Unlocking Agroforestry in Ireland

Policy and Practice

A report for



NUFFIELD IRELAND

Farming Scholarships

by Marina Conway

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Executive Summary

Agroforestry, the integration of trees into farming landscapes, is not a new approach to land management but one that is deeply rooted in agricultural history. Historical systems such as wood pasture demonstrate that trees and livestock have coexisted productively for centuries. However, over the past 30 years, agricultural intensification and afforestation policies have encouraged a clear divide between farmland and forestry. Today, as challenges around climate change, biodiversity, water quality, and farm viability intensify, agroforestry offers a multifunctional land use that bridges this gap without compromising food production.

Despite growing policy interest, agroforestry adoption in Ireland remains low. For many farmers, agroforestry has involved a significant leap of faith with unclear outcomes beyond the initial establishment and premium payment period and limited research or practical guidance demonstrating successful agroforestry systems under Irish conditions.

In this report, the author examines the barriers to agroforestry uptake in Ireland, explores international best practices, and presents actionable policy recommendations. The study combines a survey of Irish landowners, foresters and Department inspectors, alongside visits to practitioners and policymakers across New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

The survey findings presented in Chapter 2 reveal broad support for integrating trees within farming systems but highlight significant concerns regarding land designation, scheme design, regulatory restrictions, long-term management and financial uncertainty. Crucially, the primary obstacles stem not from the trees themselves, but from prescriptive policy frameworks that prioritise administrative compliance over practical farm objectives.

International case studies demonstrated that farmers readily adopt agroforestry when it delivers clear economic and environmental value to their farm business. In New Zealand and Australia, trees are integrated for erosion control, shelter, timber production and environmental stewardship, often without state subsidies. In Cornwall, agroforestry development is farmer-led and supported through strong regional collaboration.

Throughout this study, a consistent theme emerged: farmers are willing to integrate trees into their farming systems when they provide a clear benefit to the farm business and when farmers retain flexibility over how those trees are established and managed.

Ultimately, increasing agroforestry uptake in Ireland will require a shift from highly prescriptive schemes towards a more flexible farmer-centred approach. Policy should focus on removing structural barriers, expanding agroforestry options, strengthening advisory support and improving long-term confidence in agroforestry.

Key Recommendations:

<u>Remove Structural Barriers</u>

1. Establish an Agroforestry Land Status within CAP
2. Introduce a Tiered Agroforestry Framework

<u>Expand Agroforestry Options</u>

3. Develop a Woodland Pasture Option

4. Develop a Tree Fodder Option

Support Farmer Adoption

5. Develop an Agroforestry Financial Decision Support Tool
6. Engage Agricultural Advisors
7. Establish an Irish Master TreeGrower Programme

Strengthen Long Term Delivery

8. Focus on Silviculture
9. Understand Where Farmers Want Trees?
10. Diversify Funding Mechanisms for Agroforestry

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Foreword

I am a forester by profession, with a career that has spanned roles in government, private industry, co-operative sector, charity sector, and as a self-employed practitioner. I have held senior leadership positions, including that of CEO, which has given me a broad and practical understanding of both policy development and implementation. Most of my career has been dedicated to farm forestry, where I have developed a strong interest in ensuring that farmers, farm families, and rural communities are placed at the centre of how we own, manage and think about our forests in Ireland.

Through this work, I have gained valuable insight into the intersection of forestry policy, practical implementation, and farmer attitudes to trees as a land use in Ireland. I am particularly passionate about bridging the knowledge gap and addressing the lack of a strong forest culture among landowners and farming communities. I believe this is essential to achieving long-term, sustainable ownership and management of forests in Ireland, and to ensuring that the multiple benefits of forestry are realised at farm and community level.

It is within this context that I undertook this Nuffield Scholarship study. My aim was to learn from more established agroforestry systems internationally, to understand why farmers adopt trees or agroforestry systems on farms, how these systems are implemented in practice, what works well, and what challenges arise. I believe agroforestry offers a unique opportunity to bridge the traditional divide between farming and forestry, enabling farmers to integrate trees without having to choose between the two.

My Nuffield Study Tour – A Global Perspective on Food Production, Trees and Agroforestry

My study tour provided an opportunity to explore how different countries integrate trees and agroforestry into agricultural landscapes, and how they balance food production with environmental, social, and economic objectives.

- New Zealand – where trees are viewed as an integral part of the farm, providing shelter, shade, and soil protection.
- Otway Ranges, Victoria (Australia) – where the guiding principle is simple: plant trees where farmers want them and empower them to manage them.
- South Australia – a major export region for grain, wine, beef, and horticulture, where water security is the primary constraint on agricultural production.
- Singapore – where less than 1% of land is allocated to farming, and rooftop gardens, aquaponics systems, and vertical farms serve more as sustainability showcases than food production systems.
- Denmark – where the ambitious Green Tripartite Agreement reflects a determination to lead on climate policy, including livestock emissions taxation and plans to convert 10% of farmland to forest.
- California – orchard country, where farmers are increasingly a minority voice, social licence is fragile, and water scarcity shapes decision making. Trees in agricultural areas are largely confined to orchards, with limited interest in wider farm integration.
- Chile – a highly export-oriented agricultural economy focused on high value products such as wine, fruit, and specialty crops.
- United Kingdom – home to some of the more established agroforestry systems, including historic woodland pastures, and a regional approach to new agroforestry development, with farmers shaping system design and adoption.
- Ireland – where farmers and foresters are pioneering agroforestry in their own way, each offering a unique perspective on the role of trees within farming systems.

Nuffield GFP 5 visiting a watermelon field in California September 2025.



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Abbreviations

ACRES	Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme
AGS	Afforestation Grant Scheme
BISS	Basic Income Support for Sustainability
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CO_2e	Carbon dioxide equivalent
CS	Countryside Stewardship
CSAL	Czech Association for Agroforestry
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
EURAF	European Agroforestry Federation
FFC	Forests for Cornwall
FGS	Forestry Grant Scheme (Scotland)
FT 8	Forest Type 8 (Agroforestry)
GFP	Global Focus Programme
GST	Goods and Services Tax (Australia)
ha	hectare
IAF	Irish Agroforestry Forum
ICRAF	International Council for Research in Agroforestry
MJ/kg DM	Megajoules per kilogram of dry matter
MTG	Master TreeGrower
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NOTS	National Organic Training Skillnet
NZ ETS	New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme
OAN	Otway Agroforestry Network
OFS	Organic Farming Scheme
QEII	Queen Elizabeth II National Trust
SFI	Sustainable Farming Incentive
TDRs	Transferable Development Rights
VToF	Victorian Trees on Farms Program

Introduction

Ireland's forest history is complex and, in many ways, characterised by loss and disconnection. In this context, agroforestry presents a significant opportunity to re-engage farmers with trees. Unlike conventional approaches, agroforestry is not a choice between farming and forestry; it is the integration of both on the same land, working in harmony. This integration has the potential to deliver environmental, economic, and social benefits while maintaining the central role of the family farm.

Between now and 2030, Ireland faces an urgent need to expand its forest estate in ways that deliver climate, biodiversity, water quality and economic benefits. With just 11.6% forest cover compared to the European average of 38%, Ireland remains one of the least forested countries in Europe. Forestry also plays a central role in achieving national and EU climate targets, with the Forest Strategy and Climate Action Plan setting a goal of 8,000 hectares of afforestation annually by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2025). However, planting rates are well below target with 1,573 hectares in 2024 and 2,527 hectares in 2025, highlighting the need for more practical and accessible approaches to integrating trees into farms.

Despite its potential, agroforestry as a stand-alone enterprise remains relatively new in Ireland. While its benefits are well established internationally, there are still many uncertainties in an Irish context. These include low levels of adoption, limited practical experience, and questions around financial returns, land value, and long-term outcomes. Agroforestry also sits somewhat uneasily within existing policy and regulatory frameworks, often being viewed as neither fully agricultural nor fully forestry. In addition, rigid scheme rules can discourage innovation and deter early adopters.

However, there are also clear opportunities. Agroforestry can provide attractive early-stage income through available supports, including agroforestry premiums and agricultural payments, while contributing positively to climate action, water quality, and biodiversity. It also offers a pathway for farmers to engage with trees without the perceived trade-offs associated with traditional forestry.

This Nuffield report explores the barriers and opportunities for agroforestry in Ireland through stakeholder engagement, farm visits, international travel and analysis of policy and practice.

Aims & Objectives

To explore how agroforestry is implemented and supported internationally, identify lessons from more established systems, and apply these insights to increase the uptake of agroforestry and ultimately more trees on Irish farms, creating landscapes that work for farmers, food production, nature, and future generations.

Objectives

- Understand the barriers to agroforestry uptake in Ireland
- Look to international examples for incorporating agroforestry systems on farms
- Develop policy recommendations to support and increase agroforestry uptake in Ireland

Chapter 1: What is Agroforestry?

1.1: History of Agroforestry

Agroforestry is not new; it is a modern name for an ancient practice of working with the forest and trees to grow crops and rear animals and has long been a key component of agricultural landscapes in both tropical and temperate regions worldwide. Forests provide shelter, fuel, food, water and cultural importance that evolved with humans, the recognition and management of which is still evident in indigenous land management and First Nations peoples.

Traditional agroforestry systems in Europe have long blended agriculture and biodiversity conservation, supporting both sustainable production and rich ecosystems. Le et al. (2025) undertook a review of 232 studies (1992–2024) that showed systems vary regionally, with Dehesa and Montado landscapes common in Southern Europe, and orchards and wood pastures more typical in Central and Eastern regions.

The Dehesa in Spain and Montado in Portugal, is a Mediterranean woodland pasture system of high natural and cultural value, and at some 3.5 million hectares is the largest agroforestry system in Europe. It is a man-made landscape, characterised by carefully managed low-density woodland (35-80 trees per ha, dense canopy cover of 40-70%) in which the evergreen cork oak trees are an integral part of a farmed landscape providing shade for the pigs, cattle, sheep and goats that graze the area extensively. They also provide acorns for the pigs in autumn sold as *Jamón Ibérico de Bellota* (acorn-fed ham), honey and pollen, aromatic herbs, wild game, mushrooms and harvesting of the cork oak every 9 years. In Spain they say, "*the Dehesa is like an orchestra, we have to be able to play many different instruments*".

Figure 1: Dehesa, Spain (Photo Credit: NatureScot)



In France, *Bocage* is an ancient agroforestry system largely based on hedgerow networks containing high-stem trees (trunks cleared for grazing/machinery) and medium-stem trees (half-standard species forming a mid-tier canopy). Found mainly in western France, this landscape is characterised by a mosaic of small fields enclosed by dense hedgerows of shrubs and mature trees, forming an interconnected ecological network. Traditionally, bocage served multiple functions: marking property boundaries, sheltering livestock, protecting crops from wind, and supplying firewood and timber.

Figure 2: Bocage agroforestry France (Photo Credit: INRA Rennes)



The Bocage system is very similar to the hedgerow network across Ireland, especially in western counties such as Leitrim with small fields enclosed with dense hedgerows of hawthorn and ash, primarily managed as agricultural boundaries. Despite this, there is an early reference to hedgerows and farm groves being managed as a source of timber and farm income on an estate in Wicklow "*On many other farms on this estate the timber is being sold out of the hedgerows and groves*." (O'Carroll, 2004), highlighting that trees within agricultural landscapes may have been viewed as a resource rather than simply as field boundaries.

The establishment of the International Council for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) in 1977, helped formalise the term "agroforestry":

A collective name for land-use systems in which woody perennials (trees, shrubs, etc.) are grown in association with herbaceous plants (crops, pastures) or livestock, in a spatial arrangement, a rotation, or both; there are usually both ecological and economic interactions between the trees and other components of the system (Lundgren 1982, cited by Smith 2010).

In more recent times, agroforestry has re-emerged as a valuable land management approach. It reflects a more holistic way of working the land, drawing on natural processes rather than relying solely on external inputs, driven by growing awareness of climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and animal welfare.

1.2: Agroforestry as a Land Use

Agroforestry is a land-use system that deliberately integrates trees with crops and/or livestock on the same area of land. These systems can enhance farm profitability while also delivering environmental benefits such as improved soil health, carbon storage, biodiversity

conservation, and water regulation alongside farm level benefits including improved animal welfare, shelter, shade, tree fodder, wood fuel and quality timber. There are three main types of agroforestry systems supported in Ireland namely; silvopasture, silvoarable and forest farming or forest gardening.

Table 1: Agroforestry Systems

Agroforestry system	Details
Silvopasture	The integration of trees with livestock grazing systems. Trees may be widely spaced or grouped and are managed for timber, shelter, or other products while animals graze beneath. Common examples in Ireland include rows of trees known as grid planting, fenced tree groups/plots within fields, and individual or scattered trees in fields (e.g. parkland landscapes). Wood pasture (open grown trees) and grazed orchards are less common.
Silvoarable	The integration of trees with arable or forage crops, typically with trees planted in rows and crops grown in the alleys between them. This allows continued mechanised farming while introducing benefits such as shelter, improved microclimates, and enhanced nutrient cycling. Still relatively uncommon in Ireland. Silvoarable pilot opened (April 2026)
Forest Garden	The cultivation of food or high-value crops within a woodland or under a tree canopy, often designed to mimic natural forest structure with multiple vegetation layers. Outputs can include fruits, nuts, berries, mushrooms, and medicinal plants. These systems are generally small-scale in Ireland and associated with diversified or niche enterprises.

Figure 3: Silvoarable (apples & oats), Stephen Briggs farm, Cambridgeshire (January 2026)



Figure 4: Silvopasture at Loughgall, Co Armagh (December 2024)



1.3: Agroforestry in Ireland

Trees have been revered in Irish history as far back as the Brehon Laws, which could be said reflect early agroforestry principles by legally protecting valuable tree species and supporting integrated systems of trees, livestock, and farming within the same landscape.

Today agroforestry remains a relatively new concept within Irish farming and forestry sectors, and both are still trying to understand each other's roles and how agroforestry fits between them. However, elements of agroforestry are embedded within Irish farming systems and the Irish landscape such as;

- Hedgerows are a dominant and defining feature of the Irish landscape and represent a long-established form of agroforestry.
- Riparian and alluvial woodlands on farms as well as increased measures for planting, particularly in response to water quality and climate objectives under CAP and ACRES.
- Silvopasture is the most relevant "trees within fields" system for Ireland, reflecting the predominance of grass-based livestock farming.

1.3.1: 2014 – 2020 Forestry Programme

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) introduced a pilot agroforestry scheme for silvopasture under the 2014–2020 Forestry Programme, offering an establishment and fencing grant (€6,220/ha) alongside an annual premium of €645/ha for five years. Foresters were sceptical, and farmers were largely unconvinced, due in part to the scheme's designation of land as forest land under the Forestry Act. This also placed it in direct competition with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) agri-environment schemes, which likewise operated on a five-year payment basis, but under which land remained classified as agricultural, thereby retaining flexibility for farm management.

In contrast, agroforestry required landowners to commit to an unfamiliar and unproven system while assuming all associated risks. Crucially, if the system proved unsuccessful after the payment period, the land remained classified as forest land under the Forestry Act 2014, now subject to felling licence requirements and a replanting obligation post felling with uncertainties

around future agricultural payments and land-use options. This designation is widely perceived by landowners as a long-term burden on the folio and on future generations.

Given these uncertainties, and the lack of a proven track record, it is unsurprising that uptake was extremely low, with only 51ha out of the targeted 195ha of agroforestry planted over the 5-year period of the scheme and a high proportion of the area planted was established as demonstration plots (Curran cited in Irwin et al. 2025).

1.3.2: Irish Agroforestry Forum

Following the limited success of the initial agroforestry scheme, the establishment of the Irish Agroforestry Forum (IAF) in 2021 marked an important step in supporting the development of agroforestry in Ireland. It was formed through a common interest to see more trees on farms from a broad range of actors including farmers, foresters, ecologists and representatives from Teagasc, DAFM, NOTS (National Organic Training Skillnet) and is chaired by Professor Jim McAdam, formerly of Queen's University. The Forum was created to inform policy, share information and help bridge the gap in knowledge between farming and forestry.

The IAF has played a significant role in advocating for improvements to scheme design, engaging with policymakers to promote greater flexibility and alignment with farm support systems. Alongside this, it has been highly influential in raising awareness and encouraging practical adoption, particularly through farm walks, demonstration events, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange.

A strong focus has been placed on education and upskilling, with the Forum delivering training, webinars, national and international conferences and practical resources for farmers, advisors, and wider stakeholders, including its agroforestry ambassador programme, which offers a farm visit to aid the decision-making process, site selection and planning for the best agroforestry system and related supports. Through this work, the IAF has been effective in building confidence and capacity within agroforestry, reflected in strong engagement with its events.

