

EDITORIAL

For generations, foresters busily plied their profession behind closed gates on the remote mountainsides and boglands of Ireland, well away from the direct gaze of the wider public. This situation has however changed considerably over recent years. The increased afforestation of lowlands has brought forestry into direct contact with a greater section of the rural community, leading in some cases to conflict. With the increased environmental awareness now permeating Irish society, critics of forestry are finding their way with greater frequency into local and national media. In light of the absence of any cohesive defence from the forestry profession, such criticism can sway public opinion against forestry – a trend which will invariably translate, *via* the democratic process, into tighter policy controls on the development of the sector. In addition, unlike other European countries, an inherent woodland culture is largely absent from Irish society, resulting in a general lack of understanding and appreciation of the forest cycle. Such trends are clearly at odds with the projected growth of the forestry sector within Ireland.

Foresters can no longer afford simply to react to criticism of forestry as and when it appears. Instead, we must embark on a cohesive and proactive strategy to promote the industry. We must unashamedly 'sell' forestry for what it is - a sustainable landuse capable of producing a huge range of timber and non-timber benefits for all. We must highlight the fact that we are learning from our past mistakes and are adapting accordingly to ensure compatibility, particularly in relation to landscape and the environment. We must actively promote an understanding of the forest cycle, from seed selection to the final wood product. In effect, foresters must set the agenda regarding the public perception of forestry, and not let it be set by others.

The three-day Forestry Ireland show, held in Kinnitty, Co. Offaly earlier this year, epitomised this growing realisation. The event succeeded in drawing together interests from across the entire spectrum of Ireland's forestry sector into what can only be described as a showpiece for everything forestry has to offer. Forestry Ireland has set the standard, and will undoubtedly come to be regarded as having made a huge contribution to the promotion of forestry, in all its diverse forms, among the people of Ireland - an achievement for which all those involved in the monumental task of staging the event must be congratulated.

Securing a positive perception of forestry is a long-term challenge facing us all. We are indebted to our forebears for laying the foundations which have brought forestry to the brink of a period of unprecedented expansion. Perhaps we owe it to future generations of foresters to ensure that this expansion can take place unhindered, in an atmosphere of public understanding, acceptance and support.

Submissions to *Irish Forestry* are welcome and will be considered for publication.

The attention of contributors is drawn to "Guidelines for Submissions". Submissions to be addressed to:

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