

A REVIEW OF PROGRESS WITH SILVOPASTORAL SYSTEMS IN IRELAND

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Following recent changes in EU agricultural support policy, the impending imposition of controls on fertiliser use, concerns over eutrophication, pollution and loss of biodiversity and the introduction of the Single Farm Payment, it is felt that it is an opportune time to propose silvopastoral systems as a viable land use option in Ireland.

Experiments and trial plantations have given encouraging results. In Northern Ireland, protected ash planted at 5m x 5m spacing in intensive sheep grazing pasture have created landscape, environmental, production, economic, social animal welfare and sustainability benefits. Trees have been successfully managed with stock (sheep till year 11 then cattle), no reduction in livestock output was found till year 10 and enhanced biodiversity and animal welfare was recorded. At year 15 hurley-quality ash butts (126/per ha) were sold for £723/ha plus firewood. Grass production increased following tree removal. There are also several demonstration sites of on-farm practice.

In Ireland a silvopastoral experiment was established in 2002 in ryegrass dominated pasture grazed by beef cattle using oak in an alley design. The system has been successfully established and a unique silvopastoral resource is now available for future research.

From a policy prospective, silvopasture will be considered as forage area for SFP in N. Ireland and a silvopastoral option is being considered for inclusive in a proposed new agri-environment measure in Ireland. Applications for funding to continue research and to promote the system to livestock farmers have been made.