Interviews with IAF Chairman Jim McAdam and Manager Maureen Kilgore (January 2025) highlighted the continued importance of this work. Both identified forest land designation, limited advisory capacity, and significant knowledge gaps around agroforestry design, management, and financial performance as key barriers to wider adoption. They also emphasised the need for more locally relevant research, demonstration sites, and practical guidance to support farmers in designing agroforestry systems that align with their production objectives and long-term farm plans.

Figure 5: Irish Agroforestry Forum National Conference 2025, Hazel Hurley artist summary



1.3.3: 2023-2027 Forestry Programme

The Agroforestry scheme was significantly enhanced in the Afforestation Grant Scheme (AGS) of the 2023-2027 Forestry Programme (DAFM 2023). Improvements included increased capital establishment support for silvopasture, higher annual premium payments, and increased payment duration to 10 years. The scheme was expanded to include a silvoarable pilot and a forest gardening pilot (small scale food forest) up to 1 ha. In addition, all agroforestry plots are eligible for fencing grant support for external boundaries.

Table 2: Agroforestry Grant and Premium Rates 2023 - 2027

Agroforestry FT8	Establishment Grant per ha	Annual Premia per ha	Duration Years	Fencing Grant per ha
Silvopasture	€8,555	€1,170	10	€725 - €1,140
Silvoarable	€6,000	€829	10	€725 - €1,140
Forest Garden	€6,000	€829	10	€725 - €1,140

One of the most significant advantages of the current scheme is the ability to stack payments, whereby landowners can receive the agroforestry premium, the BISS (Basic Income Support for Sustainability) and Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) payment all on the same parcel of land. When combined with the tax-free status of forestry premiums, this creates a particularly strong financial incentive for adoption. These financial incentives have seen interest increase with 181ha of FT8 planted in 2025 and some 456ha of FT8 applications currently in the system (Delany 2026).

Even so, constraints remain. Most notably, land established under the scheme is designated as forest land, continuing to present a key concern for many landowners in terms of long-term land use and flexibility.

Eligibility requirements can also be restrictive, including a minimum stocking rate of 400 trees/ha, which is relatively high compared to many international agroforestry systems (section 1.4). Additional limitations include relatively rigid design requirements, with trees required to be planted singly, in rows, or in groups, and a prescribed list of eligible species. Furthermore, fruit and nut trees are limited to 15%, restricting diversification opportunities within systems.

1.4 Agroforestry Support Internationally

Agroforestry support varies widely between countries. Ireland currently offers one of the most financially generous agroforestry schemes, while most other countries support agroforestry through broader agricultural, forestry, or environmental programmes. Across the EU, this is typically delivered through CAP measures or supplemented by corporate initiatives, while in the UK support is provided through a mix of national and regional schemes.

1.4.1: England

Agroforestry support in England is provided through the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) schemes. Support is available for planning, establishment, and early-stage management. The PA4 Agroforestry Plan provides funding (approximately £1,270 per plan) to develop site-specific designs and is a requirement for accessing Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agroforestry support. Capital grants are available for individual eligible items such as tree planting, protection (e.g. guards and fencing), and associated infrastructure.

The scheme supports both silvopastoral and silvoarable systems, with a high degree of design flexibility. Tree densities are typically lower than in conventional forestry and are guided by scheme specifications, generally in the range of 30 - 400 trees per hectare. Unlike Ireland, there is no fixed tree density requirement, allowing systems to be tailored to farm conditions, an important consideration for farmers wishing to retain agricultural land classification.

Annual maintenance payments are structured according to tree density and land sensitivity, with annual payments ranging from approximately £248/ha to £849/ha (Table 3). Payment duration varies, typically 3 years under SFI and up to 10 years under CS and is linked to ongoing management requirements.

Table 3: Agroforestry Grants under Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship schemes (Source: Will Simonson, Organic Research Centre UK)

Agroforestry maintenance grants offered through Sustainable Farming Incentive (AGF) and Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CAGF)

Code	Name	Duration	Payment rate	Tree densities	Applicable land	Required
AGF1	Maintain very low density in-field agroforestry on less sensitive land	3 years	£248/ha/yr	30-50/ha	Less sensitive eligible land	
CAGF4	Manage very low density in-field agroforestry on more sensitive land	10 years	£248/ha/yr	30-50/ha	More sensitive eligible land*	AF plan, (EIA)
AGF2	Maintain low density in-field agroforestry on less sensitive land	3 years	£385/ha/yr	51-130/ha	Less sensitive eligible land*	
CAGF2	Manage low density in-field agroforestry on more sensitive land	10 years	£385/ha/yr	51-130/ha	More sensitive eligible land*	AF plan, (EIA)
CAGF3	Manage medium density in-field agroforestry	10 years	£595/ha/yr	131-250/ha	Eligible land	AF plan, EIA
CAGF1	Manage high density in-field agroforestry	10 years	£849/ha/yr	251-400/ha	Eligible land	AF plan, EIA

Codes are hyperlinked to more information; *see SFI agroforestry sensitivity map; AF plan refers to Agroforestry Plan (PA4 capital grant)

UK Regional Woodland Creation Grants

Outside of national funding, local Woodland Creation Partners offer highly competitive funding, across specific regional catchment areas. Grants are available for various tree planting projects including agroforestry. They are delivered through partnerships involving:

- Forestry Commission / Forestry England
- Local authorities (such as Forests for Cornwall, see section 3.4)
- Environmental NGOs
- Catchment or landscape-based initiatives

1.4.2: Scotland

Scotland's forest cover increased from 5% in the 1920's to 18.5% in 2024. National targets aim to expand this to 21% by 2032 and achieve net zero emissions by 2045, with agroforestry identified as a potential contributor to both goals.

Despite this ambition, significant structural barriers remain. Tenant farmers are often unable to commit to long-term agroforestry schemes due to tenancy arrangements that are incompatible with 20-year grant scheme contracts (Mvula et al., 2025). This is further compounded by highly concentrated land ownership, with some 2,413 landowners owning 70% of rural land (Wightman, 2026).

Agroforestry is supported through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), administered by Scottish Forestry. The scheme provides funding for agroforestry systems on both grazing and arable land. Eligible projects must be a minimum of 0.5 hectares and a maximum of 15 hectares per farm, and the land must remain available for grazing for the duration of the 20 year contract.

The Agroforestry option supports investment across three main objectives:

Aim 1 Broadleaves for timber production

Oak, sycamore, cherry, beech, birch and aspen. Up to 20% may consist of fruit trees or native shrub species.

Aim 2 Broadleaves for biodiversity

Oak, sycamore, cherry, beech, birch, rowan, willow and aspen. Up to 10% Scots pine. Up to 20% may be fruit trees or native shrubs

Aim 3 Fruit and nut trees for business diversification

Apple, pear, damson, plum, cherry, elder, hazel, sweet chestnut and walnut

Grant support is provided through a capital grant for establishment and an annual maintenance payment for a period of five years. The rate of capital grant depends on the number of trees per hectare (Table 4).

Overall, the Scottish agroforestry scheme is similar to Ireland's, but it does offer landowners flexibility in tree density, and payments are reflective of that.

Table 4: Stocking levels and grant rates Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme

Planting density	Initial payment	Annual maintenance
300-400 trees/hectare	£5,400/hectare	£126/hectare/year
150-200 trees/hectare	£2,790/hectare	£72/hectare/year

1.4.3: France

Agroforestry is an important land use in France, covering approximately 1.55 million hectares. Whilst no single dedicated grant system for agroforestry could be found, support is available through a combination of CAP measures and private initiatives. One example is the French Agroforestry Foundation's Fund (https://fonds.agroforesterie.fr/), which is supported by corporate partners, and provides both financial and technical assistance to farmers. Companies contribute as patrons and benefit from corporate tax incentives, while funding on the ground supports agroforestry planting projects. For farmers, the fund provides:

- **Supplies (up to €9 per plant)**, including plants, mulch, protection, stakes, and irrigation where required
- **Technical support over three years**, including regular advisory visits, co-financed up to approximately €4,665 depending on project complexity

Landowners remain responsible for site preparation and operational costs.

Smaller private initiatives also exist, such as the L'Occitane Foundation's agroforestry programme, which supports biodiversity focused planting on farms (https://fondation.loccitane.com/actions/respecting-biodiversity/agroforestry-to-protect-local-biodiversity-in-farms-in-france).

At a policy level, the CAP 2023–2027 National Strategic Plan has more clearly integrated agroforestry into the subsidy system, moving away from earlier approaches where trees reduced payment eligibility. Measures such as the "Bonus Haie" eco-scheme provide additional payments (up to €20/ha) for maintaining agro-ecological features, while retention of the 100 trees per hectare threshold ensures continued eligibility for BISS. This has reduced incentives for farmers to remove trees, although practical challenges around implementation remain (Liagre et al., 2025).

1.4.4: Czech Republic

The Czech Republic provides a strong example of how targeted CAP measures can accelerate agroforestry adoption. Agroforestry was incorporated into the Czech CAP Strategic Plan for 2023–2027 following extensive collaboration between the Czech Association for Agroforestry (CSAL), researchers and government agencies. The aim was to remove barriers that had discouraged farmers from integrating trees into productive farmland.

The scheme supports both silvoarable and silvopastoral systems. Farmers receive an establishment payment of approximately €4,353/ha alongside annual maintenance payments of €754/ha for five years (CSAL) and EURAF, 2025).

Farmer uptake has been impressive. In 2023, 87 farmers established 610 hectares of agroforestry. By 2024, 126 farmers established a further 1,140 hectares, bringing the total area planted in the first two years to 1,750 hectares. Around half of the new plantings were on arable land, demonstrating that farmers are willing to adopt more management intensive agroforestry systems when policy and financial supports are aligned.

The Czech experience is particularly notable because agroforestry had largely disappeared from the agricultural landscape during the twentieth century. The rapid uptake achieved through the CAP programme demonstrates how legal recognition, practical support and targeted incentives can successfully reintroduce trees into productive farming systems.

1.4.5: Germany

Agroforestry support in Germany is highly decentralised and varies significantly between federal states, resulting in what the initiative *Agroforst Jetzt? (Agroforestry Now!)* describes as a “patchwork” funding landscape. While agroforestry has been eligible for support under the current CAP through Eco-scheme 3, implementation differs between regions and funding structures remain complex (https://agroforst.jetzt/foerderlandschaft/).

Under Eco-scheme 3, farms can receive approximately €600/ha of woody area (not total system area) from 2026. In addition to this maintenance style payment, some federal states have introduced investment support schemes for agroforestry establishment and consulting support with qualified advisors (80-90% of cost up to €1,500).

1.4.6: Victoria, Australia

The Victorian Government recently announced the Victorian Trees on Farms Program (VToF) which provides grants to rural landowners to integrate trees into their agricultural land. Farm forestry plantings may be eligible to receive up to $4,000 per hectare (excl. GST) capped at A$80,000 (excl. GST). The funding for farm forestry plantings recognises additional costs associated with pruning and thinning to produce timber.

There are two options:

1. Wide spaced plantings – trees planted several metres apart (minimum 400 trees/ha) to enable effective grazing of livestock or growth of crops, whilst producing timber.

2. Shelterbelts/Timberbelts – strips of trees at least 10m wide, strategically planted to shelter livestock, crops, and pastures, as well as producing timber products in future years.

<u>An Alternative Perspective on the VToF Program</u>

During my visit to Victoria, I encountered a contrasting perspective from forest scientist Rowan Reid, who questioned whether grant-funded programmes are always the most effective means of integrating trees into farming systems. Reid’s Bambra Agroforestry Farm is presented in section 3.3.

Drawing on over 40 years of experience planting trees in the Otway region, Reid argues that state led grant schemes have often resulted in poor outcomes, stating that the landscape is “littered with failed and neglected timber plantations owned by farmers who regret ever taking the money.”

He contends that such schemes risk undermining long-term progress, suggesting that VToF style funding can “punish leaders, sap community enthusiasm, discourage third-party investment, stifle innovation and set our state back decades.” In contrast, Reid highlights the

success of the Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN), a farmer-led initiative and now one of the largest landholder networks of its kind globally.

The OAN operates on a simple principle: farmers plant and manage trees that suit their own needs and motivations. As Reid notes, “farmers are planting and managing the trees they want, for the reasons that are important to them.” Rather than being driven by government or industry, the resulting landscape reflects local priorities and community values. This approach emphasises cultural change over financial incentives. The focus has been on fostering a long-term commitment to tree growing within farming systems, embedding forestry for both conservation and commercial benefit within the farm enterprise.

His critique raises an important question: whether grant led approaches risk undermining the very behaviours they seek to promote, and whether farmer led systems may offer a more durable pathway for integrating trees into agricultural landscapes. There may be many who agree.
(https://agroforestry.net.au/main.asp?_=Victorian%20Trees%20on%20Farms%20Grants)

1.5 Key Insights from this Chapter:

Agroforestry support is delivered through a diverse range of mechanisms, including forestry programmes, agricultural schemes, environmental payments, corporate funding, and community initiatives.

Annual maintenance payments are generally absent or significantly shorter in duration than Ireland’s agroforestry premium, which currently provides support for 10 years.

Ireland offers one of the most financially generous agroforestry schemes internationally, through premium payments and the ability to stack support with BISS and Organic Farming Scheme payments.

Regulatory and land tenure arrangements can strongly influence agroforestry uptake, particularly where long-term commitments are required.

Many countries place greater emphasis on flexibility in system design, allowing farmers to determine tree density and layout according to farm objectives. For example, the maximum tree density (400/ha) in Scotland and England corresponds to the minimum planting density required under the Irish agroforestry scheme.

Chapter 2: Agroforestry in Ireland: Stakeholder Experiences, Barriers and Opportunities

This chapter examines the barriers to agroforestry uptake under the Irish Afforestation Grant Scheme, drawing on survey responses from landowners (those who had undertaken agroforestry and those who had not), registered foresters and Department inspectors. It identifies the most significant constraints and highlights opportunities to better align policy with farm practice.

2.1: Survey Design, Methodology and Response

The goal was simple: to identify which aspects of the scheme are working well, what challenges exist in practice, and what improvements could support wider adoption and better outcomes. A survey on experiences with the Irish agroforestry scheme (delivered through the AGS) was circulated on 20th March 2026. The date was after the Mid-Term Review of the Forestry Programme (DAFM 10th March 2026), in which the premium for FT8 agroforestry was increased from €975/ha to €1,170/ha, now the largest forestry premium per ha in the AGS.

Several survey questions used a ranking based response format, where participants were asked to rank a series of options in order of importance (e.g. 1 = most important, 6 = least important). To analyse these responses, each ranking position was assigned a numerical value corresponding to its rank. Mean ranking scores were calculated for each option, with a lower mean score indicating a higher overall ranking. This allowed comparison of the relative importance or performance of different factors while accounting for the full distribution of responses rather than only first choice selections.

The landowner survey was circulated through the Irish Agroforestry Forum, Irish Timber Growers Association, Irish Nuffield Scholars, and the client lists of Western Forestry Co-op and Forestry Services, organisations whose members are more likely to have engaged with forestry, agroforestry or tree planting than the wider farming population. As a result, the survey sample may overrepresent individuals with a pre-existing interest in trees and land-use change. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of the views of engaged landowners rather than representative of the wider farming population.

The registered forester survey was sent through the Society of Irish Foresters (registered foresters who prepare the licence and grant applications for agroforestry must be members of the Society), and the Forestry Inspectors survey to the 22 DAFM district inspectors directly.

Given the relatively recent introduction of the agroforestry scheme, the response rate was considered strong, with 107 responses received across the key stakeholder groups, including 75 landowners (24 with agroforestry, 51 without), 25 foresters, and 7 Department inspectors.

