

Questions and Answer Session from Agroforestry FT8 webinar 21/02/2024

Please note we have transcribed these questions from forms that were submitted prior to the webinar and from the Q+A box during the live webinar.

Please also refer to the webinar presentations - available [here](#).

1. If an Applicant has received Technical Approval to Plant Agroforestry under the old Forestry Program and has now selected to opt-in to the new program under FT8, the application will need to be assessed again for suitability?? Due to the low impact, minimal ground disturbance involved with Agroforestry, surely this won't take longer than 3-4 weeks to gain permission to proceed. Also if part or all of the site is showing as being within a peat soils layer, this area will be now ineligible? Is this correct?

Yes, the application will need to be re-assessed. Duration of assessment will depend on what shows up under the new IFORIS layers. If the peat is more than 30cm deep it currently is ineligible for those areas, where peat is shallower those areas are okay.

2. Can in some circumstances the Applicant get in a mini digger and raise mounds to plant the trees?.

Yes, but invert the mounds and make them shallow. The machine could also help drive the posts.

3. Can the Various planting spacings be made available to the public and how stringent are these once the minimum stocking of 400 trees per hectare is achieved, is that sufficient on any site, I am thinking of sites with setbacks from EPA watercourse and

public roads, can the stocking rate be increased in between these features to achieve acceptable density

Yes, every site will vary and as long as the trees are not closer than 3 metres with shelters and meets the 400 trees per hectare requirement the spacings can vary.

4. Is it advisable to sow a more shade tolerant grass species when planting agroforestry

Not necessarily as most grasses tolerate partial shade, the canopy will become more dense as the plantation ages but will need to be thinned for tree establishment by year 10 which will allow more light. Clover and herbs in multispecies swards in agroforestry systems may require careful selection, there needs to be more research on this.

Shade bearing species of grass could be considered in the future if reseeding the area.

However, multi-species swards with plants such as white clover, plantain or chicory for an economic high protein forage. would be the preferred option particularly given the need for low cost feeds.

5. What fruit and nut species grow best to make up the 15% if the client requests them?

Any dependent on site suitability and exposure. When planting the fruit and nut component try to find a sunny corner. Do not mix in amongst the timber trees with the exception of hazel.

6. Which of the farming schemes are compatible with the FT8 premiums, Young Farmers payment, ANC payment, BISS payment, CRISS payment, Organic farming schemes and BPS ?

Everything listed except ANC, agroforestry does not count towards eco scheme calculation.

7. Can a very poor crop of oak be converted to agroforestry, a crop severely impacted by scots/larch mixture?

Every plantation is different. It will depend on age, species and condition of the crop. If it is still in premium payments the land owner undertook to look after the trees as a forest. It should be thinned and managed as such initially. Once premiums finish contact the local Forestry Inspector or TEAGASC forestry advisor to assess the plantation. If a mature forestry plantation is converted to agroforestry, the farmer cannot avail of premiums under the agroforestry scheme.

8. Can unplanted headlands be incorporated into plan to accommodate the turning of machinery?

Yes

9. Will stands converted to agro forestry be eligible to organic schemes such as criss?

In most cases if the plantation is recognised by DAFM as being agroforestry then it will be entitled to organic payments.

10. Will ash sites planted prior to 2008 and converted to agroforestry be entitled to Basic Payment Scheme & organic grants?

Ash sites planted prior to 2008 and converted to agroforestry won't be eligible for BISS. Organic payments should be okay.

11. Why is agroforestry not allowed on peat sites which are fertile and in active agricultural use? FT1 native woodland is allowed on peat sites as new drainage is

permitted. Agroforestry has no new drainage and even less of an impact on existing land and certainly no increase in carbon emissions?

The new programme will not allow any planting on blanket peats greater than 30 cm.

12. Why is agroforestry not permitted on reclaimed peat that is currently under agriculture?

If it is less than 30cm deep there may be a possibility.

13. Can the Various planting Spacings be made available to the Public and how stringent are these once the minimum stocking of 400 trees per hectare is achieved is that sufficient on any site, I am thinking of sites with setbacks from EPA watercourse and Public Roads, can the stocking rate be increased in between these features to achieve acceptable density?

There is flexibility, consult with your local forestry inspector or Teagasc forestry advisor. Field systems and conditions vary and the planting plan can be adjusted accordingly.

14. Can the fully agroforestry plot area be taken into account when determining nitrates calculations (i.e. are there any reductions for the areas occupied by the trees)? Is it ok for e.g. (suitable) slurry application between the rows of trees? If this is ok, is slurry that is deemed to be from organic sources would be required for organic farms?

