



Arriving at a customer's yard, where the stack of timber in the background shows how particular Irish producers are about the wood they process.



The Eazi Pak at work.



Top: PJ Gordon of Castlebar processing straight into Eazi Pak from Posch S-375.

Above: This customer in Roscommon nets and pallets 40,000 bags annually with Eazi Pak, working part-time.



How's this for an impromptu demo? This Eazi Pak was shown working while still strapped to the trailer, but resulted in another order.

# Making firewood pay – the Irish way

**S**MALLER logs can make bigger profits for British firewood producers, if they can learn lessons from Ireland.

That's the message John Wilson wants to get across to producers in the UK, who could be adding significant value to their businesses with relatively modest investment. The eldest of the three brothers behind Jas P Wilson, John took a step back from the machinery distributor last year to set up the company Multi Log, manufacturing and selling the new Eazi Pak log-netting machines.

The philosophy behind his new venture is to add value to firewood by selling smaller quantities in nets, bagged using a more efficient semi-mechanised system. This only works, says John, when mechanisation reaches a level where operators can work constantly throughout their shift with the minimum of physical effort. Otherwise, motivation and morale is diminished and production levels fall.

Designed to provide a fast and affordable packing solution ideal for small, medium and large operations, the Eazi Pak machines have proved very popular in their first year, with sales across the UK and Ireland.

It was on a recent trip to Ireland to deliver a new machine that John had the opportunity to study the country's bagged firewood market. And what it confirmed to him was that, while many UK producers assume that increasing production and bulk selling are the only routes to improved profits, a more

John Wilson of Eazi Pak speaks to *Forestry Journal* about the opportunities awaiting UK firewood producers interested in learning lessons from Ireland.

thoughtful approach can yield significant returns.

He said: "Firewood net bag sales in the Republic are enormous and predominantly softwood. One of the reasons seems to be that 37 cm cut machines like the Hakki Pilke and Posch are the norm and most producers buy in to suit these machines for a one-pass multi split.

"They don't seem to have any interest in breaking down large, bent hardwood timber. Perhaps the fact that most buy in ensures they are able to avoid this stress.

"Upon investigation, I have concluded that 60 x 45 nets are the norm. Now the interesting part for UK producers! Irish logs are generally cut between 6 and 7 inches in length. In the UK, we tend to cut either 8- or 10-inch logs, which can produce between 1,450 and 1,800 nets per 25-tonne load. If you go down to 7- or even 6-inch logs, you can stretch numbers up to 2,300 nets.

"The logs are also cut into square chunks, which bulk up and fill nets better than other shapes. Anyway, customers seem to be happy with these, which most log burners easily accept. Besides, the old firewood



supplier saying is 'there is more money made from what is not put in the net than what is'!"

Irish producers have historically paid on a piece-work basis for people to fill nets off piles or to fill chutes, said John. These practices are reducing as producers realise the revenue lost to labour costs.

As most UK producers will already know, much of the foreign labour traditionally used in the industry will be restricted after February 2021 as a result of Brexit. Now could be the time to consider replacing some of these labour costs with mechanisation.

Ireland's firewood producers, though they are not in the same legislative situation, are likely to follow suit.

Eazi Pak now offers two models, both of which are single-phase electric powered. The fully electric Eazi Pak Midi has a capacity of up to 1.5 cubic metres, while the larger Eazi Pak Maxi, with hydraulic drive, has a capacity of up to 3 m.

Both are equally productive and require no special skills to operate. The logs need not be cleaned prior to bagging, as the Eazi

Pak has a built-in combination cleaning system, although pre-cleaned would always be a preferred option.

When it was unveiled last year, John described the Eazi Pak as the end result of a 20-year search for a machine that enables firewood producers to net logs without the physical effort and energy required by manual and chute-style bagging.

"We wanted to supply a machine that people would enjoy using, while increasing production and maintaining an acceptable level throughout the day," he said.

While every other process in the forestry industry has been mechanised, from timber harvesting through to firewood processing, he said previous mechanised systems for bagging have proved either comparatively expensive and/or complicated.

The difference with the Eazi Pak is that while the actual bagging is still done

Length of log	number of nets per 25-tonne load	Sale price per euro	Gross return per load
10 inch	1,450	€ 2.50	€ 3,625.00
	1,450	€ 3.00	€ 4,350.00
	1450	€ 3.50	€ 5,075.00
	1,450	€ 4.00	€ 5,800.00
7 inch	2,000	€ 2.50	€ 5,000.00
	2,000	€ 3.00	€ 6,000.00
	2,000	€ 3.00	€ 7,000.00
	2,000	€ 4.00	€ 8,000.00
6 inch	2,300	€ 2.50	€ 5,750.00
	2,300	€ 3.00	€ 6,900.00
	2,300	€ 3.50	€ 8,050.00
	2,300	€ 4.00	€ 9,200.00

manually, the effort involved is minimal and can be done by practically anyone. This ensures production figures remain consistent throughout the day. During testing using two operators on 45 x 60 nets with 8" softwood, 150 nets per hour was easily achieved.

Eazi Pak owners have said that while the extra production achieved has been significant, the increased staff welfare and morale has ensured the machine is embraced by all and is now an integral part

of their setups. The Eazi Pak machines are simple to operate over long periods and can be set up practically anywhere without any noise pollution issues.

If you study the table above you can see the tremendous potential added value on offer.

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