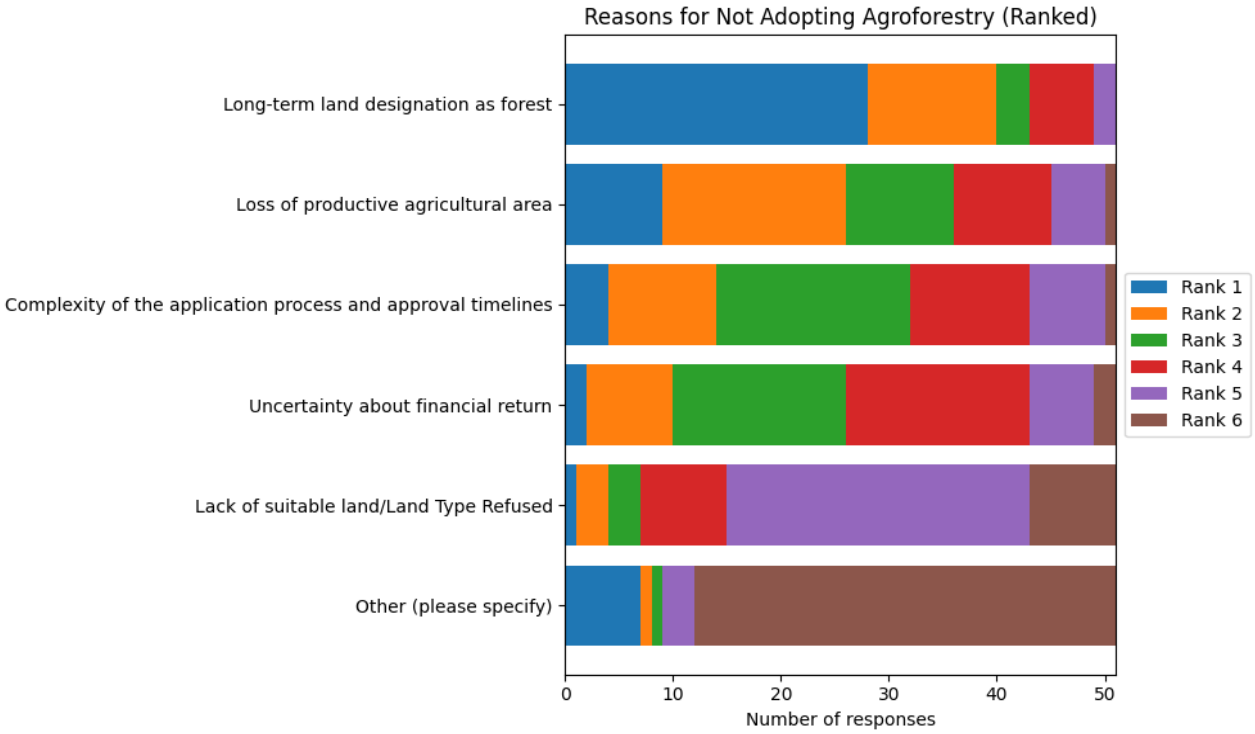
The results reveal strong underlying interest in agroforestry across all stakeholder groups. However, this interest is constrained by a combination of structural, administrative, financial, and practical barriers. While those who have adopted agroforestry generally report positive experiences, significant challenges remain at the decision-making and implementation stages.

2.2: Landowner Perspectives: Interest Constrained by Risk

For landowners who do not have agroforestry, awareness of agroforestry is relatively high, yet engagement remains limited. While 39% of respondents had examined the scheme in detail, a further 35% had not progressed beyond awareness. This highlights a gap between interest and action.

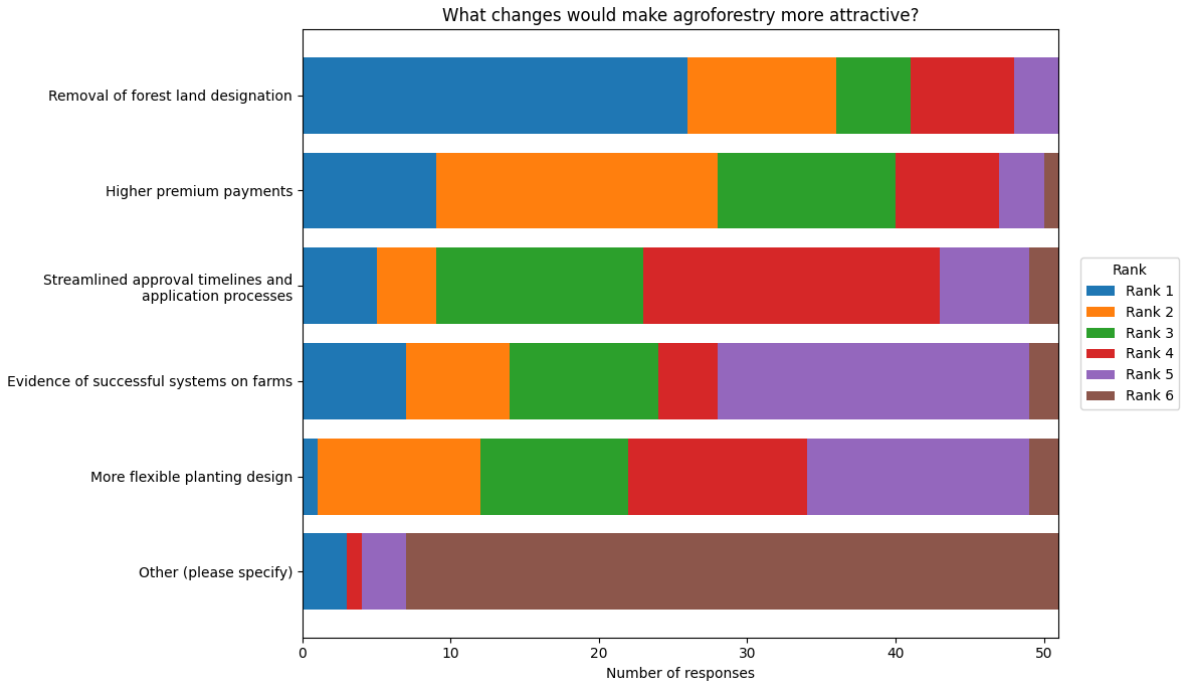
The most significant barrier is the long-term land designation as forest land. One respondent noted: *'The permanent nature of forestry is my No.1 obstacle'*. Respondents consistently expressed concern about loss of flexibility, impact on land value, and uncertainty for future generations. Similar findings were reported by Zhu and O'Hagan-Luff (2026a; 2026b), who identified long-term land designation and the associated loss of future land-use options as key factors influencing farmer attitudes towards afforestation in Ireland.

This is not unique to Ireland, during my travels in the UK farmers had opted for agroforestry tree densities that remain outside the forest land designation, typically fewer than 50 trees per ha. In Australia and New Zealand this wasn't considered an issue as there is no forest land designation that restricts future land use options. Loss of productive land, administrative burden and financial uncertainty were also highlighted as key deterrents to agroforestry uptake.



When asked what changes would make agroforestry more attractive the most important change was removal of the forest land designation, followed by higher premium payments.

Administrative improvements, (particularly streamlining application and approval timelines) and evidence of successful systems on farms were of secondary importance.



Despite these concerns, underlying interest remains strong. Overall, 65% of respondents indicated they would consider agroforestry in the future, while 24% remained uncertain and 11% would not consider it, suggesting there is significant latent demand if existing constraints and policy barriers can be addressed.

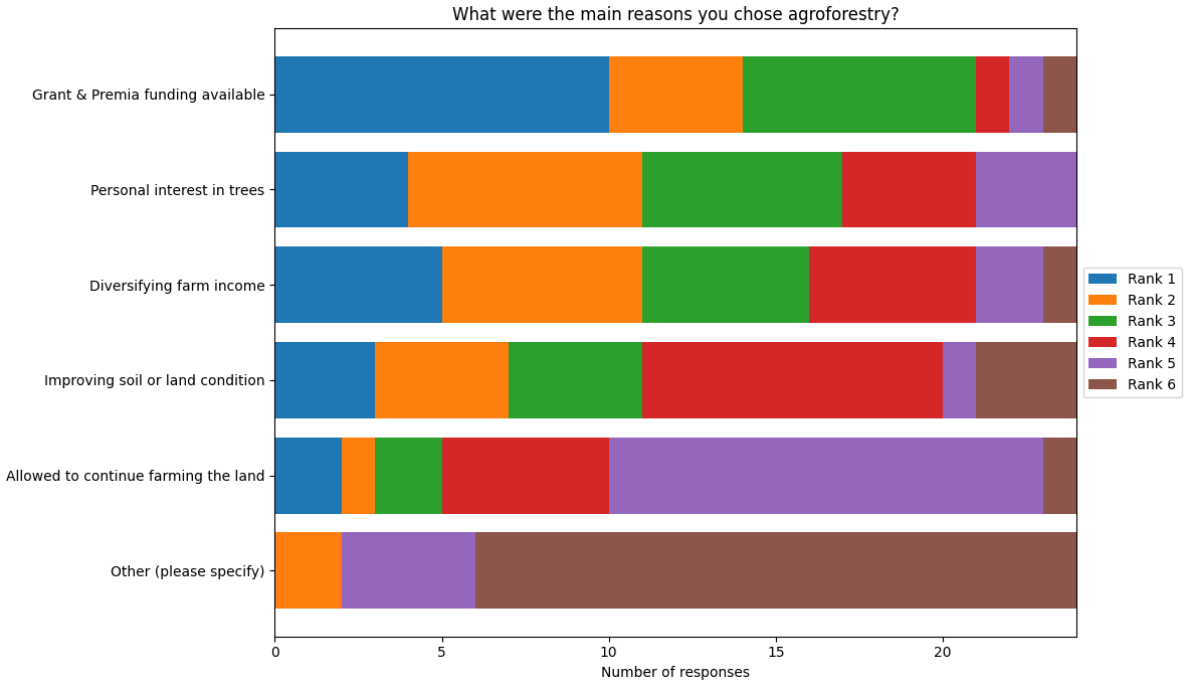
When asked the open question, *"Is there anything else you would suggest that would increase your confidence in considering agroforestry?"*, 33 respondents provided additional comments:

- Financial improvements were mentioned repeatedly, including longer premium durations, higher payments, and clearer return on investment. "*increase premium payments from 10 to 20 years*"
- Land designation and flexibility were a dominant concern, with multiple respondents calling for removal of forestry classification or greater ability to revert land use. "*Making it a farming scheme as opposed to a forestry scheme with DAFM - keep it simple*"
- Knowledge and evidence gaps were frequently highlighted, with respondents requesting more real-world examples, case studies, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. "*Seeing/hearing about successful farms that have adopted it. Perhaps I'm not a pioneer, but might be a late adopter!"*
- Practical design and implementation also featured, including wider spacing, better integration with farming systems, and clearer options for managing non-tree areas. "*Wider tree spacing perhaps plus planting a species that had definite commercial value for the future*"
- Advisory support and communication were raised by several respondents, including the need for better access to foresters, clearer guidance, and regular updates during the application process "*More practical advice available from foresters*"

2.3: Agroforestry Landowners: Positive Outcomes, Implementation Challenges

Landowners who adopted agroforestry reported largely positive experiences. Financial incentives were the primary driver of adoption, supported by diversification benefits *"Working Full Time so, was sensible to plant some of land*" and personal interest in environmental

outcomes "*I decided farming was becoming a burden and took the opportunity to start a native forest*". The importance placed on environmental outcomes is consistent with the findings of Irwin et al. (2023), who found that farmers viewed environmental benefits as the main advantage of having trees on farms.



This was further supported in their responses to what aspects of their agroforestry had worked well with financial support and tree establishment/survival ranking highest. Interestingly integration with livestock ranked low, indicating that experience was limited and agroforestry systems were relatively new.

However, adoption is not without challenges. Application delays, design constraints, and tree establishment issues were the most common difficulties. While 75% reported no major restrictions on farming, a notable minority highlighted inflexible rules and spacing requirements. When asked whether they would establish agroforestry again, the majority of respondents said yes. The main reasons given were:

Yes (67%)

- Environmental motivation and satisfaction "*I enjoy having an agroforestry project although it may not be the most financially viable project undertaken*"
- Improved land use and practicality "*As I work full time and rent the land it has reduced maintenance on area of poor land quality*"
- Financial support and incentives
- Personal interest and enjoyment

Not sure (21%)

- Uncertainty about long-term outcomes "*The jury is still out whether calves are suitable*"
- System-specific challenges

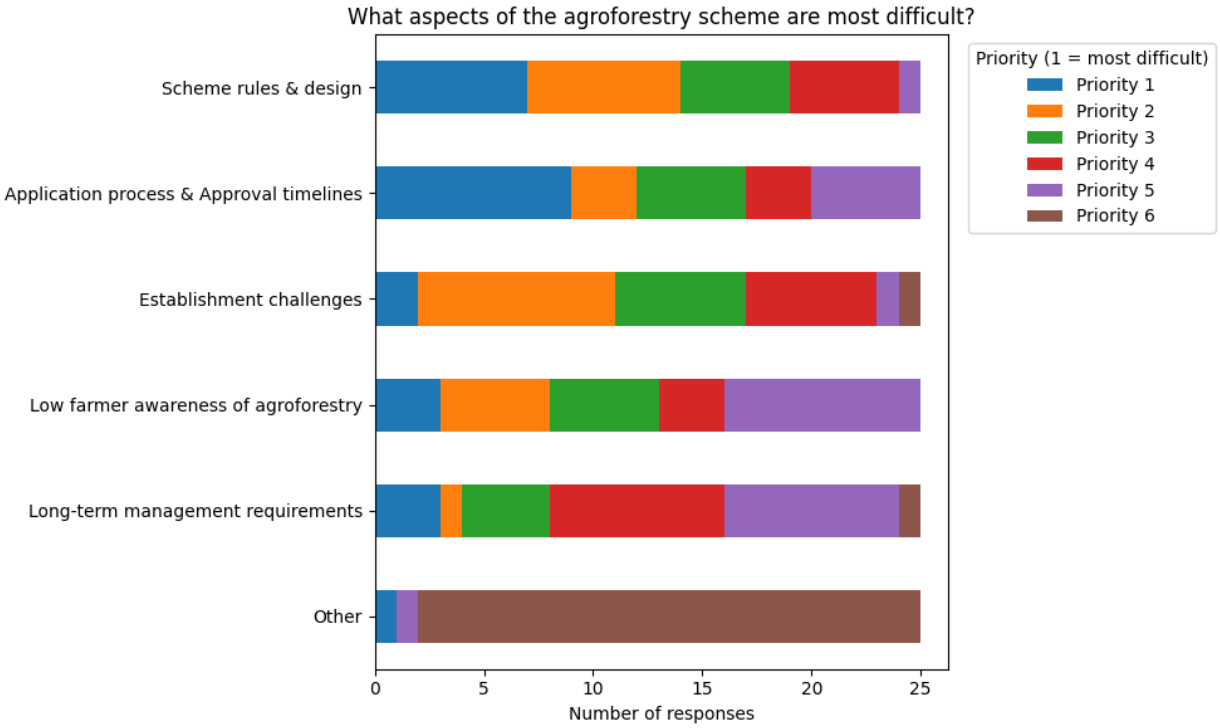
No (12%)

- Scheme inflexibility "*Inflexibility of scheme. Owner must be able to decide their lands use*"
- Policy and funding uncertainty

When asked what changes would improve the agroforestry scheme for farmers, respondents most frequently highlighted the need for improved financial support, a simpler and more transparent application process, better advisory and technical support, greater flexibility in scheme design and land use, and more equitable sharing of risk and upfront costs.

2.4: Foresters: Complexity, Cost and Scheme Design

The forester survey captured a substantial level of practical experience with FT8 agroforestry, with participating foresters representing approximately 80-100 agroforestry project interactions, excluding additional enquiries or projects that did not proceed. Foresters play a central role in delivering agroforestry, and their responses highlight systemic challenges. Scheme rules and design constraints, alongside application timelines, emerged as the most significant barriers.

