



Afforestation & Woodland Creation Scheme

Introduction

The Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 opened on the 1st January 2015 to encourage farmers to plant by providing 100% establishment grants and 15 years of annual forest premiums. The scheme is 100% Exchequer funded.

It is a voluntary scheme that aims to increase the area under forest in Ireland from its current low base of 11% (EU average is 38%). The scheme is administered by the Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Grant and premium

The following are the grant and premium rates for all categories:

Grant Premium Category	Total Grant (€/ha)	Fencing Allocation IS436 (€/ha)	Fencing Allocation Non-IS436 (€/ha)	Premium Rate (€/ <10ha)	Premium Rate (€/ >10ha)	Duration of premium (years)
GPC 1 - Unenclosed	2,140	600	350	185	190	15
GPC2 – Sitka spruce/Lodgepole pine	3,105	600	350	440	450	15
GPC 3 – 10% Diverse Conifer / Broadleaf	3,215	600	350	510	520	15
GPC 4 – Diverse Conifer	3,710	600	350	590	600	15
GPC 5 – Broadleaf	5,280	600	450	605	620	15
GPC 6 – Oak	5,620	600	450	645	660	15
GPC 7 – Beech	5,620	600	450	645	660	15
GPC 8 - Alder / Birch	3,595	600	450	605	620	15
GPC 9 – Native Woodland Establishment (Scenario 1 – 3)	5,620	600	450	665	680	15
GPC 10 – Native Woodland Establishment (Scenario 4)	5,280	600	450	665	680	15
GPC 11 – Agroforestry	5,620	600	450	645	660	5
GPC 12a – Forestry for Fibre	3,215	600	450	510	520	15

The afforestation grants are paid in two instalments. The first instalment (75%) may be claimed immediately after planting. The second instalment (25%) can be claimed 4 years after planting has been completed, subject to the forest being successfully established and maintained.

The first premium is paid on the successful completion of initial planting.



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Forest premium and basic payment

The forest premium and basic payment can be paid on the same land under the current programme. The main requirement for payment of both forest premium and basic payment is that the land being planted was eligible to draw down Single Farm Payment in 2008.

A farmer who plans to afforest part of the farm but wants to continue to paid basic payment, must retain at least 10% of the eligible hectares declared in 2008 SPS application form in an agricultural activity, subject to a minimum of 3 hectares.

Eligible land

To be eligible for the scheme, land must be capable of growing to full rotation, a commercial timber crop of Sitka spruce of Yield Class 14 or greater, based on one standard application of phosphorous at establishment. A standard application of phosphorous fertilizer is define as 350kg Granulated Rock Phosphate (GRP)/ha at the time of planting.

The environmental suitability of proposed afforestation projects is also considered by the Forest Service, therefore sites considered to be productive in nature may not be approved due to other constraints. All applications for afforestation approval undergo an environment assessment to ensure that proposed projects are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the environment.

The following lands are excluding from the scheme: unmodified raised bogs, infertile blankets and Midland raised bogs, designated blanket and raised bogs, plots with rock outcrop and associated shallow soils in excess of 25% of the plot area and severely exposed sites and some sea-facing locations.

Grant application process

All proposed afforestation developments must receive written approval from the Forest Service termed "technical approval". A separate "financial approval" must be received prior to any work being carried out on site.

An afforestation application form must be completed and signed by the applicant and qualified forester, whose name must be included in the Registered Foresters and Forestry Companies. The list of Registered Foresters and Forestry Companies is available on IFA.ie or on request from the IFA Farm Forestry section.

The application form is available from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford. Lo-call 1890 200 223 or email: forests@agriculture.gov.ie.

Public consultation & site notices

Following commencement of the Forestry Act 2014, on 24th May 2017 there is a requirement for a site notice to be erected on sites proposed for afforestation projects. The site notice must be maintained in position for a period of not less than five weeks from date of receipt of the licence application from the Forest Service. If the notice is removed or becomes illegible it must be replaced within that period. In addition, the afforestation licence applications are published on the Department's website.

A period of 30 days is allowed for public consultation during which a submission or observation in relation to the licence application may be made in writing (by post or email) to Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford; email forestryappeng@agriculture.gov.ie.

Minimum area

- A conifer plantation must not be less than 1.0 hectares in area. A smaller area is acceptable if the plantation directly adjoins existing forest. A conifer plot must not be less than 0.2 hectares.
- A broadleaf plantation must not be less than 0.1 hectare in area. A broadleaf plot must not be less than 0.1 hectare. An agro-forestry plot must not be less than 0.1 hectares.

Environmental setbacks

The following setbacks are required under the scheme to protect different environmental features and sensitivities:

Setback type		Minimum setback width (metre)
Water	Aquatic zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 20m (depending on slope) • Up to 25m (for peat soils or in high status objective waterbody)
	Relevant watercourse	5m
	Hotspot	5m
	Drinking water abstraction point	20m
Utilised buildings	Dwelling houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60m • 30m with written agreement
	Roofed farm buildings	10m
Public road		10m
Archaeological	Designated sites & monuments	20m
	Designated buildings & structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20m • 30m for upstanding structures (buildings)
	Non-designated built heritage structures	10m

Habitat and landscape setbacks may also be required depending on the site. Setback distance and design should be as appropriate.

Plantation rules

For the purposes of the scheme a plantation is a plot or number of plots on the same holding and contained in a single application, planted in a single season under a single contract number. To be considered eligible under the scheme the following rules apply:

- The plantation must contain a minimum 15% of broadleaves. This can comprise broadleaves planted in plots of minimum width and/or additional broadleaves planted for landscape and environmental reasons.

- Each plot must comply with one of the GPCs and their corresponding requirements.
- In plantations greater than 10 hectares, Areas of Biodiversity Enhancement (ABES) should comprise up to 15% of the forest area.

Planting options

It is important, whatever option you choose to plant, that your forest is managed to the highest standards to ensure that you optimise the financial return on your investment. Ensure that you have a written contract between you and your Registered Forester in place before any work begins. You can obtain a contract from IFA.ie or by contacting the Farm Forestry section.

- **Option 1: Organise the forest establishment**

This is the most hands-on option and it is advisable that you take the time to get a good knowledge of forest establishment and management techniques. You are still required to employ a Registered Forester to help prepare and to submit your application to the Forest Service.

All sub-contractors hired, such as machine operators for mounding and drainage, must be fully tax compliant. When the work is completed, the same Registered Forester submits an application to the Forest Service for payment to you of the First Grant and the first forest premium payment. An inspection by the Forest Service may take place after four years and subject to successful establishment the Second Grant will be paid. You must be prepared to fund all costs until the grant has been paid by the Forest Service.

- **Option 2: Hire a Registered Forester to establish forest**

You employ a Registered Forester to submit your application to the Forest Service. Only when written approval has been received can the work start. The Registered Forester will coordinate some or all of the work, as s/he will have knowledge of subcontractors and machine operators and can source trees and other materials. Most Registered Foresters establish and maintain plantations under a 4-year contract and usually request that the grants are mandated to them.

However, some of the work can be carried out by you, as agreed with your Registered Forester in the written contract. You must be prepared to fund all costs until the grant has been paid by the Forest Service, unless there is an agreement to mandate the grant to the Registered Forester. The works and the costs involved should be specified in a written contract.

Replanting obligation

The land is subject to a replanting obligation for all grant and premium categories and must remain under forestry.