

Key Takeaways

Cross-Fertilisation and Collaboration: Advancing the Forestry Sector in Ireland and Spain

In a recent cross-fertilisation meeting between the Irish and Spanish [BBioNets FANs \(Forestry and Agriculture Networks\)](#), key challenges and solutions for the forestry sector were discussed.

With insights brought by [Álvaro Picardo \(CESEFOR](#) and [SMURF](#) project), José Ramón Guzmán (Directorate-General for Forestry Policy and Biodiversity of the Regional Government of Andalucía), [Edward Casey \(AMBER centre\)](#), and attendees such as Tony Quinn (Forest Inspector, [Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine](#) of Ireland) and [Colm Faulkner](#) (Research support for [NXTGENWOOD](#) collaborative industry/academia wood research program), the event highlighted the importance of collaboration, innovation, and tailored funding to support sustainable forest management, biomass production, and rural development. Here are the main takeaways and proposed solutions for advancing the forestry sector in these regions.

Watch the meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eRPv59fHeo&t=607s>

Developing Local Forest Value Chains

Need

Developing local forest value chains for biomass is costly, particularly in regions where factors such as production per hectare or the density of supply are not as developed as others. Many primary producers struggle to afford the expensive machinery and equipment necessary for biomass production. This lack of resources does not help small forestry companies find funds to deploy the innovations in the landscape and rural areas.

Addressing the Situation

New support should be created to facilitate the deployment of innovations and the development of value chains through national or regional funding programmes for the acquisition or renewal of machinery and equipment.

The [SMURF project](#) is actively exploring funding lines available for forestry equipment. While regions such as Galicia, Catalunya, and the Basque Country in Spain offer funding opportunities, most other regions lack this support. On the 14/01/2025, [Castilla y León published the bases of new incentives](#) of this type. The CAP Strategic Plan for Andalucia includes a specific support aid for this situation to be implemented during the coming years.





Expanding Biomass Consumption Points and Addressing Forest Road Infrastructure Challenges

Need

Developing robust local forest value chains in Spain demands a multifaceted approach to overcome several key challenges.

- **Limited Biomass Processing Capacity for the Energy sector:** The current landscape of biomass processing for electric uses in Spain is dominated by large-scale facilities, hindering the development of localised value chains focused on thermal uses. The key factor to develop the value chain is to increase the demand of biomass all over the territory taking advantage of its use for small and medium thermal energy installations. Expanding biomass consumption points requires establishing smaller, more dispersed processing units that can better serve the needs of local communities and support the growth of rural economies.
- **Inadequate Forest Road Infrastructure:** Efficient forest management and the successful functioning of local forest value chains heavily rely on well-developed forest road networks. However, improving forest road infrastructure often faces significant challenges, particularly in mountainous regions. Environmental concerns frequently impede road improvements, leading to limited access to forest resources and increasing the risks of wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters. These challenges ultimately undermine the sustainability of the forest sector and hinder the development of a thriving local bioeconomy.

Solution/Collaboration

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort. Investing in the development of dispersed biomass processing facilities, coupled with strategic upgrades to forest road infrastructure, will significantly enhance the accessibility and transportation of forest resources. This integrated approach will not only support local economies and boost biomass production but also improve and enhance forest health and resilience. Rural municipalities play a key role in the establishment of small collective boilers, and they have several incentives for that, mainly through the regional energy agencies, like the existing one in [Andalucia](#). The Irish Forest Roads Scheme (2023-2027), approved under state aid, provides a valuable model for other countries by demonstrating how to balance economic development with environmental concerns. This scheme supports forest road development to improve forest access, management, and fire prevention, offering valuable lessons for countries like Spain. More information about the Scheme is available [here](#).

Adapting Machinery to Diverse Forest Conditions

Need

Forest land and terrain plots vary between regions in the same country and between countries. In regions like Andalusia, steep slopes make it difficult to use standard forest machinery. Biomass is also widely and sparsely distributed, complicating collection efforts.

Solution

Developing and acquiring specialised equipment adapted to the characteristics of the lands, such as specialised tractors, wagons, processors, and chippers will improve biomass collection efficiency in diverse terrains.