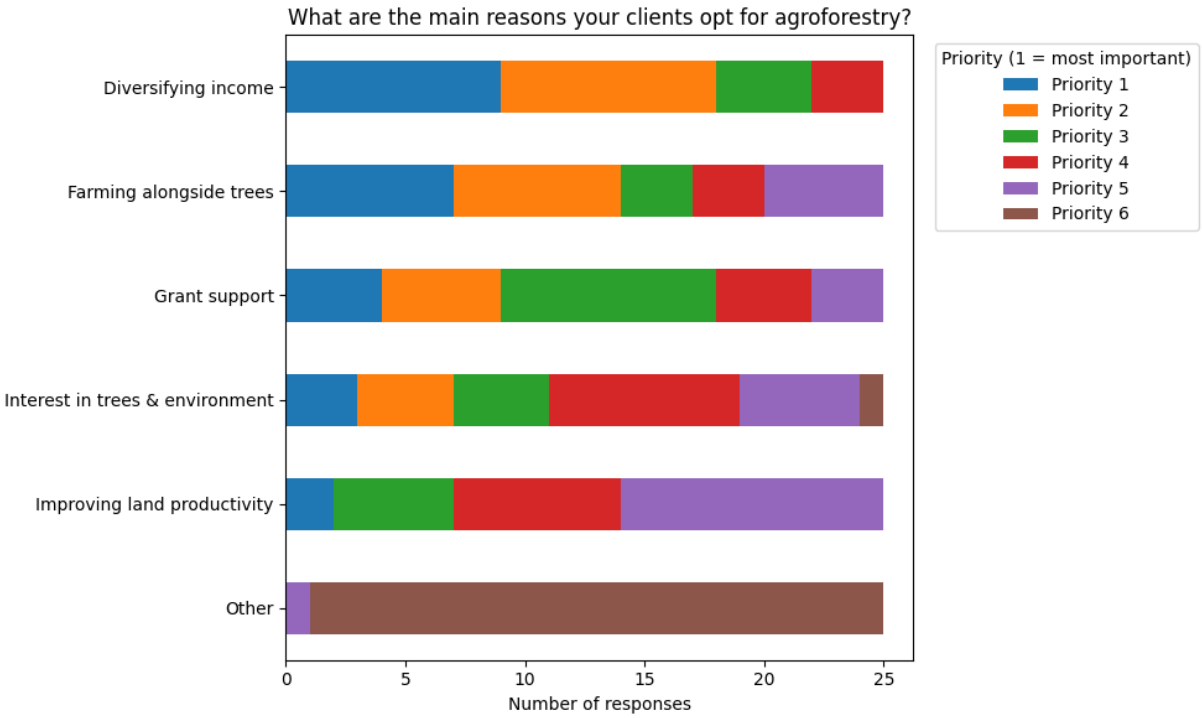


When asked if there were any specific technical, design or management requirements within the scheme that are difficult to implement in practice, foresters identified several practical challenges in implementing agroforestry (listed below). Overall, there was a clear view that greater flexibility, clearer guidance, and better alignment of supports with real costs would improve implementation.

- **Design & layout complexity**
  - Spacing, group planting, fitting designs into fields
  - Limited flexibility / rigid rules
- **Costs (major issue)**
  - Fencing
  - Tree protection (tubes vs mesh)
  - Grants not covering real costs
- **Establishment challenges**
  - Marking out sites
  - Time and technical input required

- **Management & labour**
    - Ongoing silviculture
    - Labour intensity
    - Training needs
- **Livestock interactions**
    - Damage to shelters
    - Managing cattle within systems
- **Scheme/process issues**
    - Need for better guidance and earlier clarity
    - Importance of collaboration (farmer – advisor - DAFM)

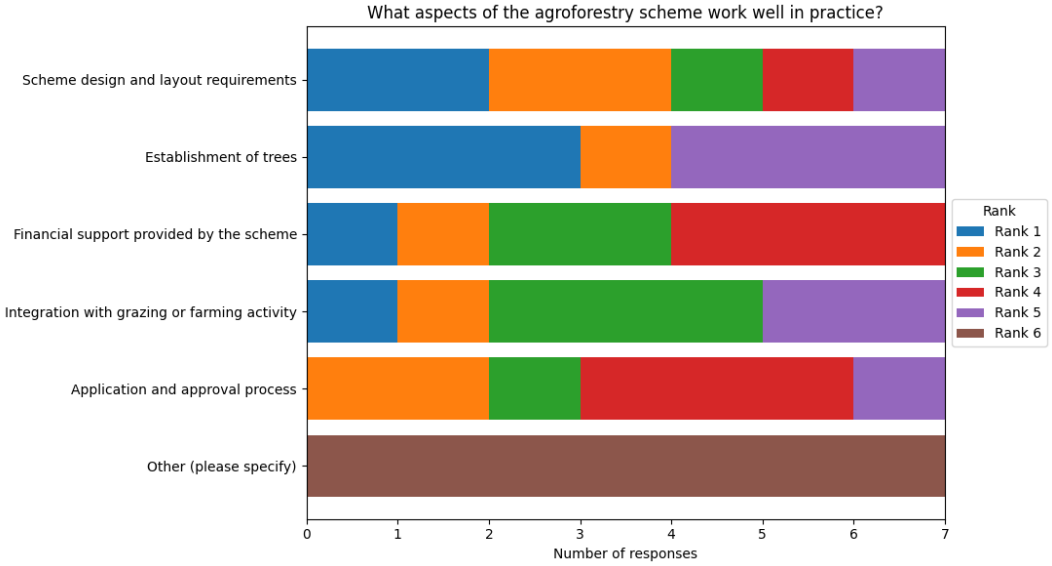
When asked what one change to the agroforestry scheme they believed would increase client uptake, foresters identified financial incentives, scheme flexibility, and land classification issues as the key areas for improvement. The most common suggestion was to increase premium rates and extend payment duration, with many recommending a 15 – 20 year term to better reflect long-term management. Foresters indicated that their clients most commonly adopt agroforestry to diversify both their income and farming system.



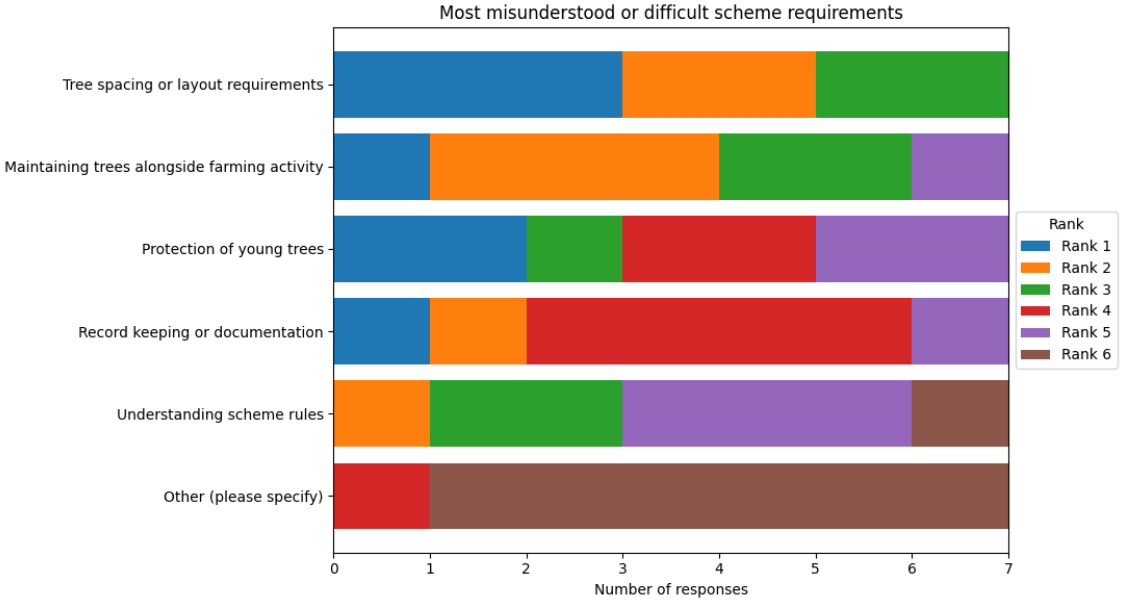
Overall, foresters emphasised that successful implementation requires close collaboration between farmers, advisors, and the Department, and that aligning the scheme more closely with practical farming systems would significantly increase uptake.

2.5: Inspectors: Delivery vs Administration

Department inspectors generally view the scheme as working well on the ground, particularly in terms of tree establishment and scheme design, with administrative processes and approvals identified as weaker elements of delivery, as also highlighted by foresters.



Regarding the scheme, inspectors highlighted several recurring practical challenges around tree spacing and layout requirements and the protection of young trees. Managing trees alongside farming was identified as an area where farmers frequently encountered difficulties or misunderstandings.



Responses also emphasised the need for improved guidance, training, and knowledge transfer. Several comments suggested that trees can sometimes become an “afterthought” within agroforestry, reflecting concern about insufficient emphasis on long-term management and integration of the trees. Financial improvements, particularly higher incentives and longer premium periods, were also repeatedly identified as priorities for future scheme development.

2.6: Key Insights and Implications: Policy vs Practice

The survey findings suggest that agroforestry uptake is not constrained by lack of interest, but by misalignment between policy design and farm reality. Stakeholders consistently highlight the need for greater flexibility, improved financial incentives, and more efficient administration. The scheme is perceived as a forestry programme rather than an agricultural system, creating both regulatory and psychological barriers.

Reframing agroforestry as a flexible agricultural system, rather than a rigid forestry model, is central to increasing adoption. There is also a clear need for improved knowledge transfer, including demonstration farms and peer learning, to build confidence in long-term outcomes. Key Insights include:

- Strong interest exists: 65% of non-participating landowners would consider agroforestry.
- The dominant barrier is the forest land designation and perceived permanence.
- Administrative complexity and delays significantly reduce uptake.
- Financial supports are important but do not currently reflect long-term realities.
- Practical implementation challenges reinforce reluctance among both farmers and foresters.

These points are further reinforced in a study undertaken by Irwin et al. (2025) on barriers and enablers to agroforestry adoption in Ireland, which found the following key failures of the Irish agroforestry innovation system:

- a low level of knowledge of agroforestry;
- a lack of research undertaken and capacity;
- a lack of interaction between actors;
- policy issues; and
- a lack of goals within actor organisations in supporting and promoting agroforestry.

Irwin also stated that uptake remains critically low with only 51ha out of the targeted 195 ha of agroforestry planted; a high proportion of this area of agroforestry established under this scheme was used as demonstration plots (Curran, E. cited as personal communication).

Chapter 3: Lessons from International Agroforestry Practice

3.1: Trees as Farm Infrastructure: Lessons from New Zealand Hill Country

The New Zealand Poplar and Willow Trust promotes the integration of trees into pastoral farming systems for erosion control, shelter, biodiversity and long-term farm resilience. Poplars are favoured for slopes and erosion prone land. Willows are widely used for riverbank stabilisation and flood management; both species provide shade and shelter for livestock.

Unlike more formal agroforestry systems, the farms visited demonstrated a practical and highly integrated approach to using trees within commercial sheep and beef enterprises. Trees were not viewed as separate forestry blocks, but as part of the farm's core infrastructure supporting production, environmental resilience and farm viability simultaneously.

A strong narrative emerged across the three case study farms; tree planting began as a response to erosion and land instability. Over time, however, farmers increasingly recognised wider benefits including biodiversity, habitat creation, animal welfare, aesthetics, legacy values and alternative income streams. Importantly, these systems were largely farmer led rather than grant driven, resulting in strong personal investment and long-term stewardship.

Trees for erosion control and water protection

Erosion control was the primary driver for tree establishment across all three farms. Poplars and willows were strategically planted on vulnerable slopes, gullies and waterways to stabilise soils and reduce sediment loss.

At Westview Farm in the Pohangina Valley, Shane Carroll and his wife Nicola have planted at least 200 poplar and willow poles annually for the past 30 years across their 1,600ha hill country property. Shane described erosion control as the single greatest advantage of trees on the farm, particularly during Cyclone Gabrielle, when their farm experienced significantly less damage than surrounding properties.

Figure 6: Poplar and willow poles to stabilise hill on Westview Farm (March 2025)





Similarly, Bill and Sue Garland at Maungatautari began extensive tree planting after severe storms in the 1980s exposed the vulnerability of their hill country soils. Soil mapping identified erosion prone areas, leading to widespread planting of poplar and willow poles and the fencing of bush remnants. Bill noted that these trees protected fragile soils effectively, although many are now reaching the end of their lifespan and creating management challenges.

On Brent Mountfort's farm in the Bay of Plenty, poplars and willows continue to be used for erosion management alongside extensive wetland and native bush protection. Regional council support has assisted with environmental planning and tree provision, particularly in vulnerable areas.

Figure 7: Poplar and willow planted for soil stabilisation and shade, B Mountfort Farm (March 2025)



Shade and shelter as livestock infrastructure

Shade and shelter were consistently described as critical animal welfare tools within pastoral systems. Trees reduced livestock exposure to wind, rain and heat while improving overall paddock functionality.

Shane Carroll highlighted the shelter value of trees for livestock, while also recognising their contribution to farm aesthetics and landscape enhancement. Bill Garland specifically noted that poplar trees provided excellent shade for bulls, particularly where animals were grazed in separate groups.

Trees as biodiversity and habitat corridors

While erosion control initiated much of the early planting, all three farms demonstrated a growing emphasis on biodiversity, habitat restoration and landscape connectivity.

Brent Mountfort's property includes wetlands and native bush, protected under QEII covenant. Extensive native planting has been undertaken in partnership with the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, including 40,000 native trees. Some protected areas remain lightly grazed, although the long-term objective is full exclusion and habitat restoration.

At Maungatautari, Bill and Sue Garland have established eight QEII covenants and incorporated 30ha of their farm into the Maungatautari Sanctuary Mountain project. The farm now contains over 30km of protected covenant fencing and significant native restoration planting, notable as there were no trees on the farm when they originally purchased it. Bill reflected that if he were planting again today, he would favour mixed native species over pure woodlots of poplar and willow, particularly in gullies and wetland areas where native vegetation creates more valuable contiguous habitat.

Economic returns from marginal land

The farms also demonstrated how trees can improve the economic performance of less productive land. Shane Carroll described erodible hill country as more profitable under trees than livestock production. On one 20ha area of highly vulnerable land, forestry establishment is expected to generate approximately NZ$1 million over a 25-year rotation. Poplar and willow plantings also provide additional commercial outputs including willow poles and poplar timber.

Bill Garland's participation in covenant and sanctuary schemes generated transferable development rights (TDRs), which were sold to fund farm infrastructure including housing for farm labour. These arrangements demonstrated how environmental protection can create indirect financial opportunities within highly regulated landscapes.

However, the economic value of trees was not viewed solely through direct timber returns. Protection of soil resources, reduction in erosion damage and increased resilience of productive land were considered equally important long-term economic outcomes.

Farmer ownership, stewardship and legacy

A notable feature of the New Zealand approach was the high degree of farmer ownership. Unlike systems heavily reliant on subsidy schemes, these farms demonstrated voluntary and often self-funded integration of trees into farming systems. Regional council support, particularly in erosion-prone areas, generally operated as partnership support rather than full grant funding: Brent Mountfort described councils supplying trees or contributing toward fencing costs, while farmers undertook planting and long-term management.

Shane Carroll reflected that because they planted the trees themselves, they had developed a strong emotional connection to them and knew most of them individually. For Bill Garland, planting trees was about "making their mark" and leaving a legacy for future generations. Trees that attracted birds and enhanced the landscape were valued alongside their productive functions. Bill also noted that many people had visited the farm over the years, reinforcing the value of farmers learning from one another through practical demonstration.

From exotic poles toward native restoration

Poplars and willows were widely planted because they rapidly stabilise vulnerable soils, but farmers increasingly recognised their limitations: ageing trees, branch failures and lower biodiversity value. Bill Garland noted that native plantings now create more valuable habitat, and gullies once planted exclusively in willow are increasingly restored in native vegetation to protect wetlands and establish connected ecological corridors.

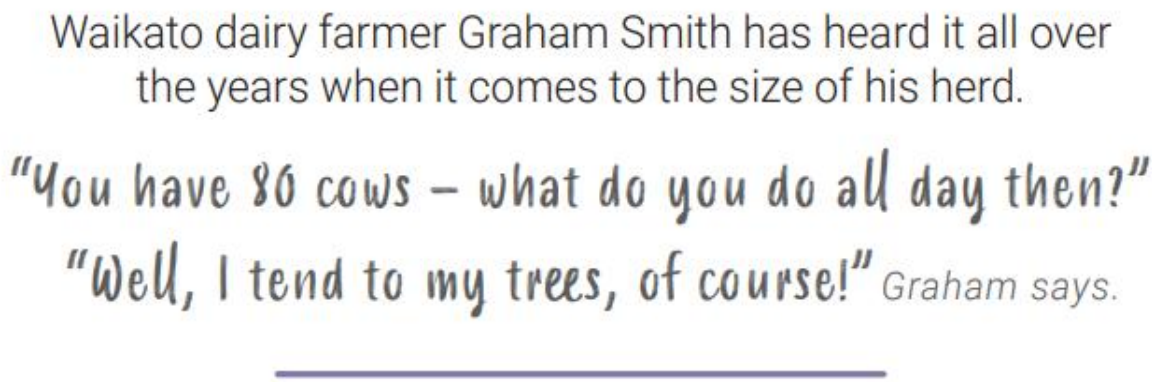
Collectively, the case studies demonstrated that trees are no longer viewed as optional environmental additions to farming systems. Instead, they function as long-term farm infrastructure supporting resilience, productivity, biodiversity and identity within New Zealand hill country farming.

