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**Teagasc Forestry Development Department
Afforestation/Tree planting Clinics 2013**

A nationwide series of forestry clinics for people who were considering planting forestry on their farm was organised by Teagasc’s Forestry Development Department in February 2013.

Farmers and landowners considering the merits of a forestry enterprise were invited to attend these free clinics in local Teagasc offices throughout the country. They provided an opportunity to avail of a one-to-one consultation with a Teagasc forestry adviser.

Similar clinics held in 2012 were very well attended, with a range of issues being explored, such as land suitability, environmental compatibility, interaction of forestry with other farm schemes, and potential returns on investment.

The 2013 clinics also proved very successful when 59 clinics days were held around the country (38 clinics were initially advertised). These days facilitated a total of 510 individual appointments. Figures 1 and 2 show the areas of interest of those attending the clinics in both 2012 and 2013. It is important to note that in 2012; clinics were marketed to those with queries on all aspects of forestry whereas 2013 clinics were aimed specifically at those interested in afforestation/tree planting.



***Figure 1:*** ***Figure 2:***

**2012** ‘forestry clinics’ **2013** ‘afforestation clinics’

229 appointments 510 appointments

The Afforestation clinics were promoted using many different medium. Each clinic attendee were asked where they heard a about the clinic and *Figure 3* outlines the feedback. The Department of Agriculture Food and Marine used their general farmer database (not forest owners) text message facility to promote the clinics and this proved to be a very effective method where 20% of clinic attendees said they heard about the clinics by DAFM text.



***Figure 3***: Promotion of clinics and its effectiveness

Each Teagasc forestry development officer recorded basic details of each clinic. Included in this was the proposed area of land to be planted. *Figure 4* shows the geographical spread of proposed planting (of those attending 2013 clinics) and also the average size of proposed planting. The overall average size of proposed planting sites was 9.45ha.



***Figure 4***: Geographic spread of proposed land to be planted- Teagasc Clinics 2013.

Those involved with promoting afforestation are familiar with the many questions that are asked, time and time again by landowners who have little knowledge of growing trees or the afforestation grant scheme. The following questions were the predominant issues that were discussed during the 2013 clinics:

* What does the grant cover/ how much is it?
* Premiums – are they guaranteed?
* How do you qualify for farmer rate of premium?
* Is there planning permission required?
* What happens after 20 years?
* Who carries out the planting?
* What is the value of planted land?
* Single Farm Payment and its interaction with forestry
* CAP reform; what are the implication re forestry?
* Why is there a replanting obligation- might that change?
* What’s the minimum size?
* What species should I plant (in context of ban on ash)?

The above questions reflect what landowners have to consider in the context of making a permanent land use change to forestry. It also reflects the risk/‘leap of faith’ required to make this permanent land use change and so forms part of the reason why landowners are reluctant to make the decision to plant even after they have looked in detail at the incentives in place to plant. This decision to plant is often being considered at a turbulent time in peoples lives. Many attendees spoke about the context in which they were considering forestry eg health issues, recent bereavement, no successor to farm. The 2013 clinics were held in the middle of a serious fodder shortage on Irish farms and so attitudes to farming, on somewhat marginal farm land was quite negative.

***Conclusion***

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of how the forestry development officers perceived what the result of each individual clinic was. 59% of all those to attended a clinic said they would progress to the next step ie apply for an afforestation grant. Over all there was a large increase in afforestation queries from the previous clinics in 2012 and these were reported as being ‘new people’; in other words had never sought Teagasc forestry advice previously. Over 3500ha was considered for forestry during the clinics in 2013 with an average size of 9.45ha. How this transfers into actual planting remains to be seen.



***Figure 5***: Outcome of 2013 Teagasc Forestry Clinics