

Co-operating to compete

A brief report from the National Forestry Producer Group Conference by **Frances McHugh, Teagasc**

THERE are 330,000 hectares of private forests in the country, involving almost 16,000 growers. Many of these forests were planted in the early 1990s and are 'due' a thinning. However, growers have little tradition and experience in managing, utilising and marketing their timber crops.

This is complicated by the large number of small plantations (less than 8ha), often fragmented, with difficult road access, at a distance to markets and are mixed quality crops.

The National Forestry Producer Group conference and demonstration held in the Conference Centre at Camp-hill Ballytobin, Callan, Co Kilkenny, offered potential solutions.

Representatives

Representatives from many of the now 18 forestry producer groups gathered to compare notes, to learn and to reignite their enthusiasm for the work involved in forming and running a successful producer group.

Among the speakers was Karsten Raae from the Danish Forestry Extension, who presented some thoughts on best practice for forest owner groups.

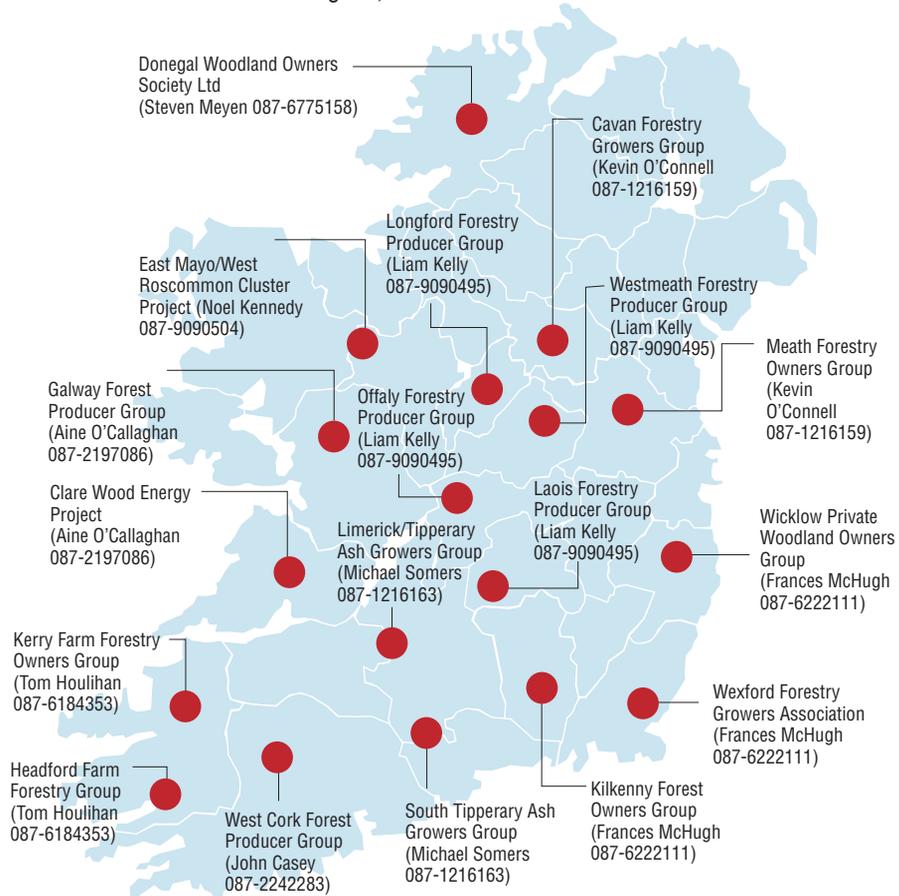
He said that, ideally, forest owner groups should deal with advice, supply and marketing.

Donal Whelan, Technical Director, Irish Timber Growers Association, spoke about a Model Timber Sales Dispatch System for Private Timber Growers. This system tackles the issue of sales security

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Farm forest producer groups

In association with Teagasc, contact name and number in brackets



in private forests. A full step-by-step outline of this sales system can be downloaded from the ITGA website, www.itga.ie

Paul McCarthy, Teagasc Rural Enterprise Specialist, outlined the importance of good planning when it comes to producing and marketing a product.

He said that farmers have many strengths when it comes to initiative and starting a new business. Farmers are already in business, have assets, maybe some relevant machinery and generally have a good reputation as hard-working honest people. This all bodes well for starting a new enterprise such as marketing your own timber.

Business plan

Paul emphasised the importance of a good business plan. This should be written down and understood by all involved.

Patrick Lydon from Camphill Callan spoke about a local wood energy supply chain working in the Callan area. Callan Renewable Energy Supply Company (CRESCO) supplies woodchip to three boilers in Callan and others in the surrounding area. They have purchased a chipper and trailer and have also built a

weighbridge with the help of the local LEADER company.

Their plan is to expand a district heating system around Callan and supply it with woodchip from forests in the surrounding area of Callan.

Benefit

They are working with the newly formed Kilkenny Forestry producer group to ensure that woodchip is bought as locally as possible so that all involved will benefit.

It is an exciting time in the private forestry industry. There are many opportunities for local development and rural employment as this new timber market emerges. There are also many challenges to be faced.

If this conference is anything to go by, these challenges will be overcome in time, as there is such enthusiasm for this story to turn to success for all involved.

All of the above mentioned presentations are available for download from the Teagasc forestry website, www.teagasc.ie/forestry.

Contact details of your local timber producer group or forestry adviser are also available.