3.2: Silvopasture and Diversified Dairy Production at Miraka Farm, New Zealand

Graham and Tess Smith's Miraka Farm is a unique example of silvopasture integrated within a commercial dairy system in New Zealand. Located near Te Awamutu, the farm combines dairying, Paulownia timber production, carbon farming and tree nurseries within a highly integrated farming enterprise developed over more than 30 years.

The Smiths purchased the farm in 1988 and began planting trees with livestock in the early 1990s, long before agroforestry or silvopasture systems were widely recognised. Graham reflected that at the time many people believed the system would fail because trees were seen as reducing pasture productivity. Instead, through continuous experimentation and adaptation, the farm has evolved into a system designed around diversification, environmental resilience and quality of life.

The 28ha dairy platform supports approximately 80 cows under a once a day milking system, while additional areas are used for forestry and Paulownia production. The farm is subdivided into small paddocks operating under rotational grazing, with cows outdoors year round. Trees are planted on 10ha of flat paddocks nearer his home and milking shed.



Trees integrated within the dairy system

Unlike shelterbelts or forestry blocks separated from livestock production, trees at Miraka are deliberately integrated throughout grazed paddocks.

Having initially planted at approximately 100 trees per hectare, Graham now considers 40-50 trees per hectare to be the optimum balance between tree cover and pasture productivity. Trees are planted in widely spaced rows, allowing sufficient light penetration and machinery access.

A key principle of the system is that the dairy enterprise remains the primary income source, while trees provide additional resilience and supplementary income streams through timber, carbon and nursery sales.

Shade, pasture resilience and animal welfare

While acknowledging that shade can reduce spring pasture growth, Graham believes the system gains significant benefits during summer dry periods. The trees reduce heat stress on both pasture and livestock, helping maintain grass quality and moisture during drought conditions. The trees also provide continuous shelter for livestock within an outdoor dairy system and contribute to overall animal welfare.

Figure 8: Silvopasture with Paulownia, Miraka Farm (March 2025)



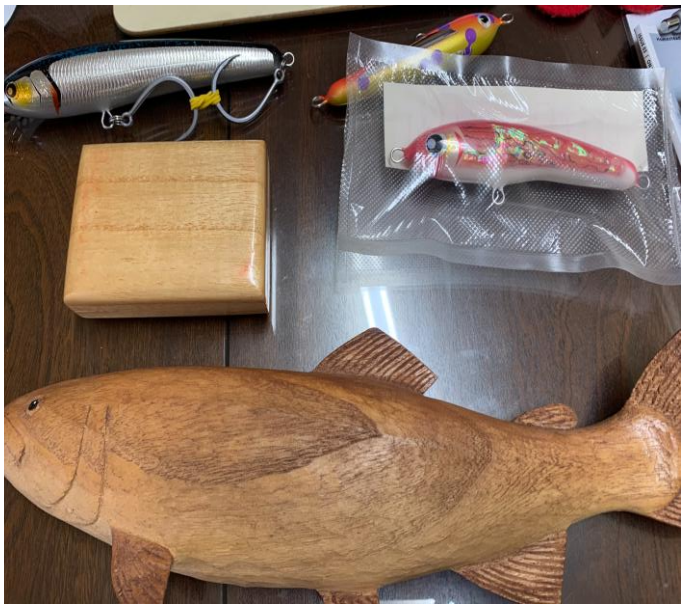
Timber, Fodder and Sapling Production

Paulownia is one of the fastest-growing hardwood trees in the world, capable of growing up to six metres annually and reaching harvestable size within approximately 12 years. The timber is extremely lightweight yet strong due to its long fibres and Graham has marketed it into high-value niche products including surfboards, musical instruments, wood panelling, fishing lures, trinkets, furniture and boat building.

The timber is soundproof and fire resistant. Graham set the price just below native timber but above pine and eucalyptus. He grades all timber himself, removing knots and blemishes to maintain quality. New Zealand grown Paulownia commands almost double the price achieved elsewhere, largely due to the niche market Graham has developed. However, the main factor limiting further expansion is demand.

Figure 9: Paulownia timber products (surfboard, fishing tackle, trinket), milled timber March 25







The deciduous nature of Paulownia also creates additional opportunities within the grazing system. Following frost events, the trees rapidly shed their nutrient rich leaves which are baled and used as supplementary winter feed, up to 10 tonnes of leaf biomass per hectare. On a cold day Paulownia trees will drop all their leaves in one day, they don't release the energy from the leaves back to the tree before they drop them (like most trees) and so the leaves are very palatable. The bales keep for 1 year and he uses them as a winter feed.

An additional enterprise is the on-farm Paulownia nursery, where Graham propagates approximately 500–600 saplings annually using root cuttings from selected mother trees. The nursery utilises unproductive field margins, these saplings supply the on farm planting and are sold through word of mouth and Graham's website.

Figure 10: Paulownia one year old sapling and tree nursery along field margin (March 2025)





Carbon farming and nutrient cycling

The Miraka system also integrates carbon farming through participation in the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS). To qualify, the system must meet ETS requirements of greater than 30% canopy cover, exceed one hectare in area and reach over five metres in height. Graham has begun thinning some earlier plantings down to approximately 50 trees per hectare, as this still meets the ETS threshold while improving grass production beneath the trees. Importantly, carbon payments are made on a per-hectare basis rather than tree density, allowing him to optimise the balance between pasture productivity, timber production and carbon income.

However, Graham views the trees as far more than carbon stores. He emphasised the role of deep rooted trees in intercepting nutrients moving below the pasture root zone. In grazed dairy systems, excess nitrogen from cow urine can exceed what pasture can absorb and may leach into groundwater. Graham believes the deep-rooted Paulownia recycle part of this excess nitrogen into leaf and wood biomass, improving nutrient retention within the farm ecosystem.

A whole-farm ecosystem approach

Rather than viewing trees as separate, Miraka Farm treats them as an integral component of the dairy system. Trees contribute simultaneously to livestock shelter and welfare "*you never see my cows trying to cram into a little shade as there is plenty for them to share*", to pasture resilience, erosion control, carbon sequestration, nutrient recycling, timber production and farm diversification.

While the Miraka model is niche within New Zealand dairying, it demonstrates the significant potential for silvopasture systems to improve resilience, environmental performance and income diversity within pastoral agriculture.

And it works because of Graham's commitment to learning, experimenting, resilience, care for the environment and, most importantly, his willingness to trust his own instincts rather than listen to others.

3.3: Otway Agroforestry Network Australia

During my visit to Victoria's Otway Ranges, I had the opportunity to spend time with Rowan Reid at Bambra Agroforestry Farm and Andrew Stewart at Yan Yan Gurt Farm, both founding members of the Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN). Through visiting their farms and hearing their stories firsthand, I gained insight not only into the practical integration of trees within farming systems, but also the passion, long-term thinking and commitment that helped establish the OAN. Their leadership, along with the wider network, has played a significant role in encouraging hundreds of farmers across Australia to plant trees on their farms through farmer to farmer learning, field days, education and ongoing support.

Bambra Agroforestry Farm: Rethinking Trees on Farms

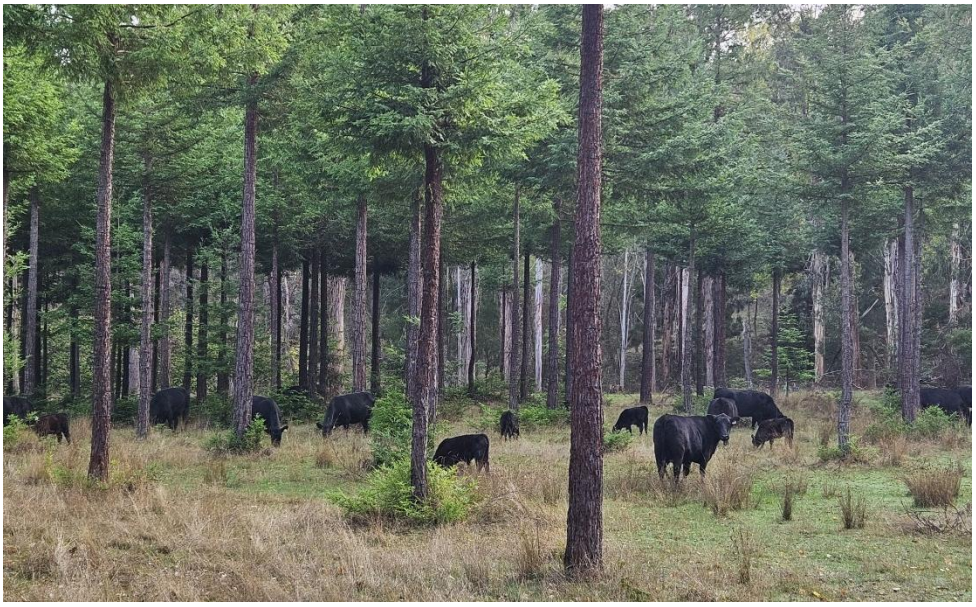
At Bambra Agroforestry Farm, Rowan Reid approaches agroforestry from a different starting point. Rather than asking how more trees can be planted on farms, he asks "*Where would farmers choose to plant trees if given the freedom to decide"*.

For Rowan, agroforestry is not about replacing agriculture with forestry. It is about integrating trees into farming systems in ways that improve the farm, strengthen the landscape and support the aspirations of landholders. He describes agroforestry simply as: "*What farmers do with trees*."

This philosophy stands in contrast to commercial plantation forestry, which many farmers associate with reduced land flexibility, declining property values and externally imposed land-use change. Rowan believes forestry in Victoria lost much of its social licence because it became too focused on short-term commercial production and disconnected from farming communities.

At Bambra, trees are integrated into the farm as long-term productive assets that can support timber production, biodiversity, water quality, shelter and future generations simultaneously. Central to Rowan's philosophy is the belief that agroforestry should be farmer led, practical and integrated within productive agriculture, rather than imposed through top-down policy or driven solely by carbon or plantation forestry models. His role, as he describes it, is to help landowners achieve what they want to achieve, independent of industry or government agendas.

Figure 11: Cattle grazing amongst high pruned redwoods (Photo Credit: Rowan Reid)



Trees where they make sense

A recurring theme throughout Rowan's work is identifying the lowest risk places on farms to plant trees while maintaining agricultural productivity on the best land. He argues that farmers are unlikely to sacrifice their most productive paddocks for trees, but there are many underutilised areas where trees can provide multiple benefits without reducing farm output.

Creek systems and riparian zones were highlighted as obvious examples. These areas are often difficult to manage for grazing, vulnerable to erosion and less profitable for agriculture, yet highly valuable for biodiversity, water quality and timber production. Rowan advocates planting and managing trees within these landscapes not simply for conservation, but as productive systems capable of generating high value timber while stabilising soils, filtering nutrients and improving ecological function.

Figure 12: Creek planting and harvesting (Photo Credit: Rowan Reid)



Importantly, he believes these areas should remain actively managed rather than permanently locked away. Harvesting trees, thinning forests and creating disturbance are, in his view, essential ecological processes that can support both biodiversity and long-term timber production. Rather than seeing creek restoration as land removed from production, Rowan treats it as another productive part of the farm.

Managing Trees as Farm Assets

At Bambra, trees are actively managed in the same way livestock or pasture systems are managed. Bambra focuses on producing high value mature timber through active management, careful spacing, thinning and pruning. The emphasis is not simply on producing more wood, but better wood.

Tree species are managed for specialty timber markets, furniture production and long-term value rather than commodity pulpwood and he estimated that trees had added substantial capital value to the farm. Rowan has recently built a new house using 54 homegrown trees he managed, pruned and milled on Bambra Farm totalling some 30m^3 of timber, storing approximately 30 tonnes of CO_2e.

Figure 13: Rowan Reid new build with homegrown timber (Photo Credit: Rowan Reid)



Trees driven by farmer objectives

Rather than beginning conversations with species selection or planting designs, he encourages farmers to first identify what is limiting their farm system or what they hope to achieve long term.

For some farmers this may be water quality, erosion control or shelter; for others it may be biodiversity, timber, fodder, aesthetics or legacy. Rowan believes that understanding these motivations is essential because management decisions should ultimately reflect the farmer's own priorities and values.

Tree species selection at Bambra Agroforestry Farm

Bambra Agroforestry Farm reveals the diversity of Rowan's approach to tree growing. Rather than relying on a single commercial species, the farm combines native timber trees, specialty hardwoods, fodder systems, foliage crops, and high-value niche species.

Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), the tallest flowering tree in the world, grows alongside blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), river sheoak, redwoods, hoop pine, and black walnut.

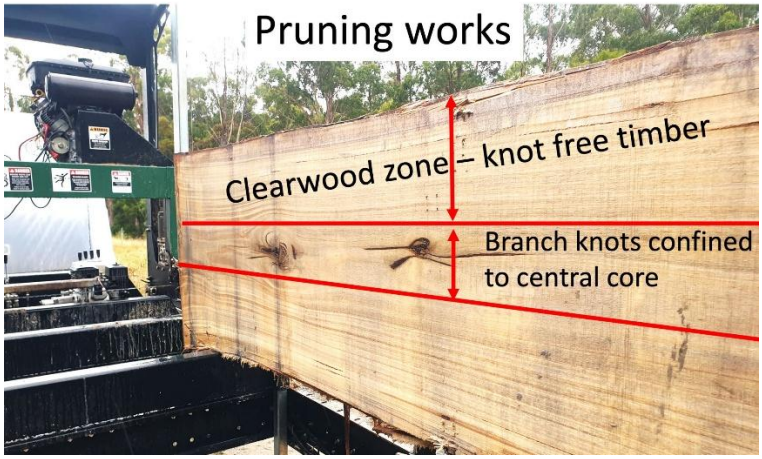
Some species are grown for timber quality, others for biodiversity, shelter, foliage products, or future specialty markets. Black walnut represents one of the highest-value long rotation species on the farm. While the timber itself may take decades to mature, Rowan already generates income through seed sales, producing several thousand dollars annually.

The farm itself functions as a living demonstration site. Rowan arranged sections of the tree plantings like the spokes of a wheel, allowing visitors to directly compare differences in growth rates, canopy structure, understorey vegetation, and tree diameter between species and management systems. Management is heavily focused on timber quality rather than simply tree survival.

"Thinning grows the tree, pruning grows the value," Rowan explains.

Pruning is carried out early and consistently to improve timber form and reduce knot size. Rowan developed his own 8 cm pruning gauge to guide branch removal, balancing timber quality with maintaining enough leaf area for growth.

Figure 14: Pruned timber and pruning gauge designed by Rowan (Photo Credit Rowan Reid)





Tree systems are also integrated with livestock management. In dry periods, some species are pruned specifically to provide fodder for animals.

But timber remains a core enterprise, particularly high value furniture and specialty timber products sourced from Australian native species grown on farms. Rowan mills much of the timber himself using one of the largest bandsaw mills in the region. Following the closure of many native forest sawmills, demand for farm-grown specialty timber has increased significantly.

The property also generates income through tree sleeves, accommodation, farm tours, mentoring, talks, seed sales, foliage products, essential oils, bark mulch, biochar, firewood, and nut and fruit trees. Together, these enterprises show how agroforestry can move beyond a single product model and instead create diversified, resilient farm businesses built around trees.

Trees as culture and legacy

Beyond economics and production, Rowan repeatedly returned to the cultural and personal value of trees within farming landscapes. He described high-quality timber trees as a gift to future generations and reflected that "*it becomes very easy to plant trees when you have grandchildren*" describing his forest of high value cabinet timber trees as "*My gift to my grandchildren*". Underlying his approach is a desire to make farmers excited about trees again, not plantations imposed from outside agriculture, but trees grown for reasons that matter to the landholder themselves. At Bambra, trees are not simply planted for conservation or carbon markets. They are planted because they solve problems, strengthen the farm and help create a landscape that farmers want to care for over generations.

Ultimately, Bambra suggests that the future of agroforestry may depend less on convincing farmers to adopt trees, and more on enabling farmers to grow trees in ways that make sense to them. Agroforestry succeeds when it begins with farmers' aspirations, constraints and values rather than external industry or government agendas. Most importantly, it reconnects tree growing with the people who manage the land every day - and that, perhaps, is where meaningful landscape change begins.

The Australian Master TreeGrower Programme

The Master TreeGrower (MTG) programme is an 8-day, field based, course for landholders interested in planting and managing trees for conservation and profit. It was developed by Dr Rowan Reid at the University of Melbourne and is built on a simple but powerful premise:

"*Fuel your enthusiasm by being involved*"

As a forest scientist, Rowan wanted to give farmers the science and knowledge of trees, growth, and management and see what they would do with it. Central to the MTG programme is a reframing of how farmers think about timber economics. Commercial forestry, Rowan argues, has long followed what he calls the "*McDonald's playbook of forest management*" research and infrastructure built around faster growth, scale, and throughput, producing smaller logs from younger trees with machinery and economics to match.

