

More good reasons to plant trees

New schemes are supporting tree-planting, in particular native broadleaf species. The private sector, aiming to help the environment, is now providing additional payments to farmers who grow trees.

Liam Kelly
Teagasc forestry advisor,
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The decision to establish a farm forest involves a significant, but rewarding, change of land use. Since 1980, (according to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)) 23,256 individual private land owners have received grant aid to establish forests. Since then, nearly half (46.2%) of all individual owners have received afforestation grant aid at least twice.

In making a decision to plant, lots of factors come into play – the land types on the farm, the current enterprise mix, available forestry schemes. The most important of all, however, are the owner's personal objectives.

Over the years, as the range of land types available for planting has broadened, complementary schemes have been established to ensure that there is an option available to suit almost anyone. As people begin to focus more on climate change and environmental challenges, one of the planting options that is currently receiving a lot of traction is the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme (NWS Est).

The aim of NWS Est. is to support the creation of new native woodland on 'greenfield' sites by farmers and other landowners. This facilitates the expansion of Ireland's native woodland resource and associated biodiversity.

Each new woodland plantation must

reflect the appropriate native woodland type (or types) identified during the application process as the most ecologically appropriate for the site. The scheme is supported in the form of a grant payment of up to €6,220/ha and a 15-year annual premium payment of up to €665/ha. This can go to €680/ha when planting in excess of 10ha.

The planning and approval stage can take a certain length of time when considering an afforestation project. It is important to get advice and plan in good time. Teagasc offer an independent advisory service for all considering forestry.

Woodland Environmental Fund

The Woodland Environmental Fund (WEF) provides an opportunity for individual businesses to expand Ireland's native woodland resource, by providing additional incentives to encourage landowners like Brian Collentine to plant new native woodlands. WEF can be regarded as a 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR) project, assisting in the restoration of Ireland's once-vast forests of native species such as oak, birch and alder.

Each individual business that participates in the Woodland Environmental Fund provides €1,000 per hectare as a once-off top-up payment to the landowner upon establishment of the native woodland. Farmers and other landowners interested in planting native woodlands may opt into the WEF as part of their standard appli-



cation under DAFM's existing Native Woodland Establishment Scheme.

In Brian's case, the business partner involved was the supermarket chain Lidl. The company sees its involvement in this initiative as an opportunity to expand its 'A Better Tomorrow Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Liam Kelly and
Brian Collentine.



Case study: Brian Collentine

"Since planting my native woodland, the trees are progressing well – perhaps I will plant some more in the future."

This is the considered view of Brian Collentine, who farms a 14.6ha family holding at Burnellstown on the outskirts of Mullingar. Brian recently planted a native woodland plantation on part of his farm.

"I mainly practice summer grazing, purchasing bullocks in the spring and selling to the factory in the autumn," says Brian.

This year, he has a nice herd of Limousin cattle, (though reduced in number) grazing on the farm. Brian also works as a director and Chartered Energy consultant with a large midland-based engineering consultancy.

"The family has been farming here for generations, so I wanted the farm to be in balance with nature and to see the

farm become a carbon sink benefitting the environment."

He researched various options for environmental enhancement, but the option that ticked the most boxes for Brian was forestry.

"I particularly liked the biodiversity attributes of the Native Woodland Scheme.

"But, I still took my time to consider all important factors over a number of years before reaching the decision to plant."

Together with forester Alec Mooney of SWS Forestry Service and an ecologist, Brian designed a woodland plan that best suited the ecology of the site. In the spring of this year, he planted approximately two-thirds of his farm (10.42ha) under the Native Woodland Scheme. The application process took approximately nine months.

"The site was sheep fenced to exclude all livestock," adds Brian.

Strategy', which is already working to reduce its own carbon emissions.

This project is intended to absorb approximately 12,500t of CO₂ equivalent from the atmosphere and to complement the landscape as protected native woodland.

Lidl are very pleased to be involved in the Woodland Environmental Fund initiative and to be working closely with Brian and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This collaborative approach is helping to restore richer biodiversity in Ireland through its contribution to reforesting the countryside.

"Our woodland has featured on a number of Lidl's publications and magazines, highlighting the benefit of the collaboration," says Brian.

"Lidl may call to the site from time to time and keep in touch with its development over the next 15 years. I'm happy to see the scheme promoted in this way."

The future

While forests are now valued for the full range of benefits they deliver, timber production will continue to be a core objective of Brian's venture.

Nonetheless, Brian says he may develop the recreation element of the forest as the trees grow and mature.

The proximity of the forest to Mullingar town and its midland location provide Brian with scope to explore this opportunity in the future. The assorted mix of tree species has potential to be enjoyed by many.

"The forestry is a great addition to the farm. I'm happy with its contribution, both from a financial and environmental perspective," concludes Brian.

"The site is mainly a rich, fertile brown earth, along with some peat in the lower areas. The terrain is drumlin-like, with short, gentle slopes across the site."

Ground preparation comprised inverted mounding, which minimised soil disruption, yet provided an ideal planting medium for the young trees. This site was planted under GPC 9, allowing the following species – 50% sessile oak, 10% scots pine and 40% additional broadleaves (including rowan, alder, birch, hazel, willow and whitethorn).

The Scots pine and additional broadleaves were intimately mixed in groups among the oak.

When the crop starts to establish, this eclectic mix of species will be very appealing. Vegetation control will be a 'close to nature' approach, with innovative means to help trample down the grasses and competing weeds to allow the trees establish and flourish in an environmentally friendly way.