



Today's Farm

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The perfect partnership 12

Also:

Dairying finance	8
Soils/fertilizer Focus	
- Managing early nitrogen	18
- Predicting N release	20
- Keeping an eye on P and K	22
- Avoiding compaction	25
Budget Analysis	15
BETTER farm feed strategies	32
Léim an bradáin in Galway	34
Sheep, forestry, Botany and more...	

'Planting trees? I'd never see any benefits other than the premium!'

John Casey

Teagasc forestry development officer, Mallow, Co Cork

Our headline is the view of many farmers but what they fail to realise is that trees in Ireland, particularly conifers, grow faster than almost anywhere else in Europe. Forestry crops are ready for thinning, the first harvest, in a relatively short period of time. A case in point is the farm forestry plantation of James O'Sullivan, Clara, Millstreet, Co Cork.

In 1989, James' late father, Matthew, was part-time farming 34 hectares (ha) outside Millstreet, Cork, rearing beef cattle. James encouraged his father to plant 10.5ha of marginal agricultural land away from the farm.

Matthew was wary due to the permanency of the land use change but felt, on balance, that land was "of no other use".

James admits that they were looking no further than the grant at the beginning when they planted the Sitka spruce crop.

With advice from the original forestry company, SWS Forestry, and Teagasc, James decided that the 1989 crop was fit for thinning in 2010. It was sold standing and bought by Graingers Sawmill of Enniskeane, Co Cork. Approximately 350 tonnes of thinnings were harvested at €11/tonne.

There was already good access to the forest site, with a barrier in place. To control how much timber was



MAIN PICTURE: James O'Sullivan, who farms near Millstreet in Cork, says that forestry thinnings are a useful source of revenue.

BOTTOM LEFT: Symptoms of ash dieback.



leaving the site, James had the haulage contractor ring him 30 minutes in advance to open the barrier for each of the 14 loads.

The successful and profitable thinning of his first crop prompted James to consider further planting. I walked his farm in 2010 and we went through the various planting options. The proposed new planting area was nearer the farmyard and James felt that he would prefer broadleaves close to the house and because of the higher premium attached to broadleaves.

James planted 5.6ha and 4.5ha of oak, ash and birch in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Collectively, the afforested

land earns James in excess of €5,000 per year in premia. "My only regret is that I didn't plant more 20 years ago," he says.

Note: An afforestation grant is available to cover the establishment of the forest. Seventy-five per cent is payable after planting with the balance paid four years later. Grants range from €2,400/ha to a maximum of €5,500/ha, depending on species and land type. Premia for enclosed land range from €427/ha to a maximum of €515/ha dependent on tree species, land type, area planted and farmer status.

For further information, contact your local Teagasc forestry development officer or visit www.teagasc.ie/forestry



Ash dieback (Chalara)

On 12 October, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) announced the first finding of *Chalara fraxinea* in Ireland. Ash dieback has spread rapidly across Europe. The disease can be fatal, particularly among younger trees. Spores from *Chalara fraxinea* are wind borne and are produced from June to September.

What does it look like?

Symptoms include:

- Foliage wilt: black/brown leaves may be retained;

- Shoot dieback with brownish to orange discolouration, often multiple shoots; and,
- Elongated angular stem lesions, often diamond-shaped.

Report (with photographs, if possible) any sites where you have concerns about unusual ill health in ash, to the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine: by email (forestprotection@agriculture.gov.ie); or, by phone (01-607 2651).

Do not remove any plant material from a site containing suspect trees.

Where the disease is suspected:

- Footwear: wash off all soil and plant debris from boots. Spray your boots with disinfectant and dispose of any used water onto an area where the water will not run into a watercourse;
- Clothing: check all clothing for any plant material; and,
- Tools and equipment: wash off all soil and plant debris, and disinfect and dispose of any used water onto an area where the water will not run into a watercourse.