The MTG teaches a different model. Just as a family restaurant succeeds not by competing with McDonald's but by offering something fundamentally different, farm grown agroforestry can produce quality timber that the plantation system has not invested in. For most farmers, shelter and animal welfare are the primary motivation for planting trees, timber is almost incidental but that timber, grown slowly and well on a working farm, can be something far more valuable than the plantation alternative.

Crucially, the programme encourages farmers to reframe the economics altogether: growing timber is not a cashflow enterprise, it is about building capital, building family wealth, like investing in your house.

Figure 15: Attending the final day of the Master TreeGrower Programme, Victoria (September 2025)



Yan Yan Gurt Farm (*ever flowing water*) - Trees, Water and Long-Term Thinking

Yan Yan Gurt Farm, owned by Andrew Stewart and his family, sits within a landscape that has been steadily transformed through decades of tree planting and ecological restoration. The 232 ha property demonstrates how agroforestry can support agricultural production, biodiversity, water protection and long-term farm resilience.

When the Stewart family began planting trees in the 1950s, there were effectively no trees on the farm. Over generations, the Stewarts gradually integrated shelterbelts, riparian plantings and timber trees across the property. Today, approximately 18% of the farm is under trees, and the farm is now considered carbon neutral as a result.

Andrew emphasises that carbon was never the original motivation for planting. Instead, the family planted trees for multiple reasons; shelter, water protection, biodiversity, timber, livestock welfare and long-term landscape health. Carbon sequestration became a byproduct of restoring ecological function across the farm.

Water, Shelter and Habitat

Shelterbelts follow the contours of the landscape rather than straight fence lines, creating protected niches for livestock and reducing exposure to wind. Dams and drainage lines have been fenced to improve water quality, while riparian areas have been planted to stabilise waterways and protect aquatic systems. Bird surveys on the property have recorded 137 bird species, reflecting the habitat value created through long-term revegetation.

Oaks and Multifunctional Tree Systems

A defining feature of the farm is its diverse use of trees. Andrew has planted oaks across different parts of the property, selecting English oak (*Quercus robur*) for wetter areas and red oak (*Quercus rubra*) for drier country. The oaks are initially planted for fire protection, as unlike eucalypts, oak leaves contain little volatile oil, reducing the likelihood of explosive fire behaviour (recently it took 17 minutes for the fire to move 5km). The trees also help reduce wind speed by the resistance of their leaves and trunks, and ember movement during bushfires, hugely important in Victoria.

The oaks provide multiple additional functions such as livestock shelter and shade, support intermittent rotational grazing beneath their deciduous canopy, and produce high-value timber, acorns and truffles. All the Oaks are pruned for long-term value.

Figure 16: Young oaks planted to reduce wind speed for fire protection (September 2025)



Species Selection and Timber Uses

Other species have been selected for equally practical reasons. Yellow stringybark is valued as the wood resists attack from Lyctus borer (wood destroying insect), making it suitable for building applications. Andrew built a cob house using timber harvested on-site, including yellow stringybark, shining gum and mountain ash, with sheep wool used for insulation. More recently, part of the farm shed has been leased to a natural builder constructing tiny homes using local timber, including timber sourced from the property itself. The farm also includes spotted gums managed for timber and shelter, while banksias are grown for foliage production.

Figure 17: Banksia's grown for foliage, amongst pruned hardwoods for timber (September '25)



Income Streams from the Trees

Some tree systems currently generating income were planted more than 30 years ago with future cashflow in mind. A blue gum plantation established in 1993 was harvested in 2007, with proceeds reinvested into a dedicated family tree fund to support future tree planting and management. Although government support assisted some riparian fencing and revegetation through Landcare programmes, the agroforestry plantings were funded privately by the family.

Products sold from the farm include blue gum pulp logs, hardwood poles and posts, radiata pine Christmas trees, firewood, tree seed, sugar gum logs to a shiitake mushroom grower, cut flowers and foliage. Other timbers have been used for farm building projects.

Income has also been derived from running farm tours for various groups and organisations.

Knowledge Sharing and Legacy

This long-term commitment to tree planting has attracted considerable interest from visitors. More than 6,000 people have toured the farm to learn from the Stewart family's approach to integrating trees into productive agriculture.

Rather than treating trees as separate from farming, the Stewart family has embedded them into the farm system as productive assets that improve water, biodiversity, livestock protection, landscape resilience and long-term economic value.

The result is not simply a farm with trees, but a farming system enhanced by trees.

3.4: Cornwall Case Study: A Bottom-Up, Farmer-Led Approach to Agroforestry Delivery

Forests for Cornwall Woodland Creation Partnership

Forests for Cornwall (FFC) was established as a pilot programme to test and inform future agroforestry policy and subsidy design. Starting with little guidance, the team developed its own methods, tools and delivery model from the ground up.

Unlike traditional schemes designed primarily to meet ministerial targets, FFC adopted a practical, farmer led approach. The starting point was always the individual farmer: what they wanted to achieve, what worked for their business, and how support could be tailored to help deliver that vision.

The results have been significant. In just three years, FFC has delivered over 650 hectares of agroforestry, 60km of hedgerows and more than 100 orchards, completing over 350 projects with minimal promotion. Its success suggests that uptake is driven less by financial incentives alone and more by flexibility, trust and practical support that enables farmers to integrate trees into working farm businesses.

A key factor has been maintaining agricultural land status wherever possible. FFC developed flexible planting density options and project designs that avoid unnecessary woodland classification, giving farmers confidence that they retain future land-use choices, agricultural subsidy eligibility and business flexibility.

Rather than relying on prescriptive national rules, FFC invested in a small team of highly skilled advisors who work directly with farmers, helping design projects, navigate regulation and provide ongoing support. This farmer facing approach has enabled a level of flexibility that centrally administered schemes have struggled to achieve.

FFC's experience also highlights the limitations of highly regulated, top-down approaches. In designated landscapes such as the Lizard Peninsula, success was achieved through early collaboration with regulators and stakeholders, allowing farmers to understand what was possible before investing time in project development, focusing on "*hyper collaboration rather than hyper regulation*". This reduced wasted effort and increased project delivery.

The central lesson is clear: farmers are interested in agroforestry, but they want systems that work for their businesses. Schemes that prioritise flexibility, local expertise and farmer led decision making are far more likely to achieve large scale uptake than those built around rigid rules and centrally defined outcomes.

Three Cornwall Farmers

Farmer Led Design and Local Ownership

Forests for Cornwall (FFC), administered through Cornwall Council using Defra funding enabled farmers to shape systems according to their land, livestock, business model, and long-term ambitions. Farmers repeatedly described the process as collaborative and flexible, with advisors supporting practical delivery rather than directing it. Ben Richards explained that FFC "let the farmer lead the project," with discussions centred around "what trees to use, spacing," and how systems could be "designed around the cows."

This approach contrasted strongly with perceptions of more centrally administered schemes, which several farmers described as rigid or focused primarily on planting targets rather than functioning farm systems. Dave Oates, a UK Nuffield Scholar noted that "FFC support the

whole system, other schemes maybe not so", highlighting the importance of local flexibility and trusted relationships in enabling uptake.

Agroforestry as a Whole-Farm System

Across all three farms, agroforestry was not viewed as tree planting in isolation, but as part of wider farming systems focused on productivity, resilience, livestock health, diversification, and environmental management. At Middle Trelan Farm, Ben Richards integrated fodder trees into a low input dairy and grazing system built around herbal leys and regenerative livestock management. His agroforestry system was designed specifically to provide additional fodder, reduce purchased feed, and potentially increase stocking rates. The primary motivation for planting trees was both dry matter production and medicinal value.

Richards noted that "hybrid willow has been the most successful", highlighting that willow and poplar "will grow more per m² than rye, corn etc." The system used endurance hybrid willow and hybrid poplar of Dutch provenance, specifically bred as fodder trees for livestock consumption. Nutritional analysis showed the willow and poplar contained 22% protein and 10.5 MJ/kg DM (metabolisable energy per kilogram dry matter), reinforcing their value as a forage resource.

Figure 18: Hybrid willow and poplar planted for fodder in 1.5m wide rows, 12m apart (January 2026)



Importantly, the system was designed around livestock movement, grazing infrastructure, and ecological function. Trees were planted in three-row strips, with rows spaced at 0.5m within a 1.5m tree belt, specifically to prevent cattle walking through the rows while still allowing browsing along them. The 12m spacing between tree belts matched the width of the farm's 6m tractor, enabling two machinery passes between rows while also maintaining what Richards believed to be sufficient proximity for mycorrhizal interaction and drainage benefits.

At Rosuick Farm, Dave Oates implemented a much broader range of agroforestry systems, including field corner planting, traditional orchards, shelterbelts, timber alley cropping, fruit tree alley cropping, fruit bush understorey planting, and parkland creation. His approach reflected a strong emphasis on future opportunity and diversification, summarised in his statement that "opportunity is the main driver of everything we do."

Figure 19: Rosuick Farm with tree alleys, parkland and orchards (January 2026)



Dave's systems were closely linked to grazing infrastructure and livestock management. He established earth banked shelters as cattle feeding stations and planted trees on them. These feeding stations became permanent infrastructure that fundamentally altered grazing management by dividing larger fields into smaller paddocks incorporating herbal leys, whole crop systems, and wild bird seed mixtures.

Dave also installed rubbing stones within fields to reduce livestock damage to hedgerows and trees, illustrating how agroforestry systems required complementary livestock management adaptations.

Figure 20: Earthen bank shelters at cattle feeding stations (January 2026)



The objectives behind Dave's planting extended well beyond environmental outcomes. Trees were intended to produce timber, provide shelter and shade, support biodiversity, and create future enterprise opportunities for the next generation through fruit-based businesses. This reflected a broader pattern across the Cornwall case studies, where trees were viewed as productive assets integrated into long-term farm business planning.

At Gwealgues Farm, Chrissie Oates developed a fruit and nut agroforestry system designed around diversification, public engagement, and social enterprise. The project was designed

for visitor experiences, fruit picking, educational access, the “Green Barn,” and future “Care Farming” activities focused on getting people onto the land. Trees functioned not only as productive assets but also as a means of connecting farming, tourism, education, and wellbeing.

Figure 21: Agroforestry planting plan for Gwealgues Farm

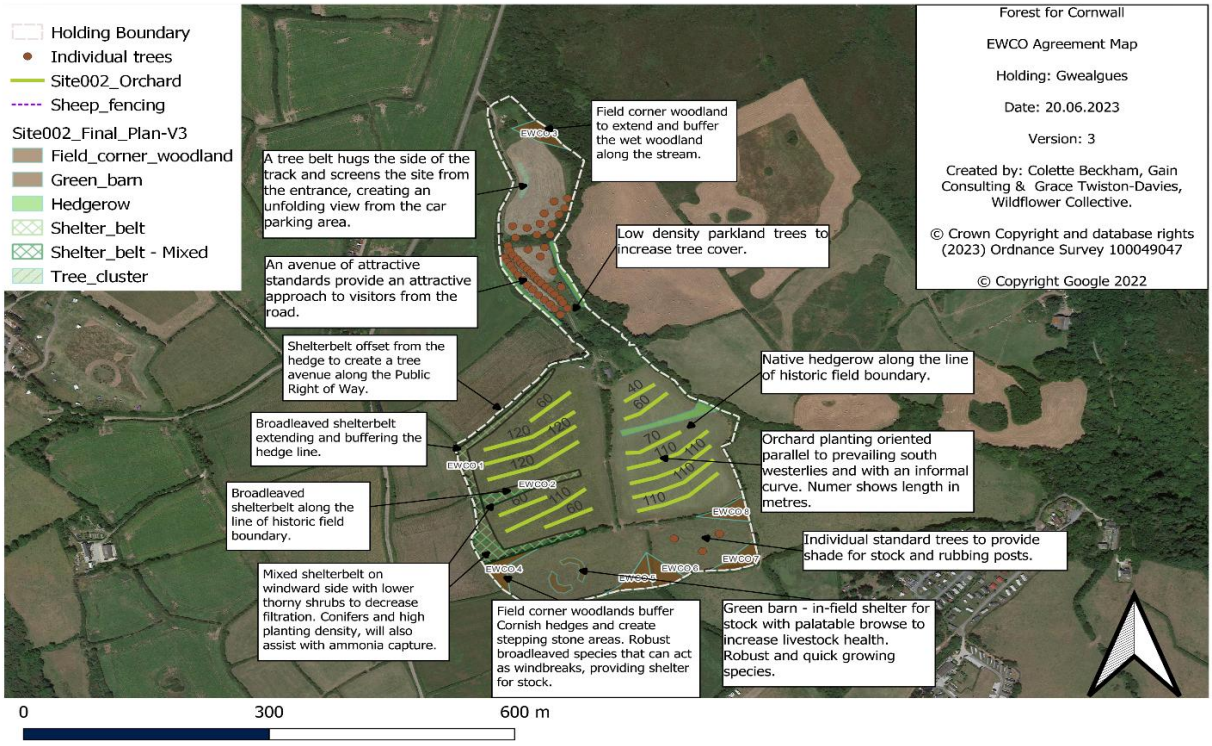


Figure 22: Gwealgues Farm shelterbelt and orchard planting (January 2026)



Financial Support as a Catalyst for Innovation

All three farms highlighted that agroforestry implementation would not have happened without financial support, despite long-standing interest in tree integration. Ben Richards acknowledged that he “wouldn’t have been able to do it if wasn’t paid to do it,” despite having considered agroforestry for over a decade. Chrissie Oates similarly noted that the huge establishment cost would have been impossible without grant assistance.

However, the Cornwall experience also demonstrated how funding structures can shape farmer decisions. Dave Oates explained that the organic top fruit payment within Countryside Stewardship became the primary driver for planting apple trees within grazing and arable systems. While his original ambition focused on timber production, habitat creation, and landscape character, the structure of available payments “shifted” the planting design towards orchard systems because they attracted higher support payments. This highlighted how policy mechanisms can significantly influence the form agroforestry adoption takes on farms.

Nevertheless, farmers consistently praised the flexibility and practicality of FFC delivery. Funding covered fencing, tree guards, mulch, infrastructure, advisory support, and maintenance in ways that reduced the risks associated with long-term experimentation and establishment.

Stewardship, Demonstration, and Long-Term Success

A recurring theme across the Cornwall projects was that successful agroforestry depends on long-term stewardship and farmer ownership rather than simply achieving planting targets. Chrissie Oates argued that many tree planting projects fail because trees are “stuck in the ground” without future ownership, management, or stewardship. In contrast, she described the Cornwall projects as successful because farmers were directly invested in designing and managing systems that suited their land and future business ambitions.

The resulting systems were highly diverse; from tree fodder silvopasture and timber alley cropping to orchards, shelterbelts and green barns with a common emphasis on productivity, resilience, stewardship, and farmer ownership.

