



Case study:

Forestry, filming and sheep boost Wicklow economy

Matt O’Keeffe examines the forestry activities, and additional income boosters, on the Cloragh Farm in Ashford, County Wicklow.

Lucy Tottenham along with her children Joanna and Edward run Cloragh Farm at Ashford, Co. Wicklow, where the main enterprises are sheep production and forestry. Cloragh is also used as a location for film productions including the recent TV series, *The Vikings*, much of which was filmed in Co. Wicklow and in studio at nearby Ashford Studios. The forest is situated beside the River Vartry and the famous Devil’s Glen, comprising of conifer, broadleaves, mixed forests and native woodlands. Most trees can be found there including Ash, Beech, Douglas Fir, Sitka and Norway Spruce, Holly, Birch, Larch, Oak, Scots Pine, Cedar and Chestnut.

The forest at Cloragh have been actively worked by Larry Byrne & Sons Timber Limited based in nearby Glenealy, Co. Wicklow, since 1973. A family run firm set up by Larry Byrne and his late wife



Betty, now all four of his sons are involved in the business. Paddy Purser of Purser Tarleton Russell Limited has acted as forest consultant to Cloragh since 1996. Early thinning and lower value timber harvested by the Byrnes are taken to their sawmill at Glenealy and processed into a range of fencing and fuel wood products for the local market. All posts used for fencing on the farm are harvested from the forest and processed at this facility before they are returned to the farm. Much of the timber grown at Cloragh is high value sawlog which Larry Byrne & Sons market and supply to sawmills and end users.

Continuous cover forestry

Lucy and her family continue the work started by Lucy’s late husband, Geoffrey. He had a great love of forestry and was passionate about continuous cover forestry, introducing this practice to Cloragh in 2005. Continuous cover forestry (CCF) is a forest management approach suitable for both conifers and broad leaves which allows for the



Sitka Spruce has fantastic ability to establish and create favourable woodland conditions where it is easy to introduce other diverse conifers and broadleaves. This can be achieved through planting or use of natural regeneration". Coming from Wicklow, Liam is equally passionate about broadleaf forests but points out the need for long term vision and greater financial support.

Organic sheep production

Cloragh Farm converted to organic in 2015 and in 2017 gained full symbol organic status. The farm is a member of the Organic Trust and in 2018 approximately 75 per cent of the lambs sold as organic through Irish Country Meats in Camolin, Co. Wexford. Generally organic lambs command a premium of 10 per cent to 15 per cent over conventional lamb.

The sheep breeds on Cloragh Farm include Belclare, Charollais, Lleyln and New Zealand Suffolk. This is a closed flock so they breed their own replacements. The ewes and lambs are fed on home grown baled silage which is analysed by Red Mills in Goresbridge, Co. Kilkenny. Based on the analysis, Red Mills advise how much organic ration should be fed to each group of ewes, which are divided into groups according to how many lambs they are carrying.

Vikings in Wicklow

During filming at the picturesque Cloragh Farm and Forest one can see one hundred extras, three herds of goats, two enormous Viking ships in the middle of a forest, several burning campfires, make-up artists, hair stylists, assistant directors, researchers, producers, one director, a bucket of fake blood and guts, three portable smoke machines, an articulated crane and, of course, several well-known acting megastars. Hundreds of local people are employed as extras during filming and the Viking TV series has been a great boost for guest houses, hotels, pubs and restaurants in the east Wicklow area.

production of commercial timber while retaining forest cover at all times. Natural processes are utilised such as natural regeneration, maintaining of bio-diversity while simultaneously harvesting high value timber. The practice of converting an even age plantation to CCF is known as the transformation process.

On inspection this process is succeeding well with much natural regeneration present along with high quality timber growing in the forest.

According to Liam Byrne of Larry Byrne & Sons: "The woodland that pays is the woodland that stays". Liam has equal respect for both conifers and deciduous trees and says they should both be managed on their merits. He says that "conifers in some cases are good to get a forest established and broadleaved trees can be introduced later". He explains: "it can be difficult to create forest plantations due to threats from vegetation, deer, grey squirrel, wind and extreme weather conditions. In Ireland



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