

Forestry

Two ash dieback schemes introduced



The schemes are heavily criticised by the IFA and growers for not addressing income loss, while the ITGA calls for flexibility in implementation, writes Donal Magner

It is eight years since ash dieback was detected in Ireland. Caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, the disease continues to spread throughout Ireland and Europe. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) no longer monitors its geographical spread and its review of ash dieback over two years ago acknowledged that eradication of the disease is no longer feasible.

Last week, Minister of State Andrew Doyle issued the following two schemes directed at owners who have ash dieback: > Reconstitution and underplanting. > Continuous cover forestry.

Reconstitution and underplanting scheme (RUS)

Plantations can be managed through thinning interventions under the existing Woodland Improvement Scheme (WIS). Alternatively, owners may replant the entire site under a reconstitution option,



Selected ash trees which could realise €100 each for hurley butts and firewood in the future may achieve as little as €20 if infected by ash dieback.

Donal Magner

which covers the cost of establishing the new crop and site clearance depending on age and top height restrictions of ash-infected crop.

"RUS, for the first time, introduces a new silvicultural technique to handling the issue of ash dieback, underplanting," according to last week's DAFM circular. "This novel approach allows owners to retain just under 40% of their plantation while replanting the spaces created; remaining trees providing shelter for the younger trees as they emerge from competing vegetation."

Owners can avail of all 12 planting options available, which allows flexibility on species selection and schemes including agroforestry.

"While eradication is not deemed achievable, these measures are aimed at reducing disease levels and the rate of spread of the disease," maintains the circular.

"Forest owners affected by ash dieback

are no longer required to report these occurrences to the Department. This means that notification letters will no longer be issued."

Continuous cover forestry (CCF) scheme

The CCF scheme is open to those who wish to choose continuous cover to manage ash dieback "or where the adoption of an alternative silvicultural system to clearfelling is clearly stated as being a management objective".

The scheme will require a CCF transformation management plan to run for a period of 12 years with three instalments of €750, paid at year one and final year with an intermediary instalment.

Owners and foresters can opt for conifer-broadleaf and broadleaf mixtures, while applications "will be considered for silvicultural systems where restructuring of the forest is required to provide conditions for an uneven aged and

Applications for support under both schemes, which run to the end of the current forestry programme, are being accepted from 22 June

permanent forest".

While CCF is a rewarding silvicultural system, it needs intense management in order to encourage natural regeneration that positively diversifies species composition. This will require "recognised skills and knowledge in CCF" by foresters and/or owners, according to DAFM.

The circular states: "Foresters wishing to develop applications under Element 2 Woodland Improvement CCF Scheme must already be on the list of registered foresters and must also satisfy the Department in advance that they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to undertake the specialised work involved in developing and implementing CCF projects."

Foresters will be required to issue details of their expertise, including descriptions of "any involvement in previous CCF projects" as well as qualifications when submitting Form 15.

On the positive side, a number of CCF events are planned although the COVID-19 pandemic has put these on hold. These training and information days will allow foresters to build up their knowledge of CCF and continuous professional development (CPD) points will be accredited by the Society of Irish Foresters.

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The schemes do not provide compensation for loss of income which had been sought by the IFA and the Limerick and Tipperary Woodland Owners.

Forestry Inspector Grade 3

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is currently recruiting a number of positions for Forestry Inspector Grade 3.

The function of the role of Forestry Inspectors Grade 3 is to carry out inspections and work related to the regulation and development of the forest sector. Responsibilities of the role can include the examination of approvals and licences, grant aid applications, plant monitoring and import controls, surveying and forest inventory, forest policy development and work associated with forests and their importance in climate change mitigation.

Further information including essential requirements, pay scale and an application form are available from www.publicjobs.ie at the link below.

<https://bit.ly/ForestryGradelll>

Applications should be made online through www.publicjobs.ie.

Closing date for receipt of applications is 3pm on Thursday 2 July 2020.

All queries relating to this competition should be submitted to Public Appointments Service by way of email to ProfessionalTechnical@publicjobs.ie

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Reaction: Farmers with diseased ash abandoned by DAFM - IFA

John O'Connell, who has a 25-year-old disease-infected ash woodland says the scheme offers nothing new to growers.

"My woodland is still less than half-way through its rotation and should be entering its profitable phase now," he says.

"Instead, I have to begin all over again with no revenue stream into the future. The schemes provide no realistic compensation for this loss of income and the inaction by the DAFM has turned people against forestry as a land use option."

He points to the drop in afforestation including broadleaves as annual broadleaf planting has declined from 2,500ha before ash dieback to under 1,000ha at present.

"The approach by the DAFM to ash dieback has really exposed farmers to massive risks in opting for forestry,"

says IFA executive secretary Geraldine O'Sullivan. "Forest owners who planted ash as pension funds have been abandoned by the Department.

"The emotional and economic impact of this disease has not been acknowledged since it was introduced in 2012 through no fault of farmers."

She maintains that in any other scheme where farmers were faced with a loss of income of this magnitude "a compensation scheme would be introduced that would address future shortfall in income".

The Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) has been calling for the re-introduction of the ash dieback reconstitution scheme for some time.

"Earlier this year, we made a detailed submission to the Department on important points that the scheme should address," says ITGA technical director Donal Whelan.

"Some of these have been introduced, but the schemes do not address growers' loss of future income while the full range of silvicultural options should be made available for all infected plantations."

He called for "considerable flexibility" in operating the scheme. "The ITGA believes that the reconstitution option should be available for all sites regardless of top height and the level of infection," he maintains.

"Research on ash dieback shows that the disease will continue to spread within such infected ash plots.

"Experience here and in the UK is that earlier intervention keeps costs to a minimum because, as the disease spreads, reconstitution costs increase.

"Also, health and safety becomes a significant issue with incidences of dangerous trees increasing later in the crop rotation."