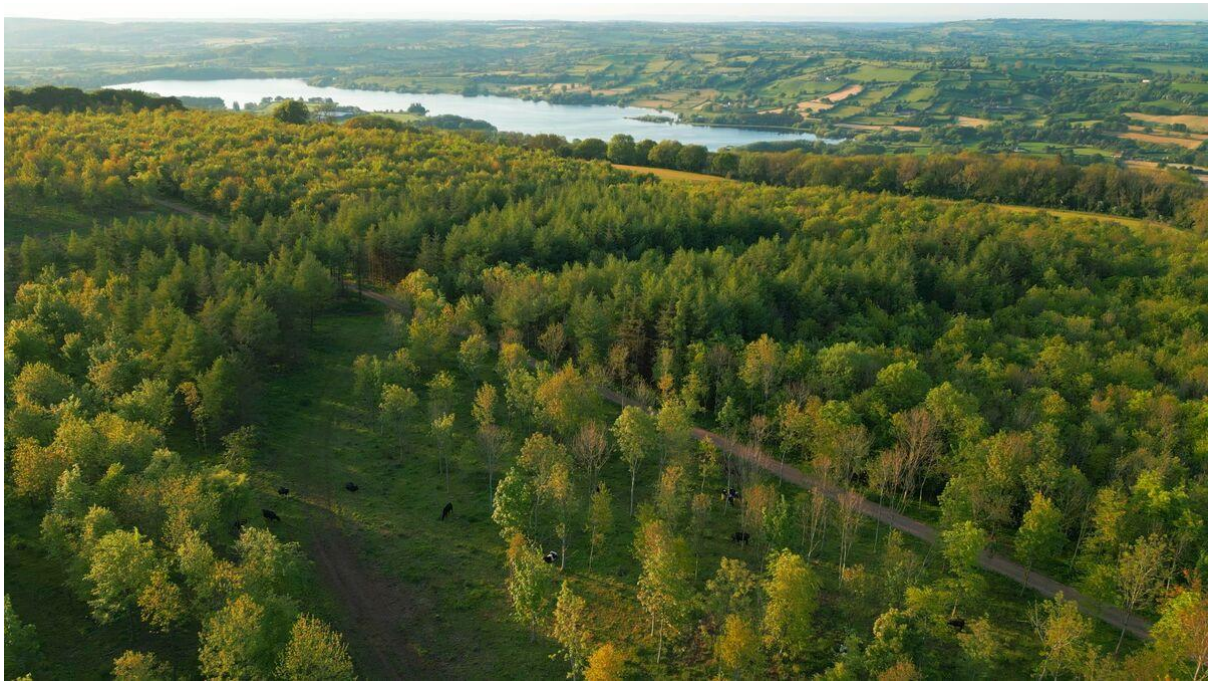
3.5: Yeo Valley Woodland Pasture: Trees, Food and Healthy Ecosystems

Yeo Valley's interest in woodland pasture emerged from an opportunity when a 1000-acre farm came up for sale adjacent to their existing farm. With this farm came 500 acres of mixed broadleaf forestry that was established in 2001 on a former dairy farm. Following widespread ash dieback, many affected trees were removed, creating gaps in the woodland canopy that were quickly colonised by grasses, brambles and other vegetation. This prompted Yeo Valley to reconsider how the woodland could be managed, exploring whether it could simultaneously support biodiversity, improve soil health and contribute to food production. Rather than viewing the woodland as a separate land use, they saw an opportunity to integrate livestock and trees into a more productive and resilient farming system.

At the heart of the approach is the belief that integrated systems create greater value than individual components operating separately. Woodland pasture is viewed as an example of "1 + 1 = 8" where trees and livestock together deliver multiple benefits beyond their individual contributions. These include food production, animal welfare, shade and shelter, biodiversity, water management, carbon storage, future timber production and overall farm resilience. Woodland pasture is seen as a form of land sharing, combining the objectives of agriculture and forestry within the same landscape.

Following the thinning and removal of diseased ash, the woodland was divided into a network of 32 paddocks, each around 16 acres in size, following adaptive multi-paddock grazing principles. Cattle are moved frequently, typically every 12–48 hours, allowing grazing pressure to be adjusted according to vegetation growth and management objectives. The system is designed not only to produce beef, but also to influence ecological succession, managing species such as bramble and dock while maintaining habitat diversity.

Figure 23: Yeo Valley woodland pasture (Photo Credit - Yeo Valley)



A key observation has been the role livestock can play in restoring ecosystem function. Yeo Valley believes that woodland soils are not automatically healthy simply because trees are present. In parts of the woodland, indicators such as earthworm abundance and biological

activity were lower than expected. The introduction of livestock is intended to improve nutrient cycling and soil biology through grazing, trampling and dung deposition. The team observed a strong response from the soil seed bank following the introduction of cattle, alongside increased vegetation diversity through the establishment of herbal leys and perennial species.

Several practical examples have reinforced this systems approach. Dung beetle populations have thrived because livestock grazing these areas are managed without routine ivermectin treatments, helping support nutrient cycling and soil health. Trials comparing shade tolerant grass species with diverse herbal ley mixtures found that more diverse mixtures established more successfully and were better able to compete under woodland conditions. Similarly, grazing management has been used as a tool to control brambles and docks, reducing reliance on mechanical or chemical interventions.

Unlike many woodland pasture initiatives, Yeo Valley's ambition is not to create a research trial but to develop a commercially viable model at scale. The current project covers around 400 acres, with a long-term ambition to expand woodland pasture to 1,000 acres over the next decade. The business sees this as an opportunity to create a practical blueprint that other farmers can adopt, demonstrating how trees, livestock and food production can coexist within a productive farming system.

While early results are encouraging, significant questions remain around long-term management. The focus is increasingly shifting from establishment to regeneration: maintaining tree cover, managing natural succession, determining sustainable stocking rates and understanding how new woodland pasture can be created within existing permanent pasture without sacrificing grazing productivity.

Figure 24: Water troughs installed in the woodland pasture (January 2026)



What about the trees?

An important consideration for the future of the system is that woodland pasture must work for both livestock and trees. The woodland was originally established for timber production and as increased biodiversity as the main objectives, and these functions need to be maintained alongside livestock grazing.

This raises important questions for Yeo Valley around tree health, regeneration and future woodland structure. Yeo Valley has removed only ash affected by dieback, together with trees that were dying, diseased or damaged, retaining the wider woodland resource. However, the long-term success of the system will depend on how well the remaining trees respond to grazing, whether natural regeneration can be maintained, and how a diverse woodland structure develops over time. Observations of livestock behaviour, browsing pressure and bark damage will be important, particularly where there is uncertainty about whether impacts are caused by livestock, grey squirrels or other factors.

Ultimately, the trees must be viewed not only as a source of shade and shelter for livestock, but as a productive asset in their own right, contributing biodiversity, timber, carbon storage and long-term resilience to the farming system.

Could this be introduced into existing woodlands in Ireland?

The project also raises an important question for woodland management more broadly. Is there an opportunity to introduce carefully managed livestock into young mixed broadleaf woodlands, for example those established over the last 20–30 years, to enhance their development and resilience? Conventional forestry practice has generally sought to exclude grazing animals from young woodlands to protect trees from browsing and physical damage. However, woodland pasture systems suggest that, under controlled conditions, livestock may also provide benefits through vegetation management, nutrient cycling and the creation of greater structural diversity.

The answer is unlikely to be straightforward. Excessive grazing could damage regeneration, alter species composition and undermine woodland objectives. Equally, carefully managed grazing may help create more dynamic and resilient woodland ecosystems while maintaining opportunities for timber production, biodiversity and food production. Yeo Valley's experience raises the possibility that livestock could become a management tool within certain woodland types, but further observation will be needed to understand the long-term impacts on tree health, regeneration, woodland structure and timber quality.

One concern is that animals would be introduced into woodlands without the management traditions that have shaped wood-pasture landscapes elsewhere in Europe. In Ireland, there is little living culture of managing livestock in wooded environments, raising fears that unmanaged grazing could degrade rather than enhance woodland habitats. Ultimately, the question may not be whether livestock belong in woodlands, but under what conditions they can be integrated in a way that benefits both the woodland and the wider farming system.

Woodland Pasture for the Twenty-First Century

The Yeo Valley project also raises a broader question about the future design of agroforestry systems. Rather than introducing grazing into existing woodlands, should we be creating new woodland pasture systems from the outset?

Silvopasture and woodland pasture both combine trees and grazing animals, but they are founded on different objectives. Silvopasture is an intentionally managed agroforestry system designed to integrate trees, forage and livestock for productive benefit (Center for Agroforestry,

2024). Woodland pasture, by contrast, is generally understood as a habitat mosaic in which trees, scrub, open ground and grazing animals interact as part of a functioning ecological system (Woodland Trust, 2012).

Contemporary silvopasture guidance has largely evolved within productive agricultural landscapes. As a result, many designs prioritise operational efficiency, often incorporating regular tree spacing, linear planting patterns, alley systems and layouts that facilitate machinery access and livestock management. These approaches have clear advantages on productive farmland, where agricultural output remains the primary objective.

Woodland pasture suggests a different design philosophy. Rather than viewing trees as a component of the grazing enterprise, wood pasture treats trees, livestock, biodiversity, soils and ecological processes as co-equal elements of the landscape.

Instead of regular rows and uniform spacing, woodland pasture might be structured around irregular tree groups, scattered trees, rounded copses, open glades, transitional scrub zones and areas of natural regeneration. The objective would not simply be to optimise livestock production, but to create a diverse and resilient landscape capable of delivering multiple ecological and productive functions simultaneously.

In effect, the challenge is not how to add trees to pasture, but how to create landscapes that function as woodland pasture from the outset.

Such an approach may be particularly relevant in upland livestock systems, on marginal land, and in landscapes where habitat creation, biodiversity recovery and ecosystem resilience are considered as important as agricultural production. As Ireland implements the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, there may be a growing need for land-use systems capable of combining native woodland creation with the continued management of High Nature Value farmland, species-rich grasslands and other semi-natural habitats of conservation importance. Well-designed woodland pasture could offer one means of integrating these objectives within the same landscape.

3.6: Policy Must Enable, Not Complicate: Insights from Stephen Briggs

Stephen Briggs, Nuffield Scholar and one of the UK's most experienced agroforestry practitioners and policy advocates, emphasised that the greatest barriers to agroforestry adoption are rarely technical. Rather, they relate to policy design, economics, knowledge transfer, and institutional structures.

A key lesson from his experience was the importance of long-term policy stability. Farmers are unlikely to invest in systems that may take decades to realise their full value if support mechanisms change every few years. Briggs argued that governments often send mixed signals, encouraging tree planting and agroforestry while simultaneously changing schemes, funding structures, or eligibility criteria. For agroforestry to scale, farmers must have confidence that support will remain in place over the lifespan of the system.

This raises an important question for Irish agroforesters: to what extent are they confident that participation in agroforestry will not compromise their eligibility for future agri-environmental or CAP support schemes?

Briggs identified the historic division between agriculture and forestry as one of the biggest barriers to agroforestry adoption across Europe. Agroforestry systems often fall between two policy "silos", creating uncertainty around land classification, eligibility for payments, and future

management options. He argued that maintaining agroforestry as agricultural land, provided productive farming continues, is critical to farmer confidence and scheme uptake.

Briggs repeatedly returned to the idea that agroforestry will only be widely adopted if it improves farm viability. He was critical of support programmes that are "designed for schemes, not for farms", where administrative requirements can make funding difficult to access despite strong policy ambitions. In his view, farmers should adopt agroforestry because it strengthens their business, not because they are chasing a grant.

Knowledge, skills and markets are as important as grants

According to Briggs, many farmers are not deterred by planting trees; they are deterred by uncertainty around managing them and making money from them. Questions such as how to manage trees, where to sell timber and what returns can be expected remain largely unanswered. He argued that investment in advisory services, demonstration farms and market development may be just as important as establishment grants.

One of the more thought-provoking ideas raised by Briggs was that current agricultural policy is built around the assumption that a single farmer is responsible for all activities and outcomes on a holding. Briggs questioned whether this model remains appropriate if society increasingly expects farmland to deliver multiple functions simultaneously, including food production, biodiversity enhancement, carbon sequestration, water quality protection and recreation. He argued that achieving these outcomes may require a wider range of skills, labour and capital than can reasonably be expected from one individual or farm business.

Rather than concentrating responsibility in a single enterprise, Briggs suggested that future land-use models could accommodate multiple actors operating on the same land, with different individuals or businesses specialising in livestock, trees, ecological management, tourism or other enterprises.

3.7 Wakelyns: Agroforestry as a Whole-Farm System

One of the strongest lessons from Wakelyns was that successful agroforestry should not be viewed simply as integrating trees into a farming system. Rather, the trees themselves become additional enterprises that create opportunities for multiple income streams.

David Wolfe, co-owner of Wakelyns, repeatedly emphasised that "the trees are another crop" rather than a conservation feature.

At Wakelyns, different tree components generated different outputs:

- Hazel coppice produced fencing stakes
- Short rotation coppice supplied biomass fuel
- Apple trees supplied a juice enterprise
- Timber trees provided future high-value products
- Tree shelter enabled livestock integration
- Trees supplied materials for horticultural uses

Figure 25: David Wolfe of Wakelyns with recently harvested hazel stakes, for which high demand was created by a government grant scheme (January 2026)



Wakelyns advocates that not every enterprise needs to be owned or managed by the farmer. Sheep grazing, vegetable production and apple processing were all undertaken by independent businesses operating within the farm system. David described this as "enterprise stacking". This echoed a point made by Briggs, who questioned whether a single farmer can realistically deliver all the functions increasingly expected of modern farmland, suggesting instead that multiple enterprises and skillsets may need to coexist within the same farming system.

For Ireland, where farm succession, labour availability and profitability are concerns, this model offers an interesting alternative approach to diversification. Agroforestry may allow farmers not only to diversify outputs, but also to diversify who participates in delivering them.

Another important lesson from Wakelyns was that agroforestry systems evolve. The farm does not look exactly as originally intended: some timber trees were not managed intensively enough in their early years, certain crops proved better suited to specific alleys than others, and livestock integration was introduced years after establishment. This is particularly relevant for Irish farmers who may be reluctant to commit to a design they believe must be perfect from the outset. Agroforestry should be understood as a system that can adapt over decades.

Perhaps the strongest impression from Wakelyns was the long-term perspective underpinning decision making. Some tree products are harvested on a seven-year cycle, while others may take decades to realise their value. Yet the system continues to deliver annual returns through crops, grazing, fruit, biomass, events and other enterprises. Throughout the farm, agroforestry was viewed not as a short-term project, but as a system that would continue evolving and delivering value over generations.

Figure 26: Wakelyns short rotation coppice for the farm’s biomass boiler (January 2026)



Conclusion

The aim of this Nuffield study was to learn from more established agroforestry systems internationally, understand why farmers adopt trees and agroforestry on their farms, and explore how agroforestry is implemented and supported in different countries. Through this process, I sought to identify what works well, the challenges that arise, and the lessons that could be applied in Ireland to increase the uptake of agroforestry and ultimately more trees on farms. The overarching goal was to support the development of landscapes that work for farmers, food production, nature, and future generations. Based on the research, interviews, farm visits, and international study tour undertaken as part of this scholarship, several key conclusions emerged:

Agroforestry is not a new concept, but a rediscovery of traditional land management. Across Ireland and internationally, trees have long been integrated within productive farming systems, delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits alongside food production.

Farmers are willing to plant trees when they are supported to do so. Financial incentives, practical guidance, and peer-to-peer learning all play an important role in building confidence and encouraging adoption.

Farmers want trees on their farms, but they want flexibility in how they are established and managed. Concerns around land designation, future land use, and rigid scheme requirements remain significant barriers to uptake.

There is no single agroforestry model that suits every farm. A range of options, including silvopasture, riparian planting, groups, shelterbelts, hedgerows, woodland pasture is needed to reflect the diversity of Irish farming systems.

Successful agroforestry is fundamentally farmer centred. The most effective systems observed were those designed around the needs and objectives of the farm business rather than being driven solely by policy or grant requirements.

Farmers are most likely to adopt trees where they address a practical need. Shelter, shade, erosion control, water protection, biodiversity enhancement, and farm diversification were common drivers of tree integration across the farms and countries visited.

Recent improvements to Ireland's agroforestry scheme demonstrate the importance of farmer-centred policy design. Enhanced financial support, some added flexibility (such as permitting electric fencing) and compatibility with other farm schemes have made agroforestry a more attractive option for farmers and contributed to increased uptake.

Recommendations

From Evidence to Action: How Findings Informed Recommendations

Issue Identified	Evidence from Study	Recommended Action
Forest land designation is the dominant barrier to uptake.	Repeatedly identified by stakeholders as a regulatory and psychological barrier.	Establish an Agroforestry Land Status within CAP.
Farmers want flexibility and varying levels of commitment.	Stakeholders raised concerns about tree stocking density and favoured options in agroforestry systems.	Introduce a Tiered Agroforestry Framework.
Existing agroforestry options do not reflect preferred tree layouts.	Farmers favoured less imposed designs and trees for environmental and landscape benefits.	Develop a Woodland Pasture Option.
Agroforestry systems provide limited direct livestock benefits.	Stakeholders highlighted concerns over loss of productive pasture and interest in productive tree systems.	Develop a Tree Fodder Option.
Lack of financial information creates uncertainty.	Stakeholders described agroforestry as a "leap of faith".	Develop an Agroforestry Financial Decision Support Tool.
Agroforestry sits outside mainstream farm advisory systems.	Agricultural advisors were identified as influential actors in farm decision-making.	Engage Agricultural Advisors.
Knowledge gaps remain despite available information.	Survey findings and previous research identified low levels of agroforestry knowledge.	Establish an Irish Master TreeGrower Programme.
Trees are often under-managed.	Stakeholders highlighted importance of timber quality and tree stewardship.	Focus on Silviculture.
Little research has examined where farmers actually want trees.	Strong preference for tree placement linked to farm function, infrastructure and management.	Understand Where Farmers Want Trees?
Public funding alone may not deliver the scale of adoption required.	Stakeholders identified opportunities for wider participation.	Diversify Funding Mechanisms for Agroforestry.

Recommendations are presented in priority order and reflect a logical pathway for increasing agroforestry adoption.

