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## Forestry and the Farmer.

*(Contributed by a Co. Wicklow farmer with a forestry training)*

AT first glance it would seem that forestry has no place in the ordinary day to day business of farming. Of course to the hill sheep farmer who sees his best summer grazing being encroached upon by the establishment of state plantations, the relationship between forestry and farming is obvious. Whether he approves of this development or not is a different matter. With a little give and take on both sides, the conflict between the interests of both parties could be amicably settled.

Now that the planting grant has been doubled there could be, and should be, a great increase in private planting. Much of this increase could come from small areas of an acre or less on ordinary farms. On most holdings will be found waste ground which could be most economically utilized by growing timber. You don't have to wait too long either for a return on your capital invested. Japanese or European larch will give quite useful poles from thinnings after 15 years.

It appears to me that much of the land reclaimed to agriculture in recent years, would be better employed in growing trees than in providing extra acres of doubtful value for grazing or tillage. I have in

mind low lying areas usually subject to flooding, which have been tile drained, ploughed, and re-seeded at great expense, and which at best will give a few months of summer grazing. It seems foolish to spend £20 an acre reclaiming land which will not have that market value when the job is completed. If such land were planted say with Sitka spruce, I have no doubt that it would prove a better investment. A plantation increases in value each year, the same cannot be said of reclaimed land.

Fencing poles and stakes are an every day requirement of the farmer, and there is no handier way to have them than from conifer thinnings in his own plantation. An acre of larch planted on a rocky slope with a grazing value of nil, would in a few years supply all his requirements. Proper care in the establishment and maintenance of plantations is essential. This is particularly so with regard to thinning. More woods are ruined by underthinning than overthinning.

Many farmers do not seem to realize the value of shelter provided by plantations, or the benefits that would accrue from having judiciously placed windbreaks on different parts of the farm. Some years ago in Co. Waterford, not far from Dungarvan, I saw a good example of the beneficial effects of a well sited shelterbelt. Here the farmer had planted a mixture of trees including Scots pine, Norway spruce and also *Pinus insignis* which provided such shelter that he could outwinter cattle on a bleak hillside, exposed to the South Western Atlantic gales. Without the shelter that of course, would be impossible.

Somebody may well ask who will buy my light thinnings if I go in for planting a few acres. It seems to me that with the development of plastics and the wood-pulp industry, which is bound to come in the next decade or so, any light conifer thinnings should find a ready market.

Now is the time when the rabbit population is under control, to plant the trees and increase the wealth and beauty of our countryside. We may not reap the full benefits of our planting efforts but our children will. After all, our generation has reaped the benefits of the plantings done in the 18th and 19th centuries, by that much maligned class, the landlords of Ireland.

N. J. DEVEREUX.