Yes from 2023 areas under agroforestry can be taken into account when determining nitrates calculations. Yes, it is ok for (suitable) slurry application between the rows of trees. Organic farms can import slurry from extensive grass based systems as long as they show

justification (Soil test result Index 1 or 2). The only restriction is the slurry or manure cannot come from an intensive pig or poultry farm/factory farming systems. Please see [Organic Standards Edition 2](#).

Anyone querying nitrates can contact DAFM directly at nitrates@agriculture.gov.ie or by phone 053 91 63425. The phone system in Johnstown Castle is a call centre that can answer basic queries or log the query for a call back from the relevant section.

15. Will ash sites planted prior to 2008 and converted to agroforestry be entitled to Basic Payment Scheme & organic grants?

If it was considered forestry prior to 2008 then it may not have been in receipt of basic payments then as it was forestry, so it will not be eligible now.

16. Why is agroforestry not permitted on reclaimed peat that is currently under agriculture?

It may be eligible depending on the type of peat and if it was planted with native species only.

17. With regards to the "max. 15% fruit and nuts": Do timber species, which also produce fruit and nut as maybe a byproduct, count towards that? I imagine wild cherry being mainly a timber tree wouldn't count. What about sweet chestnut and walnut (in particular if grown for mainly timber)?

There is no onus to plant the 15% component, it is an option. When planting the fruit and nut component try to find a sunny corner. Do not mix in amongst the timber trees with the exception of hazel.

18. Deer Fencing is eligible around silvopasture with fenced off clumps. But in the case the to be established silvopasture area would be small (for example 1ha), deer guards to protect the trees within the fenced of clumps would be more economical than deer fencing around. Could the agroforestry establishment in this case be eligible for the new Deer Shelter Scheme instead of Deer fencing?

Taller tubes could be used than the standard 1.5 metre ones for agroforestry but the stability of the trees might be compromised. Planting small groups of alder might be an option with sheep fencing. Deer are known not to like alder.

19. I've been requested to get an ecologist to state why an agroforestry should proceed in hen harrier habitats area. Can the department assess the implications of agroforestry on these sites or will we have to provide justification on a site to site basis.

Every site is different and may have issues that only an ecologist can answer. DAFM now have a team of ecologists. Any questions relating to SPA's or SAC's etc. should be referred to Wexford and an ecologist will answer your questions.

20. Can you get ANC and agroforestry on the same land?

No, forestry or agroforestry is not eligible for ANC.

21. Will the young farmer payment be paid on land put into agroforestry?

Please refer to examples given on John Casey's presentation

22. Any tree from the list of approved species-specifically asking about conifers-are they acceptable for agroforestry?

Yes, may select to grow conifers in group situations.

23. Could you go without any ground preparation at all? (grass growth would be suppressed anyways with grazing around the tube)

Yes

24. If fencing groups of trees, does agroforestry boundaries need to be fenced to the same standard as other forestry?

Agroforestry needs to be fenced with stock proof fencing, this will be different depending on the livestock on the farm. For sheep, sheep wire may be used, for cattle bull wire with one row of electric or barbed wire.

25. Now that the scheme allows for cattle, does the same apply to horses? I take it the recommendation would be to plant in groups rather than rows and singly?

Yes

26. In the group example that Eugene mentioned having 32 trees per group and 16m between the groups, is it that you can fence these separately and allow cattle in between them, but electric may not be allowed, and could the groups of 32 be grouped in to 64 for fencing them say?

Yes, there is some flexibility here to have some groups of 32 trees within the 1 hectare, please see example design in Eugene Curran's presentation.

27. What posts and shelters are required if any for poultry farmers?

Robust tubes such as tubex should be used in poultry systems as well, there is one farm using Clipex posts with the tubex.

28. Given the size of most modern mowing equipment i.e. butterfly mowers 8.4m-9m widths, is there a case for increasing the maximum widths between rows to accommodate this?

The design of the system will be important to allow enough room for turning at headlands, the forester and farmer can decide this and submit it in a 1 page plan with their application. The recommended width would be 12 metres.

29. Agroforestry is not allowed on peaty soils because of supposed carbon losses from soil. Why is this as trees + grass sequester more carbon than grass on its own?

