

The Application of Piece Work to Forest Operations

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THE past 12 years have seen vast changes in the social outlook of our country. The scarcity of labour has become a dominant factor in the manufacture of any produce. Demands for basic wage increases have been made and in most cases justified. Despite this production has slowed down, and it seems that a time wage does not offer sufficient incentive to the worker.

Forestry has been hit hard by the labour shortage. The fact that men do not give of their full value in time work has raised costs considerably, and it would appear that a rise in wages will not bring a corresponding increase in production. Therefore if it is possible to increase the workers pay and efficiency at the same time, much will have been accomplished.

It is suggested that a system of piece-work would be a solution to the problem. Piece-work means setting a value on a unit of work which would be fair to employer and employee. This gives incentive to the worker, because within limits the more units of work he completes the greater the remuneration he receives. The limit should occur at about 75% above his normal wage. For the purposes of this article the basic wage is taken as £4 per week. An individual worker should not be penalised if he makes more than the 75% of the basic wage but if a gang do so, it means that the rate is too high.

Much care and study is needed to strike the correct rate for a job, as reduction after the work has started is not popular. The most potent argument against piece-work is the possibility of poor and slovenly work. The Supervisor should set a standard for the men and make them repeat any work that is not up to standard. A bonus for excellent work also acts as an incentive in this direction. When the workers realize that they are paid a fair return for good work, little trouble will be found.

Although it might appear that piece-work tends to increase supervision costs, such is not the case. The financial incentive is usually sufficient to keep the men working constantly and a bonus for excellent work will ensure a reasonable standard. Time work would necessitate the Supervisor remaining with the gang all day, and even then a comparable output might not be achieved.

Piece-work rates will vary according to the locality and often within it. Alteration of the rate for each change of ground is not practicable, so an intermediate rate must be fixed which will cancel out the difficult and easy parts. Often the men have to walk a long distance carrying tools to their work, or moving from one job to another. In these cases a bonus rate per mile should be paid, rather than increase the piece-work rate to compensate for this loss of time.

The following table has been compiled from observations made in the West Scotland, and South Wales Conservancies of the British

Forestry Commission, and is intended to show the approximate limits within which piece-work rates should lie. The assistance of the Forestry Commission and its staff in providing the data on which these figures are based is gratefully acknowledged.

Table of Piece-work Rates based on a time wage of £4 per week.

Nature of Operation	Unit of Cost	Approximate Cost per Unit
NURSERY.		
Lining out	1,000	3/6—4/6
Weeding—Transplants	100sq.yds.	8/-—12/-
Lifting and Tying Seedlings	1,000	1/4
Lifting and Tying Transplants, 1 yr.	1,000	2/9
Lifting and Tying Transplants, 2 yr.	1,000	3/2
PLANTING.		
Flat planting (notching)	1,000	18/-—22/-
Flat planting and screefing	1,000	22/8
Mound planting	1,000	18/-—24/-
Mound planting after ploughing ...	chain	1/8—2/-
" " " "	acre	56/-
Mound planting after manual drainage	chain	1/-
DRAINING.		
Manual drains complete	chain	3/6—5/-
New drains unbottomed including mounding	chain	2/8—3/7
Bottoming new drains	chain	2/-
Complete drain in old woodland ...	chain	5/4
Normal upkeep of drain	chain	2/-—2/4
1st bottoming and repairing old drains	chain	3/-—4/-
GRASS CLEANING.		
Plantation weeding, bracken and grass thinning.	acre	18/-
THINNING.		
1st and 2nd thinnings—felling and snedding	cu. ft.	2½d.—3½d.
1st and 2nd thinnings—felling and snedding	pole	4½d., 6d. & 8d.
FENCING.		
Rabbit fence, stobs 9' apart (2 plain, 1 barb)	chain	12/-
Rabbit fence, stobs 9' apart less netting	chain	8/8
Rabbit fence, netting only	chain	4/4
Rabbit fence, stobs 7½' or 9' apart (3 plain, 1 barb)	chain	13/-
Sheep fence, stobs 9' apart (2 plain, 1 barb)	chain	12/-
Deer fence (4 plain, 1 barb) long stobs at 6yds., short stobs at 2yds., droppers and rabbit fencing	chain	22/-