

# Forest Producer Groups

A fforestation by private growers has been the most dramatic development in Irish forestry over the past 25 years. Private forest cover has increased from 107,923 ha to 354,100 ha during this period.

Last year, private sector harvest amounted to 463,000 m<sup>3</sup>, which demonstrates that growers are now thinning in greater numbers. Annual production from private forests is estimated to increase to 1.2 million m<sup>3</sup> by 2020.

Ireland has 24 forest producer groups. Support is provided by Teagasc but ultimately the growers are expected to take ownership of the groups. Further information on Teagasc website [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry))



The benefits of thinning have been outlined for a number of years by forestry organisations and publications including the ITGA *Forestry & Timber Yearbook* and the message is getting through. Excellent prices paid for first thinning have also helped to concentrate the minds of growers on revenue that can be expected from early harvesting.

Forest producer groups will play a major role in future forest management especially in making forest owner more aware of the advantages of good silvicultural practices to ensure optimum yields and revenue from their forests.

Producer groups such as the Clare Wood Energy Project and Donegal Woodland Owners Society Ltd have been active for a number of years and have led the way in promoting forestry to private growers. In recent years, they have been joined by other groups and most counties are now represented.

The emphasis has been on achieving markets for thinning but groups are also interested in educating members on good management throughout the forest cycle.

Support by Teagasc has been crucial in setting up the producer groups in all counties. Mary Ryan, Teagasc said that Teagasc will continue this support but believes that to be fully effective in the long-term, the members need to take ownership of the groups and manage them professionally. A number of members believe that organisations based on the co-operative model may be the most suitable and efficient structure.

There are now 24 producer groups and while it is difficult to know how many growers are represented it is likely to be only a fraction of the estimated 18,000 to 20,000 plantation owners throughout the country. Most of these are farmers with plantations less than 25 years old, so producer groups have a large market at their disposal. ITGA has a proud tradition in promoting private forestry in Ireland and will support the producer groups through field days and information on its websites ([www.forestryyearbook.ie](http://www.forestryyearbook.ie) and [www.itga.ie](http://www.itga.ie)).

*Members of producer groups are welcome to attend ITGA field-days, workshops and other events which are held throughout the country.*

