



IFA

Addressing Ash Dieback to move forward – a Farmer's perspective

Ash growers' immediate demands.
Proposing immediate workable solutions.

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Objectives

- Brief background to Ash Dieback and impact on affected forest owners.
- To give two very clear messages to the Minister and DAFM officials to take away from this conference.

History of Ash Dieback

- Started in eastern Europe 1992. The Forest service failed to prevent the importation of infected plants, and the disease was first officially detected in Ireland in 2012.
- The importation of ash plants was banned, and the first scheme was brought to eradicate the disease and control spread.
- In 2018 this scheme, deemed too costly, was terminated, with a promise to introduce a more effective scheme.

Why did private landowners decided to grow Ash?

- In the 1990s landowners were encouraged to “Grow Ash for profit.”
- 75% of the hurleys were from imported ash butts.
- Many saw this as a way of investing in an enterprise that would provide an income in their later years and a business to pass on to the next generation.





Why are farmers now so angry?

- The support system that ash growers signed up to has radically changed.
- Digitalised mapping caused land area planted to be reduced, with further subsequent reduction in premiums.
- The level of bureaucracy has increased which makes management forestry a nightmare.
- Ash growers started facing serious losses depending on the age of the plantation and can vary between €5,500 per ha for 9-year-old plantations and €21,500 per ha for 30-year-old plantations.

Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS)

- In June 2020 the Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS) was introduced which did not adequately address the losses associated with the disease.
- The focus has been on minimising the amount of funding the State provides to those affected by Ash Dieback and denial of responsibility by the state to provide compensation for losses incurred.
- Initially premiums were stopped, and farmers were encouraged to apply for reconstitution schemes. This pressurised growers into applying for schemes that provided no compensation for their losses, to have their premium reinstated.

Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS)

- The only way ash growers could get permission to fell dead Ash trees, or to salvage healthy trees before they were infected, were to apply for the official schemes.
- These schemes offered a replanting grant ,with an arbitrary amount, much less than the actual cost, to clear the ground of diseased trees with the percentage paid, of the maximum €1,000 grant, according to the level of trees affected.
- Up until late 2021 all older plantations, which were suffering the highest losses, were ineligible under the RUS, even if it was quite unfit for purpose.

Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS)

- Those affected were expected to invest significant further money into clearing and planting afresh with no expectation of an income until those trees reach maturity.
- Confusion abounds as to what to replant with and issues with fungal infection being a risk to new replacement plants.
- Elderly people in their seventies and eighties being compelled to replant with no ensuing income off their replacement plantation for the rest of their lives is inherently unjust.
- Since the RUS came in, the Forest service has failed to entice the vast majority of ash plantation to avail of it

Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS)

- Minor adjustments to the RUS have been introduced:
 - Owners of plantations over 20 years old were eligible to apply
 - Certain original illogical restrictions were removed
 - And still the majority of affected owners deem the RUS not worth applying for!
- Since 1st January 2023 no-one can apply and gain approval for any scheme to assist with ash dieback until the new forestry program is agreed and introduced.
- For the small number of growers who applied for the RUS under the previous programme the grant for clearance was increased to €2,000per ha, but to nothing approaching the actual cost.

Key Messages

- Farmers and Private Landowners are not prepared to accept the way they have been treated over ash dieback any longer.
- With the support of the majority of the stakeholders in the forestry sector they are no longer asking for action and compensation, they are demanding it immediately.



What is Needed

1. Full compensation for the market value of the ash trees affected and loss in the affected plantations.
2. Full payment for the cost of taking out the dead and dying trees, ground preparation, replanting and establishment or full payment for the cost of taking out the dead and dying trees, ground preparation and permission to put land back to other agricultural use.
3. There are definite categories of ash growers whose circumstances do not justify being required to replant trees.
4. Full premiums to provide an income off the land as the newly planted trees grow for the same period as is being given to afforestation.



A woodland understory with a healthy canopy



Thicket of brambles in the understory of an ash dieback affected plantation



An understory beneath a healthy sycamore canopy (left) and an understory beneath a dying ash plantation on the right. These stands are five meters apart.



Ash Dieback Lesions









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Thank you