



Confor
Promoting forestry and wood
Hyrwyddo coedwigaeth a choed

An inquiry on Farming Connect on 22 February 2024 by The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Confor welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence for the committee on how Farming Connect specifically supports Forestry Businesses. Confor (www.confor.org.uk) is the not-for-profit organisation for the UK's sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. It has 1,500 member companies, representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain from seed to structure in the UK.

The Farming Connect platform has the capacity to host the Continuous Personal Development (CPD) programme for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and we, Confor, believe we could add significant value to the writing group. Forestry and woodland management are applicable to farm profitability, by supporting improvements to soil, habitats, water and air quality, as well as potentially improving animal welfare with shelter and shade carbon storage, the economic return of harvested wood products and the contribution to security of future wood supplies. To realise these improvements, it is anticipated that farm business owners will need training and understanding, this is when the expertise from the forestry sector can support the farming sector.

To support the SFS, multiple woodland themed learning units need to be considered. Initially, the first module should include a high-level overview of information on the rules and regulations in forestry including felling licences, grants, potential routes to harvesting timber, deer and pest management. Once completed, other modules such as those listed below will be able to support the farming business in the direction they want to take. Due to the length of time woodland operations can take, it is strongly suggested that the initial woodland module is mandatory in the first year, and potentially each year afterwards. This prevents the farming business to 'do and forget' the valuable information learned.

Ideas for other woodland modules:

- Benefits of trees on farms
- Marketing Timber
- Creating new woodland
- Managing existing new woodland
- Agro-forestry options for farms
- Silvicultural systems explained
- Deer management and venison

After completing these modules no landowner will become an expert in woodland management but will have enough information to make informed decisions and have the opportunities to be signposted towards further information along with industry experts for further help and advice as needed. Signposting should include the Institute

of Chartered Foresters and other professional bodies and/or a register of consultants/agents who can help support landowners.

We are concerned that if only a single CPD module on woodland is created and made available, it will not give farmers sufficient information and could even create further problems. Woodland management is a long-term commitment, it takes years to manage and to complete a cycle, this can be seen as very different to the normal yearly agricultural cycle, hence why suitable support is needed.

The role of trees on farms has long been under-estimated, hence the inclusion of the Benefits of Trees on Farms module. This would seek to change attitudes and potentially increase the uptake of woodland creation schemes. It is important the landowners see the increased benefits they achieve with tree and woodland management, so they proactively want to engage rather than being forced to comply.

The units listed above would be custom written for Farming Connect, as although the information exists, it does not exist in 1 hour e-learning blocks. As mentioned above, the forestry industry and specifically Confor should be involved at the writing stage to ensure the modules are suitable for both sectors.

In conclusion, farming and farm woodlands need to be better aligned. The forestry sector can help support this process, with its wide range of knowledge and experience. Farming Connect has a key role and can help bring the two sectors together.