



Woodfuel Factsheet 5

The firewood business

With stove sales soaring, and increasing numbers of households installing wood-fired boilers for hot water and heating, demand for quality wood fuel is on the rise.

This boosts the rural economy, creating jobs in areas where woods can be managed to produce firewood.

“Bringing woods into active management for firewood brings a lot of benefits for people and wildlife as well as for the local economy,” said Forestry Commission Scotland woodfuel officer Willie Beattie.

“Thinning out woods creates more space and allows light to reach the forest floor, which encourages a greater variety of wildlife to thrive. In terms of recreation, well managed woods are much better for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.”

Sustainable forest management means managing woodlands to high environmental and social standards and replanting trees as timber and logs are harvested. All public forests in the Cairngorms National Park are certified under the internationally recognised Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme and increasing numbers of private landowners are managing woods to bring greater future benefits.

“Getting involved in the supply of woodfuel is a great way for farmers

and woodland owners to make the most of the products from their woods,” Willie added.

“Sourcing firewood locally means householders and businesses are keeping their ‘fuel miles’ low as well as boosting the local economy. And locally produced logs and chips are much cheaper than fossil fuels which have to be transported hundreds or thousands of miles to where they’re needed.”

Firewood sales

Brothers Stuart and Dan Burgess have set up business as tree surgeons and firewood merchants based near Dulnain Bridge, in Strathspey.

Their company Cairngorm Tree Care has built a loyal customer base by supplying consistent loads of quality logs cut to size.

Roundwood is sourced from local estates and farms, which benefit from having their woods thinned and managed as well as the extra revenue from sales of wood.

“We have regular customers who share our passion for firewood and appreciate the fact we sell consistent loads of well seasoned wood which is ready to burn,” said Stuart.

Find out more

This series of factsheets explores how households, businesses and communities are pioneering the use of woodfuel. They have been produced as part of the Cairngorms Woodfuel Action Plan and a partnership project run by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Clim-ATIC EU programme.

Stuart admits that earning his livelihood as a woodsman is more about quality of life than creating a business empire.

“We operate on a small scale and keep our deliveries local; it’s not generally viable to transport the wood long distances. That way we keep our fuel consumption down and have more time to focus on what we really enjoy; working with trees and wood.”

As Stuart and Dan use chainsaws for cutting, and chop most of their logs by hand, they did not have large outlays for expensive equipment.

“We trained as tree surgeons and got chainsaw tickets and now work with four chainsaws, a stump grinder and a very basic, small log splitter. We still split a lot of logs by hands though and genuinely enjoy the physical work of chopping logs with an axe.

“Doing it this way also means we can make sure the firewood is the right size - a lot of customers are very particular about what they want.”

The two brothers work full time in the business, with part time help from two students from the Scottish School of Forestry in Inverness.

“We love our work; it’s great to be outdoors making a living from doing something you really enjoy,” said Stuart.

“Wood is effectively sustainable fuel produced directly from sunlight. The tree absorbs energy when it’s growing which is then released when you put it on the fire. For me there’s something magical about that.”

Joint working on woodfuel in Aberdeenshire

Andrew Nicol from Aboyne is involved in the woodfuel business from forest to customer. As a chartered forester, he helps landowners manage their

woodlands, selecting stands of trees suitable for woodfuel production.

“Woodfuel is factored into production forecasting which is carried forward into a harvesting programme,” he explained. “Once the trees are cut, the roundwood is stacked in an airy spot where it will dry out for 18 months. Chipping is done in the forest, or the firewood is sold as logs by the lorryload.”

Andrew is a director of DWP Harvesting, a joint marketing and management agency for forest owners from across the north and north east of Scotland. The collaborative approach taken means forest owners benefit from sharing machinery and maintaining strong relationships with contractors and customers.

“We can supply woodfuel to customers in whatever form they require,” he said. “We supply biomass to individual customers as chips or logs, and to wood pellet manufacturers.”

Andrew was at the frontier in the use of domestic woodfuel himself installing a woodchip boiler in his own house in 2003. He is keenly aware of the need for a strong and consistent supply chain to encourage more people to make the switch to woodfuel.

“If you don’t run the supply chain properly woodfuel isn’t going to get to right place at right time in the right condition and the customer’s boiler will go out.”

Help and advice

Forestry Commission Scotland employs specialist wood fuel officers who offer advice and support for landowners, farmers and contractors entering the wood fuel business.

The **Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP)** is a potential source of funding for businesses looking to become wood fuel suppliers.

Contacts

Forestry Commission Scotland
01349 860 919
www.usewoodfuel.co.uk

Scotland Rural Development Programme
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP

His advice to people starting out in the business is to do their homework well, make contacts and find out what others are already doing locally.

“There’s no point in going out and spending a lot of money on machinery like wood chippers when there are already ones available for use in your area. Find out what is happening locally and who is operating. Don’t reinvent the wheel; it’s much better to work together and cooperate.”

