

Mr. Childers on Private Forestry.

MR. ERSKINE CHILDERS, T.D., Minister for Lands, speaking on private forestry at Muintir na Tíre Rural Week in Roscrea on Thursday, August 14th last said:—

The Government's decision to increase the grant for private forestry from £10 to £20 an acre is in some ways of less significance than the decision to undertake a promotion campaign and for this purpose to invite the co-operation of the existing forestry societies and rural organisations.

Mr. Childers said—

"I ask for the help of Muintir na Tíre in securing a massive increase in the level of private planting of trees, on the following grounds:—"

1. We have for too long considered national policy on a short-term basis. An agricultural country should think of development over twenty to fifty years and should prepare for every eventuality. The Government of the day should seek the collaboration of organisations like Muintir na Tíre if their rural policies are to succeed.

An increase of private afforestation will be a sure sign that the dynamic attitude to production so much approved by Muintir na Tíre is coming at long last.

2. There are tens of thousands of medium sized and larger farms where land is not scarce. Attached to many small farms is an area of useless cutaway bog or moor.

3. There are thousands of blocs of privately-owned land, from half an acre upwards, suitable for planting, producing little or nothing at present.

4. For the first time the Department of Lands is being charged with the duty of promoting private forestry as being of equal importance to State afforestation. Up to now the rural community have not been told parish-by-parish the value of trees as an investment. It has never been adequately emphasised that trees properly planted and reasonably maintained are a magnificent investment— as safe as any gilt-edged investment or bank deposit and that of all the products from the land the increase in world demand for timber products, according to every international economic organisation, seems to be the most certain and to be almost perpetual—world catastrophe excluded.

5. The basis of the private forestry campaign is the human appeal to every farmer with some land which produces little or nothing, to invest in a dowry for his son amounting to £300 or £400 per acre and a dowry for his grandson of another £700 per acre at a very small initial cost.

6. Private forestry can extend existing employment, create new employment and provide work for men in periods of the year when their retention may not otherwise be wholly remunerative.

For the farmer who does the work himself the additional burden involved in maintenance is not considerable.

7. Private forestry must increase as a result of personal decision by the rural community and the assistance of Muintir na Tíre will be of immense value to us.

We hear many appeals for increased production. In the matter of growing timber there is a most obvious case for increasing production. The markets are available and the nearest is Great Britain where there will never be more than 35% self sufficiency.

The United States is, almost incredibly, a net importer of wood products. Europe too, is becoming a net importer. Consumption will continue to rise.

The present net importation of timber products to this country is worth £10 millions a year. The vast bulk of the material imported could be produced at home.

8. The yield from Irish timber is high by world comparison and our climate is most favourable to rapid growth.

9. The initial outlay on planting varies according to the extent of preparatory work required. It is certain, however, that the increased grant will go a long way towards meeting the cost. Indeed, in many cases where the work can be integrated with normal farm work in the winter months without extra labour costs, or where the land is in a fairly clean condition the grant should cover almost all the expenditure involved.

The increased grant of £20 an acre now available to private planters is a genuine inducement and I feel sure that I can count on the assistance of Muintir na Tíre and other rural organisations in the campaign which my Department is about to launch. The campaign will be commenced in Wexford and Kilkenny, counties where Muintir na Tíre has many branches but advice is available free in all counties.

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Members are reminded that there is an arrangement with the Irish Central Library for Students for the lending of books relating to forestry to members of the Society.

Borrowers are limited to three books at a time and are permitted to retain the books for a maximum period of six weeks.

All applications should be sent to the Secretary who will forward them to the Librarian.

Acknowledgement

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