

A recent report by IBEC on the forestry industry shows that Irish forestry and forest products generated E2.2bn in annual output in 2010. The Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association's (IFFPA), an IBEC sector that represents members from the entire forest industry chain, states that while the industry currently employs nearly 12,000 people, an additional 7,000 jobs will be created, provided there is continued investment in forestry and forest infrastructure. IFFPA Director Marian Byron said: "The timber processing industry is a real Irish success story, having turned itself from largely supplying the Irish construction sector to exporting 80 per cent of what it produces to the UK, France and to additional new markets in continental Europe. The industry has the capacity to capture more export markets once they can access timber from Irish forests which were planted 20 years ago. IFFPA maintains that the Government's target of achieving a forest cover of 17 per cent by 2030 is essential to the development of a vibrant forestry sector that will generate real benefits to the Irish economy and provide jobs, particularly in rural Ireland. Investment in planting must be accompanied by investment in the necessary infrastructure to get product to market. This will include investment in harvesting infrastructure and in forest roads."

John Phelan, MD, Woodland Managers Limited, Galway said: "This year was a milestone year in bringing new woodlands into production with the forest roads programme giving continuity to timber supply. It is vital that we build on this success. The on-going investment by the State and by forest owners in forest infrastructure and improvement will pay off handsomely in terms of export growth, substitution of imported fossil fuels and the creation of jobs in rural areas.

Meanwhile, the Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) has predicted that output and harvest from the private forests is set to treble over the next eight years. Speaking at the launch of the 2012 Forestry and Timber Yearbook, Donal Whelan, Technical Director of ITGA, said that private forests are coming of age just as demand for wood in Ireland is beginning to outstrip supply and by 2020 demand is forecast to exceed supply by 1.3m cubic metres per annum.

Some years ago, the yearbook directory was made available on the internet and it now appears on three websites www.itga.ie , www.forestry.ie and www.forestryyearbook.ie

This move has proven hugely successful with the websites registering a combined total of well in excess of 1m hits over the past year.