

Wednesday October 7

“Imagine the New Zealand landscape in 20 years time with a diversity of woodlots and plantations of these genetically improved species providing durable posts, poles and timber to local industries. With government support we can make this happen.” NZDFI chairman Shaf van Ballekom

Supporters of a collaborative New Zealand eucalypt project helped plant its first breeding population of trees in Marlborough today.

The New Zealand Dryland Forests Initiative is targeted at New Zealand foresters producing genetically-improved, naturally durable hardwood eucalypts on drought prone land, providing an alternative to imported hardwoods and treated pine.

Project leader Paul Millen says the initiative is “developing tomorrow’s trees today”, with the initial focus on providing hardwood posts to replace treated pine in New Zealand vineyards.

“Durable eucalypts offer a sustainable option for Marlborough’s drylands and would reduce the need for long term disposal of thousands of CCA treated timber posts that, when broken, are a hazardous waste,” he says.

Meanwhile, the project will work towards the long term goal of producing a substitute for imported tropical timber.

After five years of seed collection, gene selection, trial planting blocks and vineyard trials of posts, three species of eucalypt have been chosen.

Representatives from NZDFI’s project partners, including the Marlborough Research Centre, New Zealand School of Forestry, Marlborough Lines, Proseed and the Marlborough District Council, helped plant a block of durable eucalypt, *E.bosistoana*, this morning.

The Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust (AGMARDT) provided \$80,000 for the project and General Manager Stephen Macaulay was one of those out putting the first trees in the ground.

He says the project is closely aligned with AGMARDT’s goal of developing and producing sustainable products for the agribusiness sector. “The ability to provide an alternative to treated timber posts from home grown hardwoods represents an exciting opportunity for the viticulture, agricultural and horticultural sectors.”

Andrew and Ngaire Lawson, who have donated the use of their land for the hardwood trial, say the durable eucalypt project should improve the productivity of Marlborough’s drought prone areas, while boosting the sustainability of its vineyards.

As a successful builder, Andrew is also excited by the prospect of New Zealand grown, sustainable, high quality hardwood becoming available in place of imported unsustainably milled kwila and other increasingly expensive hardwoods.

Marlborough Lines managing director Ken Forrest also sees great value beyond vineyard posts. He wants to see the cross-arms on power poles made from New Zealand grown eucalypt in the future, rather than from imported hardwoods.

The company has 50,000 cross-arms in Marlborough and a further 60,000 in Otago, all of which will ultimately need replacement. That's a lot of wood and a lot of money potentially going offshore, he says.

“Sustainability and minimising our carbon footprint is important to us and local cross-arms could make a huge impact.”

The planting day coincides with a deadline for applications for funding from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Sustainable Farming Fund, which declined the project funding last year, because its timeframe was deemed too long to fit the criteria.

Paul Millen says it is very disappointing that the project also appears to miss the criteria for MAF's new Primary Growth Partnership Fund, with recently released guidelines requiring industry to provide a minimum of \$500,000 of non government funds.

“That means our only option is to go back to the Sustainable Farming Fund. We believe the NZDFI objectives are directly aligned with the objectives of the fund and we are asking that the project be considered as a special case, on the basis that we are planning to establish the foundation for a new sustainable land use and future primary sector industry,” he says.

NZDFI chairman and Proseed chief executive Shaf van Ballekom says the initiative is a great opportunity for New Zealand's agribusiness sector. Although the project is a long term one, beyond the scope of current partners to fully fund, he's hopeful government will come on board through one of its funding agencies.

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Marlborough Research Centre chairman John Marris says government needs to get behind the project, which he calls extremely sensible. “It is hugely complimentary to everything Marlborough and New Zealand represents, which is sustainable, high quality production.”



For more information see www.nzdfi.org.nz or contact:

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