



New Ash Dieback scheme must compensate for loss of timber asset. August 2023.

Introduction

There is approximately, 24,300ha of ash woodlands in Ireland, account for 3% of the total forest area¹. Since 1990, approximately 17,000ha were planted, predominantly by farmers, which was grant aided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under the afforestation scheme.

Ash dieback was first detected in the Republic of Ireland in October 2012 at a site, planted in 2009 with trees imported from continental Europe. Teagasc estimate that ash dieback is likely to cause the death of the majority (90%) of ash trees over the next two decades². Ash dieback has a devastating consequence for the survival, growth and wood quality of ash trees, and therefore has devastating consequences on the commercial value of the timber crop.

The treatment of farmers affected by ash dieback has created a ripple effect, discouraging those who may have previously considered planting. Farmers are aware that farmers who have experienced disease in other commodities have been compensated for loss for earnings. The inequality in the treatment of farmers with ash dieback needs to be addressed, a new scheme needs to be introduced that properly supports farmers with ash dieback. This is crucial to restore confidence and increase farmer participation in forestry.

¹ Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2023). National Forest Inventory Results Data (2022). It can be retrieved here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/53ac8-national-forest-inventory-results-data-2022/>.

² Teagasc. Legal requirements for felling trees with ash dieback. It can be retrieved here: <https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/advice/forest-protection/ash-dieback/legal-requirements---ash-dieback/>.

Current supports for farmers with ash dieback

In April 2023, an Interim Reconstitution Scheme for Ash Dieback was introduced, which increased the site clearance grant.

Farmers are also entitled to an increased establishment grant and premium payment (for those farmers still in receipt of premium payments) in line with the new rates announced in the new Forestry Programme (see Table 1). The current supports do not cover the full cost of clearance and do not provide farmers with any compensation for the loss of timber earnings or provide premium support to farmers on the re-established forest.

Table 1. Interim Reconstitution Scheme for Ash Dieback grant rates

Site Clearance Grant	€2,000 /ha
Grant rates in line with the new Forestry programme 2023-2027.	
For those in receipt of farmer rate of premium, a top up premium equal to the difference between the equivalent FT and the existing premium will be paid.	

IFA's Key Asks

In June 2023, Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, Pippa Hackett, announced the establishment of an independent review of the Ash dieback support scheme. IFA is seeking the following changes to the scheme:

1. Provide a **100% reconstitution grant** for all infected plantations, enabling forest owners to clearfell and replant with tree species that satisfy their management objectives.
2. Reinstate a **20-year premium on replanted land** to incentivise the restoration of affected areas.
3. Ensure adequate **compensation for the value of the timber asset**, based on the valuation of healthy ash plantations at the time of clearance.
4. Allow farmers affected by ash dieback **the option not to replant**, without penalties, under specific circumstances.
5. The Government must **implement stronger control measures to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases of tree species that are grant aided under the Afforestation Scheme**. The Government must provide assurance to farmers that they will be properly compensated if a disease puts their investment at risk.
6. Finally, with regards to roadside ash trees, there are no financial supports available to farmers and landowners to safely manage roadside diseased trees. **A financial support scheme needs to be introduced to provide grants to support farmers to hire relevant professionals to safely fell these trees**. It should be administered by the Local Authorities who would be responsible for coordinating the safe removal of the trees.

History of Ash Dieback in Ireland

October 2012	Ash dieback was first detected in the Republic of Ireland on plants imported from continental Europe. Ash dieback is a serious disease of ash trees caused by the fungal pathogen <i>Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</i> .
March 2013	DAFM implemented a Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara Ash Dieback) to restore forests affected by ash dieback disease. The focus was the eradication of the disease.
July 2013	The All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy was launched with the aim of controlling and eradicating ash dieback.
April 2018	A national review of the response to Ash Dieback disease was carried out with the goal of reevaluating the policy approach from eradication to the management of ash plantations.
June 2020	The Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (Ash Dieback) was launched which aimed to clear ash trees and replant with other species, providing grants for site clearance and replanting.
April 2023	An Interim Reconstitution Scheme for Ash Dieback was introduced, offering site clearance rates, grant rates, and premium arrangements in line with the new Forestry Programme.
June 2023	Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, Pippa Hackett, announced the establishment of an independent review of the Ash dieback support scheme.