Forestry for our future

Combatting climate change with trees and timber

Forest Industries Ireland manifesto for Irish forest policy
Forests absorb carbon as they grow. Carbon is stored in wood products. Energy from wood replaces fossil fuels. Sustainable forest management guarantees ever increasing forests. Bringing sustainable jobs and incomes to rural Ireland. Ireland’s fast-growing forest sector makes a €2.3 billion contribution to the economy and employs 12,000 people all across the country. These are rural jobs in a sustainable industry that is an important part of Ireland’s bioeconomy. We are world leaders in growing trees and producing timber products. This is a fast-growing industry focussed on technology and innovation with a bright future in rural Ireland. The triple carbon benefit of forest biomass. 1. Trees sequester carbon as they grow. 2. Carbon is locked away in timber products that displace carbon-intensive products. 3. At end of life, forest products can be converted into carbon neutral energy and used for heating and generating electricity.

Forestry is a critical pillar of Ireland’s climate action plan. Forest Industries Ireland supports the Climate Change Action Plan’s ambition to plant 8,000 hectares of new forest each year. Ireland’s forests already contain 312 million tonnes of carbon and they absorb an additional 3.8 million tonnes of CO₂ each year.

“It is well known that forests play a key role in our battle against climate change; storing carbon while sucking in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it into their biomass.”

Sir David Attenborough, UN Environment Programme
Only 11% of Ireland is covered by forest compared to over 38% across the EU. We have made great strides in growing new forests, but we need to redouble our efforts. Annual planting has decreased in recent years and the situation needs to be turned around. Every new hectare of forest is a new carbon sink that helps us battle climate change. Poorer agricultural lands are unprofitable and should be used to plant trees, helping both farmers and the environment.

1. PLANT MORE TREES
BY REVITALISING THE NATIONAL AFFORESTATION PROGRAMME

We need to get creative about planting new forests and plant the right trees in the right place. The afforestation programme should be regionally balanced and diversified. Plant native woodlands for nature and conifer forests for timber. Everything must be done to create a programme that aims for 8,000 hectares of new afforestation each year.

2. GREEN OUR FARMS
BY REINVIGORATING FARMER INTEREST IN PLANTING FORESTRY

Farmers must be properly rewarded for planting trees. Forestry provides strong, steady incomes in farming communities. Our farmers must be able to embrace forestry with confidence and security. The system should support and value them. Farming families should be proud of their decision to plant and their environmental contribution be properly recognised.

3. GET OUR FORESTRY PROGRAMME WORKING
BY INVESTING IN PEOPLE, PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGY

The Senior Minister for Agriculture should have direct responsibility for forestry and set up a senior level Interdepartmental Working Group for Forestry and Climate Action. We need faster decision making and reduced bureaucracy. Uncertainty and delays are undermining forestry and reducing farmer interest in the Forestry Schemes.

4. FACILITATE TIMBER MOBILISATION: WE NEED TO GET TIMBER TO MARKET

A strong timber market supports a healthy forest industry. Our timber uses local roads to get to market just like our other agricultural commodities. Forestry is creating value and employment throughout the country and its infrastructure needs must be supported like any other industry.

5. STIMULATE A VIBRANT MARKET FOR TIMBER AT HOME
BY CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC BUILDINGS WITH TIMBER

We have a great opportunity in Ireland to build more with timber. Government can take a lead by building schools and civic buildings from timber. Wood displaces carbon intensive building products with a material that locks away carbon for generations. Our building standards must be updated to enable timber construction in all types of buildings.
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