

Report on Forestry Ireland, Kinnitty, Co. Offaly, 1997

Introduction

Forestry Ireland was a major outdoor forestry show organised by the Society of Irish Foresters and held at Kinnitty Castle, Kinnitty, Co. Offaly from Friday, 9th May to Sunday, 11th May 1997. The objectives of the show were (i) to highlight the growing importance of the forestry industry in Ireland, (ii) to act as a shop window for the forestry sector, and (iii) to successfully promote forestry and the forestry profession. Forestry Ireland was grant assisted by the Forest Service and the European Union, with major additional sponsorship provided by Coillte and a wide range of other forest related enterprises. Forestry Ireland was the fourth national forestry-based show to be organised by the Society in the last 10 years. Other shows included Forestry '88 at Emo, Co. Laois in 1988, and two Wood Ireland exhibitions held at University College Dublin in 1989 and 1992.

Management

Three separate committees were established to stage Forestry Ireland. These included a steering committee to oversee overall organisation, a coordinating committee to organise the show at a national level, and a site committee to deal with onsite logistics. In addition to the voluntary input of the members of all three committees, assistance was also employed at an administration level based in Dublin, and at a local level to manage the site. An administrator (Máiréad O'Donovan) and site manager (Kevin Donnellan) were employed for a period of six months, part of which on a full-time basis.

Marketing

The coordinating committee identified the promotion and marketing of Forestry Ireland to potential exhibitors, sponsors and visitors as being central to its success, particularly given that it was the first forestry show of such a scale to be held in Ireland. For this reason, the Society engaged the services of Donal Magner, a public relations consultant with specialist expertise and knowledge of the forestry sector. After a difficult ground-breaking drive, intensive promotion on local and national media both in the weeks leading up to the event and during the show itself, proved highly successful.

A show catalogue and trade directory was also published in conjunction with the *Irish Farmers Journal*. It contained lists of exhibitors, participants and sponsors and featured various articles on forestry in Ireland. The catalogue was included in the *Irish Farmers Journal* during the week of the show, reaching approximately 74,000 farming homes with an estimated readership of 300,000. It was also given to all visitors upon entry to the show.

Layout and services

Forestry Ireland was laid out over a 20 ha site centred around Kinnitty Castle. Four car parks were strategically positioned for ease of access, with the main exhibit area and exhibitors' car park positioned in front of the castle. The main exhibit area was supplemented by exhibitions within the immediate grounds of the castle and demonstrations of various forestry operations in adjacent forest areas. The marquee housing the Society's headquarters, from which the public announcement system was operated, provided a focal

point for the exhibitors and the public alike. The marquee contained a reception area and conference centre, and was used for various prize-giving events and for the Forestry Forum, a central feature of the show which attracted over-capacity crowds on occasion. Onsite facilities included telephones, toilets, a restaurant, catering marquee and bar.

Financial analysis

Forestry Ireland was funded through major sponsorship from the Forest Service, the European Union and Coillte, and through many other smaller sponsorships, exhibitor fees and gate receipts. Financial organisation for Forestry Ireland required a steady cash outlay throughout the year preceding the show, with a concentrated revenue collection period a month prior to, and during the week of, the event. Revenue from site fees and Forest Service/EU funding was used to defray administration and off-site activities up to the period immediately preceding the show.

From a financial perspective, Forestry Ireland broke even, with the cost of staging the event, including organisation, promotion and site planning, balanced by sponsorship and revenue generated from exhibitor fees and gate receipts. The total cost of staging the show was £178,000.



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Conclusion

Forestry Ireland attracted approximately 21,000 visitors over the three days, despite appalling weather conditions. The event also attracted 137 exhibitors representing forestry companies, contractors, chemical companies and a wide range of research, education and environmental groups. In general, feedback from visitors, exhibitors and sponsors has been very positive, with many complimenting its organisation, particularly in the adverse weather. The show organisers are also satisfied that the above objectives were successfully

fulfilled, in particular, the publicity and positive profile for forestry it generated. From a financial perspective, it was hoped that the show would generate profit revenue. However, given the adverse weather conditions and the first time nature of the show, the breakeven status achieved is regarded as a credible economic performance. The wealth of experience gleaned from the staging of Forestry Ireland, in terms of market knowledge and organisational acumen, will also prove invaluable for the organisation of future large scale events by the Society.

It would not be possible to name all the people who helped to make Forestry Ireland the success it was. Thanks are due to each and everyone, in particular, John O'Sullivan, Kevin Donnellan, Tim O'Regan, Richard Whelan and his events team, John Snell, Diarmuid O'Riordan and the Offaly forest workers team, Dr Gerhard Gallagher, Len Gallagher, Ken Byrne, Máiréad O'Donovan, Donal Magner and Tom McDonald. Thanks are also due to the local people of Kinnitty, especially Joe Parlon and Ivan Shepherd.

John Brosnan
Chairperson
Forestry Ireland