Peat is the best stored carbon resource we have, but it only remains a carbon sink if it remains wet (water table minimum of 15 cm below ground level)-in this condition it will continue to “grow” and sequester carbon. Trees dry out peat and dried peat slowly oxidises to form carbon dioxide-a greenhouse gas. Trees also increase the rate of evapotranspiration from the bog surface. High organic matter soils (not peats) are different and can retain carbon in association with trees and shrubs.

30. With agroforestry is it the case that your land is considered as forestry for ever more as is the case with other forestry systems and if so why are the premium payments only for a duration of 10 years rather than 20 as with other forestry enterprises.

Once land is converted to agroforestry, it is classified as forest land and the provisions of forest legislation apply. For further details, see [Forestry Act 2014](#). The decision to plant is a long-term land use change and full consideration of all implications is recommended, including its potential to fit in very well with other farming enterprises and to provide financial, environmental and social benefits.

The new forestry programme has seen a welcome increase in agroforestry (FT8) premium from 5 to 10 years, as well as a 48% increase from a max. of €660 to a max. of €975.

Premiums are seen, in part, as compensation for the loss of potential income from agriculture. With agroforestry, the planted land is mainly still available for agricultural production and a case can be made that it does not warrant the same level of premium.

31. Can we get clarity on what planting designs are acceptable by the forest service

Please see slide No. 14 to 17 on Eugene Curran's presentation.

32. Is there a preferred orientation for the rows ie north-south or east-west

It is best to plant rows north-south to minimise self shading in the rows.

33. If planting the square blocks of trees at 2 X 2m spacing, a total of 16 trees as displayed in the Teagasc meetings, what spec of fencing is required and considering this would mean 25 groups per hectare would be needed to make the 400 required trees how is the cost of this fencing covered?

Normal stock proof fencing is required, for cattle this consists of bull wire and one row of barbed wire or electric fence at the top. Sheep wire is sufficient for sheep.

34. Is there a maximum amount of trees allowed in the group design?

The size of the group will dictate the number of trees. The spacing within the group will be 2 metres. Fields will vary in size and the shape of the groups may vary. The designs outlined in the webinar integrate the trees/groups evenly within a field. If other designs are to be considered an applicant should contact the Forestry inspector and discuss what approach is to be taken on a site by site basis.

35. Can you comment on Spanish chestnut-European trees hit by fungal disease, ban on import into UK...I think there's a voluntary ban on import here perhaps? Seems a little risky?

The two major fungal pathogens of the sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) are the [chestnut blight](#) and the ink disease.

Sweet chestnut blight (*Cryphonectria Parasitica*) was first identified in the UK in 2011.

Between 2011 and 2018, the disease was further identified at several sites. Special regulations were applied to importations of sweet chestnut material, including plants, wood and bark, into the UK from EU Member States. There are also regulatory requirements on importations of chestnut material from non-EU Member States. Ireland, the Czech Republic and Sweden have EU Protected Zone status for the pathogen.

Biological control, by means of weakening the disease virulence, has proved effective to control chestnut blight and regeneration is possible from infected trees. Termed Hypo-virulence, it occurs when the *C. Parasitica* fungus is infected by a naturally occurring virus (called dsRNA hypo-virus CHV1), which limits the ability of the pathogen to grow in chestnut bark, or to produce spores.

The ink disease (*Phytophthora Cambivora*) infests trees mostly in humid soils, with the mycelium invading the root and resulting in wilting of the leaf. The ink disease is named after the black exudates at the base of the trunk. Cultivars that are resistant to the ink disease have been developed in the last while. However, *P. Cambivora* continues to damage sweet chestnut crops in southern Europe.

Plant health requirements came into force in the EU in December 2019. Legislation required all plants for planting sold between professionals to have a plant passport. Plant Passports are needed when transporting certain plants and wood products and isolated bark- for example, *Castanea* species with bark. Adherence to the plant passport system is critical to Ireland retaining its EU Protected Zone status for such pathogens.

36. What % can be Alder and Birch?

10% if in rows or singly as an alternative shelter design will be required. No restrictions in groups. But avoid monocultures and have at least 3 species.

37. If you have a small field (1ha) with lines going through it, can you use the area under the lines as your "pastoral" area and bunch your trees in groups away from the lines?

The owner will need to check this with the ESB and ask if they will compensate given the ground is able to be grazed. If trees are planted in 2 large groups, this may be considered forestry rather than agroforestry.

38. In a parcel that is planned for FT8 and has electricity on the proposed afforestation, can the applicant apply for ESB compensation?

In most cases, yes they can, as the groups, rows or single tree planting cannot be done under the lines.