Adopting Higher Value-Added Uses for Biomass

Need

Both Ireland and Spain need to commit to higher value-added uses for forest products, many of which are bulky and difficult to transport.

Solution

It should be possible to apply **bioeconomic forecasting practices adapted to regional conditions** to identify the types of by-products that are not fully exploited in each forest and the added value that these could bring to the region. This forecasting approach could help both regions add value to under-utilised biomasses such as bark, leaves, and branches. Increasing regional and national forecasting practices focusing on these by-products will:

- Help expand Ireland's forest cover.
- Help Spanish foresters utilise the ~50% of biomass currently underexploited.
- Return value to forest owners and foresters.

Developing bottom-up circular bioeconomy policies through engaged research, involving the collaborative work of researchers and stakeholders, allows regional and national strategies to be aligned with broader European bioeconomy policies, effectively forecasting and increasing the value of forest resources.

Stimulating Forest Biomass Supply Through Dialogue and the simplification of regulations

Need

A productive dialogue between companies and regional administrations in Spain is necessary to stimulate forest biomass demand and supply. The regulations for harvesting authorisations in Spain are complicated, differ among regions and require several environmental assessments that take many months. Simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation is highly needed. Finally, public opinion in urban areas is against the use of forests and harvests and there is a general need to change it, working on communication and awareness.

Irish Solution

In Ireland, **Local Enterprise Boards** fund equipment for private foresters and forest groups, enabling them to process undergrowth and biomass more effectively. Implementing a similar model in Spain could help small producers access essential machinery.

Enhancing Cost-Competitive Biomass Collection Machinery

Need

Forestry machinery is costly, and the sector often relies on private investment rather than research institutions to adapt technologies to local conditions.

Solutions

Foresters and advisors could overcome this difficulty by applying for funding through one of the following three strategies:





- **Top-Down Funding:** Align their work with priority areas of [Horizon Europe \(HE\)](#) work programmes, such as Cluster 6, which mentions forests extensively.
- **Bottom-Up Funding:** Utilise programs like the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Schemes](#) for research and mobility grants, which are also linked to high-priority areas.
- **Co-Funding Mechanisms:** Combine private funding with public support from sources such as the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#), [Interreg programmes](#), or national and regional funding (e.g. Irish ERDF bodies, and the Spanish programme for ERDF implementation). This synergistic approach fosters collaboration between companies and governments, and could be a key element, as it also addresses the fact that private funding sources often provide lower payment rates by allowing local or national authorities to contribute the remaining portion of the required investment.

Infrastructure funding can be challenging, but specific calls exist where 100% of equipment costs are eligible.

Prioritising Forestry Sector Funding

Need

Current funding mechanisms for rural development mainly address agriculture and often overlook the forestry sector, leaving its development lacking in key innovative areas such as the circular bioeconomy. Forestry funds have been significantly reduced in recent years.

Solutions

- Local, national, and regional authorities and governments should prioritise the **allocation of funds to support the forestry sector**. This could be achieved by adopting a slightly adjusted agenda to impact the sector's processes or by securing resources from unconventional or alternative sources.
- **Strategic Funding Applications:** Leverage opportunities such as [the European Innovation Council \(EIC\)](#) and the [Forest Partnership “Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future”](#), part of the [EUFORIE Project](#). The European Innovation Council primarily targets small to mid-sized enterprises or small to mid-cap organisations. Nonetheless, they offer a dual funding structure, partially consisting of research grants and partially comprising direct investments from the European Investment Bank, which might present a chance for organisations to tap into additional EU funding sources. The Forest Partnership “Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future” is another example of dual funding, leveraging funding from the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland (MMM).
- **EIP-AGRI Funding:** Focused on primary producers, this mechanism supports developing regional forestry value chains.

Conclusion: Collaboration for a Resilient Future

This cross-fertilisation meeting highlighted the importance of channels for industry and government dialogue, circular bioeconomy forecasting practices, tailored funding, and collaborative approaches in addressing the challenges faced by the forestry sectors in Ireland and Spain. By sharing strategies and





solutions, both countries can advance sustainable forest management, improve high-level, value-added products, and strengthen rural economies.

Stay connected for more updates and opportunities to collaborate on building resilient forestry networks across Europe!

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