

THINNINGS

options and procedures



Annual production from private forests is estimated to increase from 0.4 to 1.5 million m³ by 2020 and almost 3.0 million m³ by 2028. To ensure a viable forestry sector, it is essential that timber reaches the marketplace through regular thinning. The directory (www.forestryyearbook.ie) lists a range of companies and consultant foresters who provide the expertise to growers on how to prepare plantations for thinning and how best to market and harvest their crops. In addition a guide (compiled by Donal Whelan) is provided overleaf which shows the various steps growers need to take and a number of options are explored by foresters on how best to manage, market and harvest their plantations.

Checklist for thinning

In order to carry out thinning successfully there are a series of operations which must be undertaken. The following checklist provides step-by-step information on all operations and procedures for ease of reference. Full details in the Irish Thinning Protocol document on the home page of www.itga.ie.

YOUR FOREST [Conifer]

ACTION REQUIRED

Canopy closure
-branches dead up to 2 m
-ground vegetation suppressed
-trees approx. 8-9 m in height



1. Create access paths in plantation
2. Assess growth rate and estimate age of first thinning- seek advice from qualified forestry professional/company

Approximately 3-4 years before recommended age of first thinning



- Assess infrastructural requirements and apply for relevant Forest Service Rooding Grant or other relevant forestry schemes
Investigate co-operation with neighbouring forest owners

Ideally 2 years before age of first thinning



1. Undertake preliminary plot measurements
2. Decide on thinning system, intensity and cycle
3. Apply for felling licence
4. Construct harvest roads, laybys or bellmouth as required

Recommended first thin year



1. Seek advice from qualified forestry professional/company
2. Accurate sale volume assessment
3. Decide on method of sale and market your thinnings
4. Draw up harvest plan/safety statement, etc
5. Consult with authorities, interest bodies, neighbours, etc
6. Comply with any conditions of Felling Licence (FL)

Before thinning commences



1. Prepare, agree and sign timber sale contract with purchaser, agree indemnity, sale system, timescale, deposit, payment terms.
2. Prepare, agree and have signed a harvest plan, a site hazard and risk assessment and a safety statement
3. Check all insurance documentation
4. Ensure safety signage in place
5. Ensure machinery operators are aware of site sensitivities/FL conditions
6. Weight docket/sales system in place

During thinning operation



1. Monitor thinning operations
2. Take control plot measurements
3. Ensure compliance with FL conditions, urea applied, etc
4. Monitor sales system, load removal/dispatch, payments, etc

After thinning



1. Ensure all timber removed from site before machine leaves
2. Finalise volumes removed from site to purchaser
3. Ensure site left in an acceptable manner
4. Finalise sale details/payments/etc

Selling thinnings – options for growers

Donal Whelan

The market demand for timber and good prices achieved in 2010 are very encouraging signs for the private growing sector, just as plantations planted in the 1980s and 1990s come on stream for thinning. The response of timber growers to these market conditions over the past year can be seen by the 85% increase in number of General Felling Licence (GFL) applications in the six-month period to the end of June 2010 representing a private forest area under application of 7,313 hectares for this period.

The extent of the increase in the application rate for felling licences can be seen from the fact that over the full year in 2009 Felling Licences were issued for 7,965 hectares in the private sector, much the same area as applied for in the first 6 months of 2010.

It is important that growers consider the various options open to them in selling their thinnings in 2011. These include selling thinnings through employing a forestry company or consultant forester, working with a producer group or harvesting company or selling thinnings directly where the owners have the necessary experience and expertise. Other options are also available such as longer term timber sale contracts with Coillte or forestry companies.

In all situations growers are strongly urged to consider using and/or requesting the purchaser/forestry company/consultant to employ the ITGA Model Timber Sales System in their thinning or felling sales and also to check current market prices for timber prior to agreeing any sale. Information on both the ITGA Model Timber Sales System and market prices are available on www.itga.ie. Timber prices are also given in this Yearbook.



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Benefits of forest owner groups

Mary Ryan

Lucrative timber prices and the high number of contractors available for harvesting work should be enough to entice forest owners to thin their forests but there is little tradition of harvesting in Ireland. Also, many forest owners find it difficult to harvest and sell small lots of timber as the cost of harvesting and transportation can outweigh the financial returns.

In order to overcome some of these obstacles for individual



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forest owners, Teagasc forestry advisers have been facilitating owners to form groups. Some of these owners form discussion groups similar to those formed for other agricultural enterprises. These groups are operating successfully in a number of counties, sometimes with the involvement of organisations such as IFA and with funding from agencies such as LEADER.

The objective of these groups is to increase their knowledge of farm forest management operations in order to improve productivity. This is generally achieved by holding information meetings forest walks and most importantly, by learning from each other. Teagasc can also organise short training courses on topics of specific importance to the group.

Groups of owners whose forests are ready to thin, come together to harvest and market their timber as a group, rather than as individuals. These groups have formal structures as evidenced in counties Donegal, Galway, Cork and Wicklow where groups are established. A producer group can help achieve economies of scale, as the prices associated with harvesting; transporting and road construction can be shared and reduced.

The County Clare Wood Energy Project (www.ccwep.ie) provides a means of communication between clusters of forest owners and the timber sector. Registered foresters and contractors avail of the services they offer, while forest owners can upload invitations to tender for clustered forest operations. Contractors and registered foresters have the opportunity to do business with groups rather than individuals and can obtain a consistent supply of timber.

Bringing private timber to market

Michael Davoren and Pat Sweeney

Roundwood production from privately owned forests is forecast to increase from an estimated 0.38 million m³ in 2009 to 2.95 million m³ by 2028. Given the dispersed nature of the private forest resource and small average plantation size, there is an onus on state agencies, growers and the timber-processing sector to make a determined effort to work together to develop innovative ways to bring this resource to market.

A number of commentators have suggested that the establishment of producer cluster groups is the key to making inroads into the private resource. Whilst these have a role to play, they need to overcome the difficulty that arises as a result of price fluctuations.

It is very difficult to get an even set of producers i.e. same planting year, same yield class and felling years. These mechanisms work for milk and beef producers where all producers



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experience peaks and troughs in commodity prices on a yearly and monthly basis. It is important therefore that a pricing mechanism such as "Forward Contracts" needs to be developed to smooth prices over a period of time.

For most primary producers, selling their timber standing may be the only option open to them. For many, the cost of harvesting is prohibitive and this combined with the risk that there may not be a market for their product makes selling their timber standing the least riskiest option. There is also a requirement for a national system that allows primary producers to advertise and sell their timber to all the major markets.

The challenges outlined above are considerable and require that the industry and primary producers co-operate and come up with a framework that provides benefits to all by realising the potential of this resource. Coillte has the experience and expertise to facilitate and stimulate solutions to the various challenges in bringing this material to market.

Forest thinning – options

Jim Hurley and Paddy Bruton

Growers now have many marketing options when selling timber including grower groups and forestry companies. They are also becoming aware of the importance of employing companies that can professionally manage their plantations.

Ideally, growers should employ an integrated forest management, harvesting and marketing company. It is essential that growers receive the best advice on how to thin and sell their product. This needs to be backed up with a service, which includes crop assessment, organising felling licenses, road planning and grants, harvesting and sales.

Farmers should shop around when looking at the best option. A good company scheme needs to be flexible. There should be no annual management fee. Instead, Forwood Forestry for example organises the management of the crop on a commission of the net profit from timber sales from first thinning to clearfell. This means a long-term commitment on the part of the growers and management company.

The system facilitates the clustering of large and small plantations for thinning which reduces harvesting and extraction costs for owners. The owner remains 100% in control of the forest, but of significant benefit is the price premium, which will be achieved through the group selling of logs. This system addresses issues that arise from fragmentation of forest properties because sawmills and pulp/fuel wood purchasers prefer to source timber from a single source rather than small quantities from individual growers.



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