Remove Structural Barriers:

1: Establish an Agroforestry Land Status within CAP

A dedicated agroforestry land status should be established within CAP for lower density agroforestry systems where agricultural production remains the primary land use, while trees are recognised as a permanent and productive component of the farming system. This would allow farmers to integrate trees without automatically triggering forest land designation, addressing one of the most significant barriers to uptake identified by stakeholders.

Agroforestry could continue to be delivered through existing Forest Service structures and supported through Exchequer funded establishment and maintenance payments. This would allow support to extend beyond the five-year CAP programme period, reflecting the longer establishment timeframe associated with agroforestry systems.

An agroforestry land status should:

- Maintain eligibility for direct payments and agri-environment schemes
- Recognise agricultural production as the primary land use
- Recognise trees as a permanent and productive component of the farming system
- Support tree integration across a wider range of farming systems
- Allow greater flexibility for future land-use decisions
- Reduce the psychological and regulatory barriers associated with forest designation

2: Introduce a Tiered Agroforestry Framework

A tiered agroforestry framework should be developed to accommodate varying levels of tree integration and land use change. Current Irish agroforestry support begins at 400 trees per hectare, whereas internationally, agroforestry systems are established and supported across a much wider range of tree densities. A tiered approach would provide greater flexibility, allowing support to increase in line with tree density, management commitment and the degree of permanent land use change associated with each tier.

- **Tier 1: Farm Tree Integration:** Lower-density agroforestry focused on integrating trees in strategic locations such as field boundaries, riparian margins, shelterbelts, fruit and nut trees, tree fodder and other areas where they provide a direct benefit to the farm, supported under an agroforestry land status.
- **Tier 2: Integrated Agroforestry Systems:** Low to moderate density silvopastoral and silvoarable systems where trees are deliberately integrated throughout productive fields and where agricultural production remains the primary land use, supported under an agroforestry land status.
- **Tier 3: Intensive Agroforestry Systems:** Higher density systems involving more permanent land-use change, supported through existing forestry mechanisms and Forestry Eligible Land provisions.

Expand Agroforestry Options

3: Develop a Woodland Pasture Option

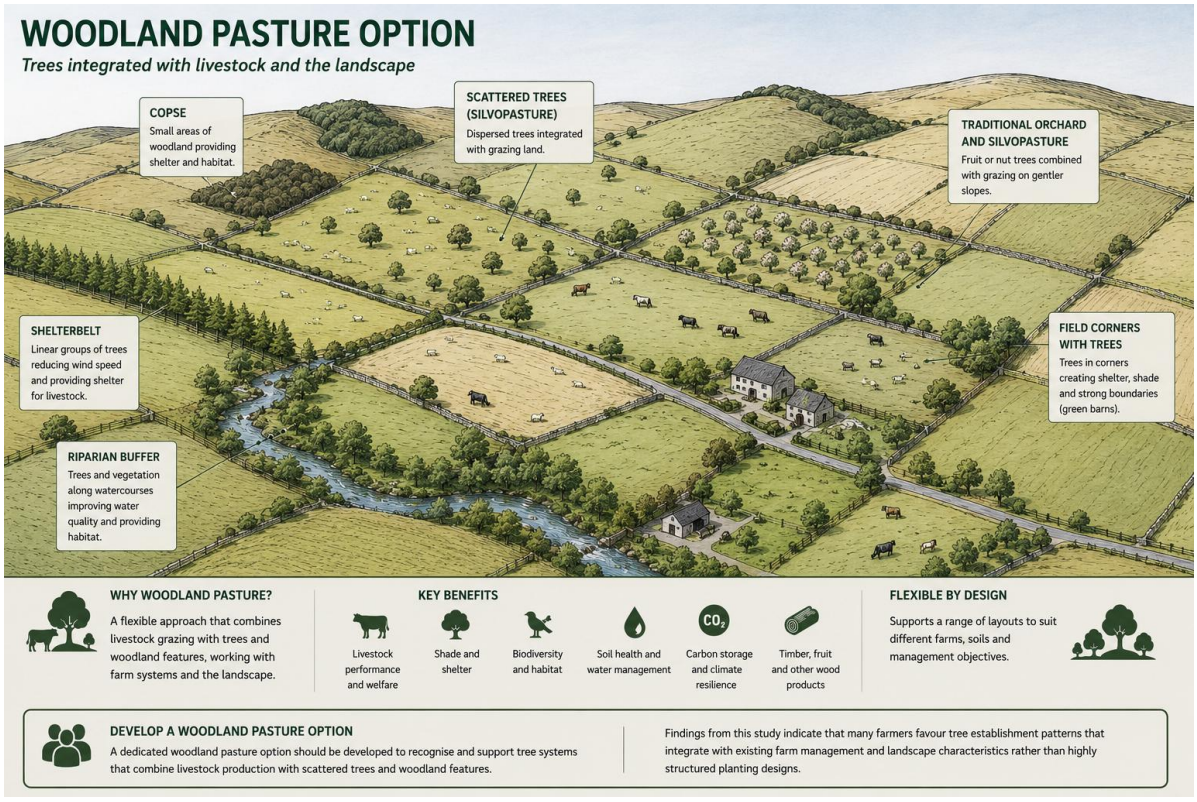
A dedicated woodland pasture option should be developed to recognise and support tree systems that combine livestock production with scattered trees and woodland features.

Findings from this study indicate that many farmers favour tree establishment patterns that integrate with existing farm management and landscape characteristics rather than highly structured planting designs. Woodland pasture systems can accommodate dispersed trees, irregular clusters, small copses, orchards, field corners and contour layouts while maintaining agricultural production and grazing activity.

Such systems may be particularly suited to upland and extensively managed grazing systems, where conventional agroforestry models may be less practical, but could also be applied across a range of suitable agricultural landscapes. Tree density per hectare can be aligned to agroforestry tiers, depending on the level of risk a landowner is willing to accept regarding land-use status and access to financial support. Such an option could:

- Support the establishment and restoration of woodland pasture systems.
- Allow greater flexibility in tree layout and design.
- Facilitate tree integration in marginal, riparian and less productive areas of farms.
- Enhance biodiversity, habitat connectivity and landscape heterogeneity.
- Improve livestock shelter and climate resilience.
- Increase agroforestry uptake among farmers seeking alternatives to more intensive agroforestry systems.

Figure 27: Concept design of a woodland pasture option



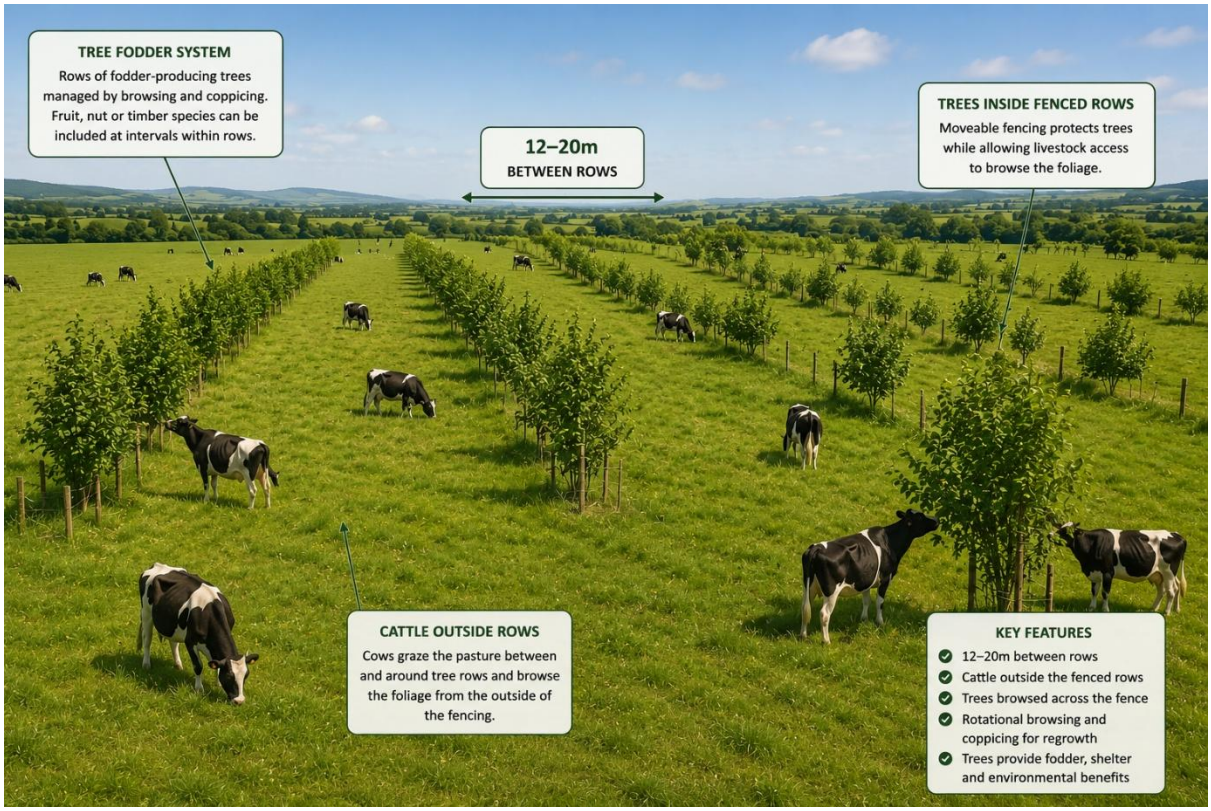
4: Develop a Tree Fodder Option

A dedicated tree fodder option should be developed to support the integration of fodder-producing trees within grazing systems. Unlike existing agroforestry measures, which are primarily focused on timber, tree fodder systems would provide a direct productive benefit through livestock feed.

The option should support the establishment of tree fodder areas within grazing systems, including rotational browsing and coppice management approaches that allow trees to recover between grazing periods. Fruit, nut or timber species could be established at intervals within tree fodder rows, allowing both short-term forage production and longer-term productive outputs from the same area. Wider row spacing and lower tree densities make tree fodder systems well suited to the proposed Agroforestry Land Status, where agriculture remains the primary land use and trees are recognised as a permanent productive feature of the farming system.

Tree fodder systems may also be particularly suited to wetter areas of farms where appropriate tree species can improve ground conditions while continuing to provide forage, shelter and wider environmental benefits. Such an option would increase feed resilience, diversify farm production and broaden the range of agroforestry systems available to farmers.

Figure 28: Concept design of a tree fodder option



Support Farmer Adoption:

5: Develop an Agroforestry Financial Decision Support Tool

Financial models and decision-support tools should be developed to assess costs, returns and long-term viability of agroforestry systems under Irish conditions. Stakeholders identified a lack of economic information as a significant barrier to adoption, creating uncertainty regarding profitability beyond the current support period. Farm level tools and budgets would enable farmers to evaluate agroforestry as a business decision based on farm needs and long-term objectives, rather than solely as a grant-supported activity, or for many, “a leap of faith”.

6: Engage Agricultural Advisors

While agroforestry is delivered through forestry structures, greater engagement with agricultural advisors is needed. Agricultural advisors are often trusted sources of information and can play an important role in helping farmers identify where trees can contribute to farm productivity, resilience and environmental performance. At present, agroforestry planning often sits separately from wider farm planning.

This could include joint training and demonstration events for forestry and agricultural advisors, together with greater integration of agroforestry into existing agricultural advisory programmes such as ACRES, nutrient management planning, whole-farm planning and dairy co-operative sustainability initiatives. Supporting advisor engagement would help bridge this gap and normalise agroforestry as a routine farm management option.

7: Establish an Irish MasterTree Grower Programme

An Irish Master TreeGrower Programme should be developed to build practical skills and long-term capacity in agroforestry design and tree management. Despite availability of information and demonstration events, this study and previous research have identified knowledge gaps and limited interaction between farmers, advisors and other agroforestry actors.

The programme should move beyond traditional information transfer approaches and provide a structured learning pathway combining classroom instruction, field visits, practical exercises and peer-to-peer learning. Building on the familiar Knowledge Transfer model, the programme would provide a more intensive learning experience, equipping participants with the skills and confidence to assess farm opportunities, design agroforestry systems aligned with farm objectives, and manage trees as productive long-term assets.

The programme should culminate in a practical project or farm plan, enabling participants to apply their learning and develop an agroforestry system tailored to their own farm objectives.

Strengthen Long-Term Delivery:

8: Focus on Silviculture

While agroforestry discussions often focus on farm outputs such as meat, milk, fruit, nuts, animal welfare etc., less attention is given to silviculture and the long-term management of trees. Trees are one of the most valuable and enduring components of agroforestry systems, yet their long-term role, value and function are often overlooked.

Where timber production is an objective (as is the case under the Afforestation Grant Scheme under which FT8 agroforestry is funded), formative pruning and stem selection are an investment in future timber quality and value. Agroforestry farmers are often more closely connected to individual trees than conventional forestry owners, viewing them as long-term

farm assets. This creates an opportunity to prioritise timber quality over volume and maximise the future value of their trees.

9: Understand Where Farmers Want Trees

Further research should examine where farmers would prefer to integrate trees within their farm landscapes and how these preferences vary across farming systems. While considerable research has examined farmer attitudes towards forestry, relatively little attention has been given to where farmers believe trees are most appropriate on their farms.

Understanding where farmers want to plant trees may reveal opportunities for agroforestry that are currently overlooked by existing schemes and could unlock substantially greater uptake.

10: Diversify Funding Mechanisms for Agroforestry

Alternative funding mechanisms should be explored to support agroforestry, woodland pasture, tree fodder and other productive tree-based farming systems where they deliver wider environmental, climate and supply chain benefits.

Agricultural co-operatives such as dairy co-ops may be particularly well placed to support agroforestry adoption among their members as part of wider sustainability programmes. Additional opportunities may emerge through corporate sustainability initiatives, catchment management programmes and developing carbon farming frameworks. Diversifying funding sources could reduce pressure on public funding while supporting a wider range of agroforestry systems and farm objectives.

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Plain English Compendium Summary

Project Title:	Unlocking Agroforestry in Ireland: Policy and Practice
Scholar:	Marina Conway
Address:	Bartra, Enniscrone, Co Sligo, Ireland
Phone:	+353 872234096
Email:	marinacon@yahoo.co.uk
Objectives	The objectives of this study were to: • Understand the barriers to agroforestry uptake in Ireland • Look to international examples for incorporating agroforestry systems on farms • Develop policy recommendations to support and increase agroforestry uptake in Ireland
Background	Ireland needs more trees on farms, but many farmers are reluctant to plant. Too often they feel they must choose between farming and forestry, and that once land is planted the decision can never be undone. Agroforestry offers a different path: trees and farming working together on the same land. Yet uptake in Ireland remains low. The schemes are seen as rigid, the long-term returns are unclear, and there are few Irish examples to learn from. I undertook this study to understand what makes farmers want to plant trees, and how policy and practice can make agroforestry work for Irish farms.
Research	The research explored how agroforestry is implemented and supported internationally, through farm visits and meetings with farmers, practitioners and policymakers both at home and abroad. A survey of Irish landowners, foresters and Department inspectors captured experiences of the Irish agroforestry scheme. The aim was to identify lessons from more established systems and apply these insights to increase the uptake of agroforestry in Ireland.
Outcomes	• Agroforestry is not new. Trees have long been part of productive farming, both in Ireland and abroad. • Farmers will plant trees when they are supported. Money, practical advice and learning from farmers build confidence. • Farmers want flexibility. Forest land designation, uncertainty about future land use and rigid scheme rules hold them back. • One size does not fit all. Irish farms need a range of options, such as tree and grazing systems, riverside planting, shelterbelts, hedgerows and wood pasture. • The best systems are farmer-led. They are designed around the needs of the farm, not around grant rules. • Trees are planted where they solve a problem: shelter, shade, erosion, water protection, nature and new income.

Implications	• Recent scheme changes are working. Better payments, some extra flexibility and stacking alongside other farm schemes have increased uptake. • Remove the barriers. Create a separate agroforestry land status so farmland with trees stays farmland and keeps its farm payments. Offer different levels of commitment, so farmers can start small with a few trees or go further. • Expand options. Support wood pasture, with trees scattered or grouped across grazing land, and tree fodder, where trees are grown as feed for livestock. • Support farmer adoption. Provide simple tools to show the costs and returns. Bring farm advisors on board. Set up a hands-on training programme for farmers who want to grow and manage trees. • Strengthen long-term delivery. Put more focus on managing trees well so they gain value over time. Find out where farmers want trees on their farms. Look beyond government grants to other funding, such as co-ops, businesses and environmental schemes.