

MARKETS FOR BIOMASS

'Increased incentives for biomass heating' was one of the messages delivered by Sir Ben Gill of the Biomass Task Force at the annual Biomass Conference held by the Renewable Power Association. With biomass generated heat resulting in carbon savings, there are clear moves towards a financial inducement in terms of £/ kwh generated, in the same way as there is for electricity. It seems likely that this will happen in the next year or two, which could give the fledging biomass industry in Wales a boost.

Wales already has several flagship wood burning heating projects, such as in the Welsh Assembly Offices in Cardiff, the Forestry Commission's Nant-yr-Arian visitor centre in Ceredigion, and at Atlantic College in the Vale of Glamorgan. The Forestry Commission Wood Energy Business Scheme (www.woodenergybusiness.co.uk, 01970 821219) can offer grants towards the cost of installing boilers, and are running a series of open days giving out information.

Farmers in Pembrokeshire are actively developing heating markets from energy crops and have formed the Pembrokeshire Bioenergy Group (PBE). It has been set up to provide an integrated fuel system to give end users confidence that wood energy crops will be a reliable, efficient and cost effective fuel when priced against fossil fuels. PBE aims to offer a full service range - from fuel supply only to becoming a full Energy Supply Company (ESCO)- selling heat per unit, in a similar way to gas or oil. Being involved in the whole chain of biomass production to heat generation is important, as Graham Perkins, one of PBE's founding members says, 'We want to be price setter rather than price takers'.

This spring they planted 10 ha of Miscanthus, grant aided by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Sustainable Development Fund. As Paul Ratcliffe, chairman of PBE says, 'As individuals it's not going to happen, we need to be joined up - from farmer to developer'. Demonstrating this is the commitment from Bluestone Holiday Village and numerous other projects as end users for its energy crops. PBE believe that local supply chains, alternative agricultural cash crops and increased biodiversity will ultimately see the establishment of these crops throughout Wales.

CALU has produced a range of information leaflets on all aspects of biomass production, and is arranging open days to view various crops. Farmers in Pembrokeshire interested in growing biomass should contact:

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