Partnership approach - acknowledging interdependency in Irish forestry

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The disconnect that once existed in Irish forestry between growers and end users is slowly disappearing as all stakeholders now acknowledge the interdependency in the forestry and forest products sector and the need for a partnership approach. At its simplest, the grower depends on the timber processor and the timber processor cannot survive without a continuous supply of quality logs.

While multipurpose forests and woodlands produce a range of goods and services, wood production remains the *raison d'être* of forestry. Since its formation in 1977, ITGA has stressed the need for silvicultural practices that produce the right trees in the right places but also the right trees for the right markets.

A number of developments have taken place in recent years in Ireland that affect forest production and markets. Issues such as forest certification, insect pest and disease damage, product innovation, wood energy and changing species – especially broadleaves provide challenges for the sector.

There are two certification schemes available to Irish growers and processors – PEFC and FSC. All our major timber processors have chain of custody certification and as private timber supply increases, the onus will be on private growers to achieve certification (see PEFC, page 40).

Certification

Sustainable forest management (SFM) is at the core of the relationship between grower and customer. Forest certification is tangible proof of SFM. It is a voluntary, market-driven initiative scheme that provides greater access to international markets as it proves that timber and timber products are sourced in sustainably managed forests.

Attendance at ITGA field day in Castlecomer where the benefits of thinning was the main topic.

As forest diseases do not respect borders, Minister Tom Hayes and his counterpart in Northern Ireland, Minister Michelle O'Neill agreed an all-Ireland Chalara *Control Strategy in 2013, which sets out the policy and actions to be taken to try and control ash dieback.*

Forest protection

Forest owners and foresters can no longer take our once proud disease free status for granted especially since the arrival of *Chalara fraxinea* or ash dieback and *Phytophthora ramorum,* or sudden oak death. The control of both diseases will require a partnership approach between all stakeholders including the public.

Innovation

Irish timber processors no longer rely heavily on the Irish market. We now export 90% of panelboard products while 60% of Irish sawmill output is exported. There have been steady developments in increasing the quality of Irish sawn timber – eased edged planed all over is now essential when competing in Europe. Panel board products need continuous product development. Medite Tricoya for example is a MDF panel which competes with hardwoods because of its durability and versatility.

A partnership approach is required between colleges and the forest industry as students need greater resources while there is an obvious need for greater R&D investment.

Wood energy

Biomass from Irish forests is a carbon neutral, renewable energy source which can replace significant imports of fossil fuels and over time lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) in the atmosphere. High yielding Irish forests are particularly suited to biomass production but to play a major role in wood energy, there needs to be an increase in annual afforestation to 15,000ha as short rotation forestry programmes such as willow along with other energy crops have fallen well short of targeted production.

Broadleaf strategy: the emphasis is on productivity and "producing high genetic diversity within tree species to develop more resilient populations" to provide resistance in future to diseases such as ash dieback. The broadleaf strategy aims to ensure that trees can be selectively bred to produce higher timber yields, making them more economically viable.

Changing species

Tree improvement programmes have delivered positive results for conifers especially Sitka spruce. There is a need for a similar approach for broadleaves as broadleaf planting has increased from 5% to 38% of total planting in Ireland in recent years.

A partnership approach between relevant researchers and scientists in Ireland and Britain has resulted in the launch of *A Future with Broadleaved Trees.* The aim of the strategy is to improve the quality of broadleaved trees in Britain and Ireland. The strategy has been drafted by the Future Trees Trust, a UK/Ireland collaborative body, which includes the Forest Service, COFORD and Teagasc.