

AgroForestry

“Plant trees and continue farming” - that was the message from Andrew Doyle T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, today at an Open Day on an agro-forestry site at a farm in Kilcock, Co. Kildare. Agro-forestry is the planting of trees on farm land at lower density than normal woodlands so that farming activity can continue on the same land. It is funded through generous grants under the National Forestry Programme and these premia were significantly increased last year from €260 to €645 per hectare per year for 5 years.

Minister Doyle commented “this open day here on Leo Murphy’s farm is to help others understand agro-forestry and the benefits of considering this type of planting. To see the sheep grazing contentedly amongst oak, cherry and sycamore trees planted really highlights the benefits of this approach for our environment, our livestock and our land. The significant increase introduced last year on the grants and premia make this worthy of serious consideration by all farmers. The Department paid for the planting of those trees and pays an annual premium to the farmer for 5 years. This is part of the Government’s commitment to delivering results under the recently published Climate Action Plan 2019 and the role which our agriculture and land use sector in achieving these targets”.

The Open Day was very well attended and those present heard both from the owner, his forester , Fearghal Kealey, Kinnitty, Birr, Co.Offaly and the Department on how best to consider an agri-forestry project. They also heard about the additional benefits of agro-forestry landscape enhancement, animal welfare, improved biodiversity, land drainage, positives for water quality, and timber production potential.

As part of today’s open day, the Minister also announced that his Department had agreed with the EPA on new rules which will allow the planting of agro-forestry in areas designated as acid-sensitive lands. This now gives farmers real options for planting trees on some 150,000 hectares of designated acid-sensitive areas. Minister Doyle welcomed this development “This now creates potential for significantly greater uptake of agro-forestry and native species in designated acid sensitive areas by farmers who wish to develop agroforestry as part of their farming enterprise”.

Farmers who are interested in joining the scheme can access details on the Department’s website under forestry grants and premium schemes, or may contact Teagasc forestry advisor, a registered forester or their agricultural advisor in order to learn more.

If you require further information contact

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Note for Editors

The agro-forestry scheme is one of a suite of afforestation schemes available under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marines Forestry Programme 2014 -2019.

Agroforestry is a land use system in which trees are grown in combination with agriculture on the same land. The system gives land owners the flexibility to graze and even cut silage and hay while growing trees for timber in the same field. With agroforestry it is possible to grow quality timber with little or no impact on existing agricultural production. This system is ideally suited to farmers who are interested in forestry but who also want to avoid taking their land out of agricultural production. Benefits of agroforestry include the following;

It provides a source of renewable energy, reducing the consumption of fossil fuels;

There is potential to produce veneer quality timber; Agroforestry improves land drainage;

Agroforestry can prevent nutrient runoff and reduce sedimentation of nearby water courses;

Enhanced animal welfare;

Improved biodiversity and habitats;

Agroforestry can enhance the landscape.

Agroforestry is also eligible for the Department's Woodland improvement Scheme grants for thinning, tending and pruning.

Scheme Outline

In fact, in order to stimulate interest in the scheme, the grant and premium rates for agro-forestry were increased under the Mid-Term Review of the Forestry Programme in 2018 with the premium increased from €260 to €645 per hectare and the grant increased from €4,450 to €6,220 per hectare.

Agroforestry will consider silvopastoral systems (pasture/grazing/silage/hay). Other systems may be considered on a site to site basis as long as the tree stocking rate is between 400-1000 trees per hectare, it is at least 0.5 of a hectare and at least 20 meters wide. The trees will be thinned out in time reducing numbers to between 160-250 trees per hectare, this will allow enough light to filter through the canopy enabling continued grass growth.

Acceptable tree species include oak, sycamore and cherry. Other broadleaves and conifers will be considered on a site to site basis. Fruit and nut species can account for up to 15% of the trees planted.

Trees must be protected against browsing animals with tree shelters, fencing or both. If the agroforestry plot is part of a larger plantation a fence must be included to prevent animals trespassing into neighbouring plots of trees. When the trees outgrow the shelters these are removed and a protective mesh is wrapped around the trees. Farmers must ensure that when silage and hay are being produced that appropriate machinery is used in order not to damage the trees.