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From the Minister of State's Desk

News from Andrew Doyle TD



December 2016

I would like to give you an overview of some of the happenings within my area over the last few months which I hope you find helpful. Further details on all of these issues can be found on the website. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Grant awards for Forest Research

I was delighted to announce research grant awards approaching €2 million for collaborative inter-institutional forest research projects under my Department's competitive forest research funding programme (CoFoRD). This research funding will make a significant contribution to the sector, in terms of its continued competitiveness and sustainability, while also adding to forest sector research capability.

The newly funded research projects tackle a variety of important issues for the forest sector including:

- addressing the needs of private forest owners with a view to greater mobilisation of privately owned timber;
- developing knowledge on the wood quality of Irish hardwood thinnings and identifying possible end-use applications;
- assessing the commercial potential of using Irish Sitka spruce to manufacture a cross-laminated timber modular flooring system;
- assessing how forest planning and management activities can contribute to the effective conservation of Hen Harriers; and developing modelling capacity to examine future scenarios for agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration by forestry in Ireland.

I particularly welcome the forestry research awards which address a number of critical issues for the sector, including enhanced mobilisation of timber from the private sector, value added opportunities for Irish grown timber, forest management and hen harrier conservation and land-use, agriculture and carbon sequestration by forestry.

Earlier this year, over €800,000 was awarded under the Department's CoFoRD programme to another collaborative inter-institutional forest research project addressing, inter alia, forest genetic resources, research on potential tolerance to ash dieback disease, and horizon scanning for potential pests and diseases of Sitka spruce.

These latest research awards brings the total investment made by my Department on forest research in 2016 to over €2.7 million.

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Buy a Real Irish Christmas Tree

At home we always make sure we have a real tree. It wouldn't be the same Christmas experience without a real tree and all that goes with bringing it into the house, setting it up, the smell and the atmosphere. I see the Christmas tree farms around the country especially in Wicklow and the 7 to 10 years work that goes into producing a good quality tree – the work is all year round, planting, shaping, spraying, fertilising, marketing, harvesting.

Around 550,000 Christmas trees are sold in Ireland each year with 350,000 sold at home and about 200,000 trees exported to the UK, France and Germany. The industry is worth €21 million to the Irish economy.

I would also like to add my support to the Irish Christmas Tree Growers #lovearealtree campaign. To me it's only common sense. Real trees provide a better Christmas experience in the home, they are better for the environment, carbon neutral and everyone who buys an Irish tree is contributing to providing jobs in rural Ireland for Christmas tree growers like Stephen Cowman, his family and staff.

This business doesn't come without its risks and none more so than the risk of Christmas tree theft. I would like to acknowledge the work of An Garda Síochána in carrying out Operation Hurdle, an initiative specifically aimed at combating the theft of Christmas trees in the approach to Christmas.

Operation Hurdle has been running since 2011 and has dramatically driven down Christmas tree theft in County Wicklow.



Minister of State Andrew Doyle visits Parkmore Christmas Tree Farm in Moneystown Co Wicklow with Stephen, Dan and Adam Cowman.

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Launch of Investment Aid Scheme for the Commercial Horticulture Sector

I was pleased to announce the continuation of the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector for 2017, which reflects this Government's commitment to ongoing support of this sector. This competitive grant aid scheme is a significant source of State funding for horticultural producers and is vital to improving growers' competitiveness, the quality of output as well as allowing growers innovate and diversify production.

The Scheme is open to all horticultural sectors – protected crops, nursery crops, field vegetables, soft fruit, apples, beekeeping and mushrooms and will provide grant aid, at a rate of 40%, for approved capital investments undertaken by the 29th September 2017. In certain limited cases, however, funding may be approved for investments that will be completed and claimed by the 28th September 2018.

The Horticulture sector will have access to the €150m low interest cash flow support loan fund, providing access to highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%.

The closing date for receipt of applications was 16th December 2016.

Launch of COFORD Publication - Broadleaf Forestry in Ireland

I recently launched the book *Broadleaf Forestry in Ireland*. This event took place in Avondale, the home of forestry in Ireland. I'm sure this fine publication will be avidly read and enjoyed by foresters and many others.

The importance of broadleaves in the afforestation programme has been confirmed in the forest policy review, *Forests, products and people*, and in the Forestry Programme 2014-2020, which provides higher grant and premium rates in order to incentivise the planting of broadleaf forest.

Broadleaves now account for over one-quarter of the forest estate and also comprise one-third of current afforestation. It is clear the increase in the planting of broadleaves is as a result of the afforestation schemes funded by my Department.

I congratulate all of the authors and those who have devoted so much time and effort in bringing this landmark publication across the line. I am delighted to be associated with this new publication which I'm sure will contribute to the achievement of a sustainable high quality hardwood timber resource for current and future generations.

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Launch of the COFORD publication Broadleaf Forestry in Ireland at Avondale House, Wicklow: Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Andrew Doyle T.D with Ciara Joyce granddaughter of Padraig Joyce launch the book with authors John Fennessy, Richard MacCarthy and Juergen Huss and Barbara and Ronan Joyce in front of the Spanish Chestnut planted by Samuel Hayes just in front of Avondale House.



Launch of the COFORD publication Broadleaf Forestry in Ireland at Avondale House, Wicklow: Authors John Fennessy, Richard MacCarthy and Juergen Huss in front of the Spanish Chestnut planted by Samuel Hayes just in front of Avondale House with Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Andrew Doyle T.D. and Ciara and Ronan Joyce and Barbara Joyce.

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Address at major Food and Drinks Seminar in Paris

I recently visited Paris to carry out a number of engagements in what is Ireland's third largest food and drink market. At a Bord Bia organised seminar on insights into the French foodservice market, I highlighted the importance of this market, and pointed out what Ireland has to offer is unique: food and drink produced to the highest standards of safety, traceability, and quality, from an island that has a clean, green, unspoilt image, and now backed up by an independently verified sustainability system – Origin Green.

Ireland's world-class credentials are well regarded by all levels of the food sector here in France, none more so than chefs throughout the French culinary arts industry. We have built a great reputation as a source of premium, safe, sustainable food and drink.

In the context of Brexit and the worries that exist about the future of the UK market for Irish food and drink exports, our French customers, remain our most important for lamb, seafood, and artisan beer, are our second largest customer for beef behind the U.K and third for whiskey behind the US and Germany.

Important Dates

23 January 2017 - Information meeting on new Sheep Welfare Scheme, Aughrim Co. Wicklow 8pm

5 & 6 May 2017 Irish Forestry, Woodland & Bio Energy Show 2017, Stradbally Hall Estate, Co. Laois

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