



DATGANIAD I'R GWASG/PRESS RELEASE

Wood for energy – Europe works together for a shared future

Wales is playing a key role in creating a shared vision of the way forward for the fledgling wood-fuel industry across Europe.

As the industry moves ever closer towards becoming a mainstream alternative, energy producer experts across Europe – including a team from Wales – have identified the common challenges facing the sector.

Now, through Robinwood the ground-breaking Forestry Commission Wales project which aims to show how best forestry practices can help provide jobs and new income across regions of rural Europe, they are sharing their knowledge to meet those challenges.

And at the project's first major international conference – staged at Brandenburg in the old East Germany, more than 250 delegates from all six partner regions discovered just how similar each country's problems are.

“Key to the success of wood-fuel energy in the future is the security of supply,” ADAS wood fuel specialist Rebecca Heaton told the conference at Eberswalde, home of the region's 175 year old forestry college.

mf

2/ Wood fuel – Europe works together

“In Wales our wood-fuel industry is just beginning to take off and the supply chain is growing in line with demand. However, in some of our partner regions, ensuring the wood-fuel supply has become an issue - a very valuable lesson for us to learn,” she said.

“But we do have some real advantages in Wales – our temperate, wet climate provides ideal growing conditions for timber and we will have no problem in meeting demand as it grows.

“The Robinwood project gives us a unique opportunity to share our knowledge and will play an essential part in helping us to develop an effective and efficient wood-fuel industry,” she said

Top of the agenda for all the partner regions – Wales, Liguria (Italy) Brandenburg (Germany) Murcia (Spain) Eastern Slovakia and Lubuski (Poland) are the socio-economic benefits that forestry, and in particular wood fuel, can provide.

“From the south Mediterranean coast of Spain, to the north of Poland there is one common problem facing the rural communities of Europe,” said Anthony Bosanquet, Forestry Commissioner for Wales, who headed the Welsh delegation.

“Rural de-population and the loss of jobs is an issue across the whole Robinwood project, and wood-fuel – made increasingly more viable by increasing fossil fuel prices – provides a real opportunity to address both,” he said.

Across Brandenburg unemployment is running at 26 per cent – and in some of the more remote villages that rises to 40 per cent. Young people are moving to the west in search of highly paid jobs

mf

3/ Wood Fuel – Europe works together

Some 10 per cent of homes are standing empty – in one small rural town near Eberswalde the population has dropped from 50,000 to 35,000 since re-unification – whilst in the prettier villages cheap houses are being bought up as holiday homes – an echo of the property market in rural Wales.

“Forestry and timber **production** can play a vital role in rural regeneration, and help meet the Welsh Assembly Government’s aspirations for providing real jobs in country areas,” said Anthony.

“Adding value to the timber crop by using wood waste and thinnings for energy **production** can make an essential difference to the profits of timber operations and provide new local work in the forests. **By subsidising early uneconomic thinning, it can also improve the long-term quality of our timber.**”

“It is a real win-win situation for Wales, reducing dependence on expensive brought in fuels, helping to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and meet the Assembly’s targets on renewable energy production,” he said.

Wales is already leading the way in the UK on renewable energy – around 5 per cent of energy is now produced from wind, wood and water compared to the GB total of just 3 per cent. That is way behind the sector leader Austria, which produces more than 30 per cent of its energy from renewables, and its neighbour Germany, where the total is around 17 per cent. Both countries have big forests - 47 per cent of Austria is forest, and 37 per cent of Brandenburg. Both Spain and Italy lag behind the UK in wood energy.

The Aberystwyth-based Robinwood team, responsible for the major component of the £4 million cross border project – looking at how forests, trees and timber can revitalise rural communities through new business opportunities – is putting teams of specialists together now to investigate the opportunities for wood-fuel. They will feed the result of their work into the overall strategy document to be produced later this year.

mf

4/ Wood fuel – Europe works together

As well as working on wood-fuel, the Aberystwyth-based Robinwood team is responsible for the major component of the £4 million cross border project – looking at how forests, trees and timber can revitalise rural communities through new business opportunities

ENDS

2/02/06

Contact:

Kim Burnham, Robinwood, Wales programme manager Tel: mobile: 07810 756225 e-mail kim.burnham@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

Guy Pargeter, Taliesin Communications Tel: 01970 832375

Editor's notes:

- At present there are 31 large scale wood heating systems operational throughout Wales. They consume just over 2460 tonnes of wood chips, pellets and logs.
- Robinwood has given Wales its first opportunity to be a partner in one of the European Interreg 111c RFO (Regional Framework Operation) projects aimed at bringing partner countries together, fostering cross border work between academics, private business and the public sector. The Welsh part of the three and a half year project is worth 1 million Euros to Wales.