



Managing hedges for firewood production: A case study

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This case study from a livestock farm in south-west England demonstrates that it is economically viable to move a hedge from annual flailing to a fifteen-year coppice rotation to produce firewood for sale.

The farm is a 160 ha low intensity livestock farm in Dorset. It has 20 km of hedges managed on a 15-20 year coppice cycle. Approximately 800m of hedge is coppiced annually. The farm has a small firewood business which sells approximately 175 tonnes of logs per year, hedges make up part of this with the rest coming from hedge and tree management on neighbouring farms.

Hedge coppicing produces round and split logs for the firewood business as well as small diameter material which is used on-farm or sold at a lower price and brash material which is fed through a branch logger, netted and sold as kindling.

Around 70% of the total hedge biomass produced from coppicing is used or sold. All firewood products are stored undercover for 10 months to reduce moisture content to between 20% and 30% content prior to use or sale.

The farmer, Ross Dickinson, was interested in the economics of the process and in 2017 coppiced a trial hedge and recorded in detail the time, costs, outputs and income. The mixed species hedge was 220m long, 6.5m high, 3m wide with 15 years re-growth since it was last coppiced. Before coppicing, an old wire fence within the hedge was removed by hand.

The hedge was coppiced by hand using a chainsaw, processed with a log splitter and a branch logger producing 21.41 tonnes of saleable or useable firewood material. The overall cost including labour for hedge preparation, coppicing, processing, burning brash and delivery was £3,378. Total income including sales and savings from not flailing annually was £4,908. This means that the profit from 220m of hedge was £1530 with no subsidy payments.



Figure 1. The finished case study hedge with standards left on the bank. Photo:

References:

Link to farm full report: <http://devonhedges.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Converting-a-Hedge-to-Firewood-Production.pdf>

Guide to Harvesting Woodfuel from Hedges: http://www.organicresearchcentre.com/manage/authincludes/article_uploads/project_outputs/TWECOM%20ORC%2

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