

More timber, more quickly: Research trials

The demand for woody biomass is rapidly increasing at local, national and international levels, driven by government policies that promote and incentivise the use of renewable fuels to help meet carbon dioxide emission reduction targets.

Within the forestry sector, this demand has created a new market for waste wood, timber residues, thinnings, small roundwood and low-grade logs, raising the value of these commodities to unprecedented levels and increasing the levels of competition with other more traditional users of timber and wood fibre.

In Wales, most woody biomass derives from forestry and related industries whose prime objective is the production of timber products. There is little grown that is specifically targeted at biomass production.



Short rotation forestry (SRF) seeks to address this issue by being a biomass specific production system, using species and methods that promote sustainable biomass yield within a relatively short time-frame. The system has not previously been tested in Wales, though there are complimentary SRF trials in England and Scotland that were planted between 2010 -12.

A research project, working in partnership with Forest Research, has created 3 trials to test the efficacy of SRF in a Welsh context on differing but representative site types, demonstrating best practice and examining the relative performance and biomass yield of a range of native and non-native trees. The three research sites were established in Brecon, Radnor and Dyfi forests in 2013 and contain 6 different species: eleven broadleaf and five conifer.

From the outset, it has been important to engage with stakeholders in the biomass sector to ensure the trials meet their needs, in terms of data provision and species suitability.

The trials are now well established and starting to yield interesting and informative results. The three sites are also now at the stage where they provide a valuable educational resource for practitioners, researchers and policy makers. The sites have already hosted several visits, and more are scheduled in the future, including one by the Royal Forestry Society.

Pursuing SMNR:

