of sales with adjoining forestry owners

A harvest plan should be drawn up based on a detailed survey of the forest. The plan and associated maps should state and illustrate the harvesting and, where applicable, reforestation operations that are planned. It should also detail measures to protect social and environmental features (e.g. water, biodiversity and archaeology).

The Standards for Felling and Refor-



estation (Department of Agriculture Food and Marine) sets out the universal standards that apply to all felling activity, undertaken under a felling licence under the Forestry Regulations 2017. These standards are contingent on health and safety considerations as set out in the Health & Safety Authority's Code of Practice for Managing Safety & Health in Forest Operations ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)).

**3** **Manage the timber sale:**  
*(a) The value of your resource* – before marketing timber, owners should familiarise themselves with timber value, how it appreciates through thinning operations and the major potential value in the final harvest. Forest owners should engage with other owners/forestry professionals/owner producer organisations, attend field days and timber marketing events (e.g. Talking Timber), co-ordinated by Teagasc. It is also very beneficial to become familiar with factors that can influence timber prices.

*(b) Selling/marketing options:* Timber can be sold in a number of ways. These include standing sales (where you sell the standing trees) and harvested sale (roadside sale or delivered sale to sawmill). While forest owners may have more control with harvested sales, expertise is required to manage production of log products. Whichever option is chosen,



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- Have an appropriate system in place to monitor the removal of all timber loads from the forest. The ITGA Model Timber Sales Dispatch System (<https://www.itga.ie/images/pdf/MTSSApril2010.pdf>) provides a widely accepted template for managing secure timber sales in private forests.
- Discrete, temporary, cameras (along with appropriate signage) may be considered at strategic locations in the forest.
- Ensure prompt collection and removal of timber from the forest as agreed within the sales contract. This will also minimise drying of timber, which is particularly important where timber is sold on a weight basis.
- Web-based/remote timber tracking and measurement systems may be an option for forest owners in the future.

### Virtual Talking Timber

This year's Talking Timber will concentrate on thinning conifer and sales of timber. Because of COVID-19, this year's event is a virtual event, and will take place on Tuesday 14 July from 7pm to 8pm.

With more and more private forests reaching the thinning stage there are both challenges and opportunities to successfully bring this rapidly expanding timber resource to market. Forest owners must ask the right questions and make the right decisions to maximise their forests' potential quality and value.

Questions may include:

- Is my forest ready for thinning?
- What is the best way to thin?
- How can I retain control to ensure the best outcome?

The format for Virtual Talking Timber will comprise a series of short, on-site videos followed by a live panel discussion and an opportunity for you to have your questions answered in a live Q&A session. You are encouraged to ask questions and comment during the virtual event.

Foresters from Teagasc and the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), together with a forest owner and a sawmiller, will discuss preparing for thinning conifers with a particular focus on second thinning and the market requirements for quality timber.

it is imperative that a contract is in place with a registered contractor prior to commencing any work.

When seeking timber prices, a range of timber markets should be consulted. Only work with experienced and reputable timber buyers and harvesting contractors. Talking in advance to owners who have already harvested will help you make informed decisions. Seek several references for any contractor.

#### (c) The importance of a good sales contract

When agreeing with your forester/timber buyer the negotiated price for your timber, ensure you have clarity on all costs involved and an indication of the net return per hectare that will be available to you as the owner. An appropriate timber sales contract between the forest owner and the forester/timber buyer is essential. It provides you with a framework for a shared agreement and a clear understanding of the responsibilities of all parties.

### 4 Monitor the harvest:

Monitoring the harvest is key. The forest owner and/or his/her agent should inspect the harvest operation from the start and review it regularly to ensure that all procedures that were pre-agreed are being followed. Professional assistance in monitoring harvest operations is worth considering and, given the

value of forests and timber products, will generally be money well spent.

Thinning control plots are used to regulate thinning practice and intensity. Modern timber harvesters are equipped with a computerised measurement system (note: regular calibration of this system is essential). The resulting computerised printouts will provide indicative information on the number and size of trees cut over a specified time period.

This data should be sought and made available to forest owners on a regular basis during operations. Stack measurement is also a simple and useful method to estimate timber volumes on site.

### 5 Secure your timber:

Following harvest, it is important to ensure your timber is protected against theft.

- Install a physical barrier at the entrance to your forest.
- Where possible, have a presence on site during timber haulage periods.

### Virtual Talking Timber programme schedule

7pm	Introduction
7pm to 7.45pm	Short videos followed by live panel discussion
7.45pm to 8pm	Live public Q&A

To attend Virtual Talking Timber - please register in advance at [www.teagasc.ie/talkingtimber2020](http://www.teagasc.ie/talkingtimber2020). We hope that you can join us. Talking Timber is organised by Teagasc with the co-operation of Forest Industry Ireland and DAFM.