

Foreword

The *Forestry and Timber Yearbook*, published by the Irish Timber Growers Association, is a useful, readily accessible source of forestry information and contacts in the forestry sector in Ireland. It has developed over the years with an online version now also providing easy access to information and contact details. I commend the Irish Timbers Growers Association on their compilation and production of this Yearbook once again and I am pleased to provide the Foreword for such a key publication in our sector.

The forestry sector itself has also developed over the years. I am pleased to note the good prices currently being achieved for timber and the innovation and marketing work being done by the processing sector, all of which gives a timely boost to the forestry sector. There are also opportunities for the sector arising from the increasing demand for biomass.

A particularly welcome development over the last number of years has been the formation of forest producer groups. Readers may be interested to note that there are over 16 farm forest producer groups in existence with more anticipated in the coming years.

These groups are providing a means by which forest owners work together to derive the maximum return from their plantations by enabling growers to avail of the current opportunities arising from good market demand and the development of wood energy. I believe such co-operation and focus is particularly relevant now with many forests, funded through the Department's afforestation programme, coming into production, with a need for ongoing management and thinning as appropriate. Forest owner participation in forestry producer groups facilitates co-operation, knowledge-sharing and economies of scale. While, obviously, the participation of forest owners is crucial, I also want to acknowledge the support and involvement of the Forestry Unit of Teagasc in a number of the groups.

In 2010, we had to take steps to deal with forest fires and the discovery of *Phytophthora ramorum* disease on Japanese larch. To put this in context, 2010 was one of the worst years on record for forest fires with the weather a significant factor in creating the optimum conditions for such fires. A Land and Forest Fires Working Group comprising representatives from my Department, the Emergency Services, the forest industry and State Bodies has examined this problem in order to learn



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from our experiences in 2010 and to make recommendations to minimise this risk.

In relation to the discovery of *Phytophthora ramorum* disease on Japanese larch, I want to advise forest growers that I am personally chairing a *Phytophthora ramorum* Forestry Group to monitor the situation. I am pleased that the Yearbook includes useful reference information on this issue containing various photographs showing symptoms of the disease. I ask all forest owners and managers if, in the course of your work, you observe larch showing symptoms of the disease, to please notify the Department and a Forestry Inspector will visit the site.

Forestry is a significant asset – both to owners and nationally – hence the importance of addressing risks such as fires and diseases. Over the years the Government has made a significant investment in the development of forestry, ensuring a critical mass of timber coming on-stream to sustain the timber and timber products sector. This in turn supports many thousands of jobs in rural Ireland and plays a significant role in meeting national greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

I look forward to continuing to work with you, and your representative organisations such as the ITGA, to sustain and develop the forestry sector in 2011 and in the future.



Sean Connick TD
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Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food