

Press release

FARMERS TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT LEADING ENERGY CROP



North East Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) members got an insight into one of the fuels of the future on a visit to a Tees Valley farm recently.

The farmers heard about the environmental and economic benefits of wood as a fuel on a visit to Eastfields Farm at Nunthorpe, near Middlesbrough.

Owners Mike and Rita Corrigan have farmed at Eastfields for eight years and have turned over around a third of their 230- acre mixed farm to the 'energy crop' short rotation coppice (SRC). The fast growing form of willow is being used to generate electricity at the Sembcorp Biomass Power Station on the Wilton International site six miles away.

The first harvest of SRC, planted in three 25-acre sections over consecutive years, was carried out in January. The wood chip is currently stacked and drying ready to transport to Wilton in its dried form. It is anticipated to yield a crop value of around £12,500 dry weight, but substantially larger yields are expected in future years as the coppiced stools produce increased numbers of shoots.

Organised by Tyne Tees branch of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the visit attracted around 13 farmers from throughout the region.

Jennie Stafford, Farming Advisor for Tyne Tees FWAG, said: "Our members were privileged to visit a farm with four years experience of growing willow and their first harvest completed. It was also good to see the willow providing a habitat for the flourishing wildlife."

She added: "Capital money for planting and fencing is available through the Energy Crop Scheme to assist with the establishment costs. The benefit of this fast growing form of willow as an additional source of income is one that some farmers are considering, particularly if they have land and circumstances that require a low maintenance crop."

Mr Corrigan said: "Growing coppice has certainly been a positive experience for me. The market is already there and it's definitely something that farmers should investigate if they are thinking about diversification. I consider I have the correct balance of SRC willow to other crops for my situation."

As part of the two-hour tour of the Eastfields plantation, Kenny Crooks of the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (TVWT), who has carried out a comprehensive bird survey, outlined the environmental spin off benefits of SRC.

He said: "There has been a dramatic increase in insect and bird life especially snipe, woodcock, lapwings and reed bunting as well as pipistrelle and long eared bats and three species of owl. To hear them calling and see the mating displays at dusk is really something."

The picture above shows Mr Corrigan (right) and Barbara Hilton – the Sembcorp Energy Crops Manager - illustrating the rapid growth of the crop to Nick Stott, who runs a 200 acre arable farm at Croxdale, near Durham.

The pictures below show a snipe and a woodcock respectively.



