

FARM FORESTRY, WOOD ENERGY & THE FUTURE

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Farm Forestry in Ireland has reached a new stage of development with many private plantations planted in the late 80's and early 90's now ready to be thinned. The organisation of the harvesting and marketing of these often small and fragmented plantations creates new challenges for the sector. The private forestry sector is proactively trying to develop local value added markets for this timber particularly the pulp/energy wood element. Wood energy offers a great opportunity for farmers to increase the value of the timber, thus increasing the financial viability particularly of the first thinnings. With the publication of the White Paper in 2007, ambitious biomass targets have been set for the first time. If these targets are to be reached a harvesting and forest chip production infrastructure needs to be developed to ensure a sustainable supply of quality wood fuel. Also it is very important that the current level of afforestation is increased to ensure the sustainable future supply to the sector. With the right political coordination and financial support the wood energy sector will provide real benefits for the grower, the environment and the economy.