

Beaver Wood Products

Growth in domestic wood heating sees business heat up



Beaver Wood Products started in 1978, as a single tractor and saw bench operation, a sideline to an agricultural contracting business. The Gray brothers partnership now cuts over 1500t of log fire wood per annum, and has developed to be the core business.

The growth in local firewood consumption has seen both the markets in kindling and bespoke saw milling predominately in oak beams for mantles and fire place fitments, both areas the business has expanded into, increase hugely. The regional increased uptake of domestic heating with wood and improved stove efficiency means the enterprise continues to expand.

objectives

- To remove seasonal peaks and troughs for agricultural contracting business and improve economic viability of the business.
- To source all hardwood logwood from within a 20 mile radius, predominately Beech, Ash and Sycamore, mostly bought 'delivered in' via Euroforest.
- To develop a more sustainable production model, embracing industrial heating, both via own installation and in local fuel supply.

actions

- A consistent programme of on-site development and investment has been undertaken, gradually driving production up by increasing mechanisation.
- Forging reliable feedstock supply lines, both with larger companies, i.e. Euroforest and at local scale estates/farm woodland owners, gleaned from agricultural contracting business, this flexibility has been key to expansion.
- Development of kindling supply, started at demand of customers for 'sticks' to help with fire lighting. This wood was sourced via the local waste streams, but high demand, fluctuations in quality and being beholden to construction (joinery offcuts) and leisure industry (caravan build residues) meant this wood is now imported from Scandinavia.
- Development of a bespoke milling service, using a Wood-Mizer bench.

achievements

For Business:

- Over 700 'nets' of firewood for the wholesale market are produced weekly, with 30,000 bags of 'stick' wood kindling produced per heat season.
- They have had a 10% increase in volume year on year for the last three years.

For the Region:

- Employment of 2 permanent staff and 9 sub contractors.
- Creation of a business with significant turn over, utilising over 1,500 tons of locally sourced hardwoods and milling 100t of timber per annum.
- Lower CO₂ emissions as increased uptake in wood heating and improvements in local biodiversity as local woodlands have growing market for sale of produce, increasing woodland management activity.

background

- Business started in 1978, with logs at 50p a bag, using a single tractor and sawbench. It was seen as a way of utilising machinery used in farm contracting business in the 'off' season. They still run a muck spreading business, with a client list of 120-150 landowners.
- There are 1200t of local hardwood on site drying at any one time, cut and stacked in 4m lengths. This is bought by weight and runs on a revolving stack system for processing. It arrives post-shooting season (February to March). From local contractors, large and small, which helps feed stock supply. Timber 16"- 4" diameter is purchased.
- Beaver Wood Products sell logged fire wood by spatial volume; wholesale via a 'net' to shops and garage forecourts, about 300 weekly, retail at the farm gate via a 'feed sack', about 200 weekly and delivered via a tipping trailer/pick up vehicle 'load', about 400+ per heating season.
- The processing lines have seen a significant investment and increases in automation in order to meet demand. Machinery now includes a Fuel Factory 400, £49,000, Pezzolano 750, £12,500, POSH, £7,500, as well as 2 fork lift trucks, a Wood-Mizer mobile saw bench, costing £26,000 and a Tracker Forward bought for £39,000.
- The residues from processing are utilised further with dusts and shavings going to chicken bedding, and smaller pieces bagged as firelighters. Plans are now developing for a drying kiln and wood heating project for adjacent dwelling.

quotes

"No matter how good a company can make a 'flame effect' fire nothing will ever beat a real log fire, we offer a local service, using local wood. We don't just offer packs of logs, we offer packs of convince, making a log fire easy".
Martin Gray, Beaver Wood Products.

"Beaver Wood Products means there is a viable and economic market for local hardwoods, bring value to the estates and woodlands across the region."
Steve Dresser, Regional Manager, Euroforest

partners

Fuel Wood Suppliers

- Euroforest
- Londesborough Estate
- Belton Estate

Machinery Suppliers

- Fuelwood (Warwick)
- Wilsons of Dalbeattie
- Arboreta



lessons learnt

- Make any product easy, in handling, storage, transporting and importantly lighting. Remember you are selling convenience for the customer. Do not rely on the fuel price alone to sell the product, keep quality high to retain customers.
- Take best practice, even from overseas, and be brave – don't be afraid to think big.