



**Farm  
Advisory  
Service**

**National Advice Hub**  
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**You don't need to wait until a woodland is ready for clearfell to receive income from timber. The current demand and high prices for home-grown timber mean that thinning can be profitable. Thinning is also an essential part of managing a woodland to maximise its value and productivity over the whole rotation.**

### Key figures

- 42ha Sitka spruce thinned
- 25 years old
- 3,500t timber
- £98,000 profit from first thinning

A farming family near Abernethy, Perthshire recently expanded their farm by purchasing neighbouring agricultural ground, which included a commercial conifer crop. Knowing that the crop was around the appropriate age for thinning, they contacted a forestry agent to advise on management actions. The family had acted just in time as the woodland was approaching the end of the viable window for first thinning. Another few years would have been too late and with too much risk of destabilising the remaining trees.

### Why thin?

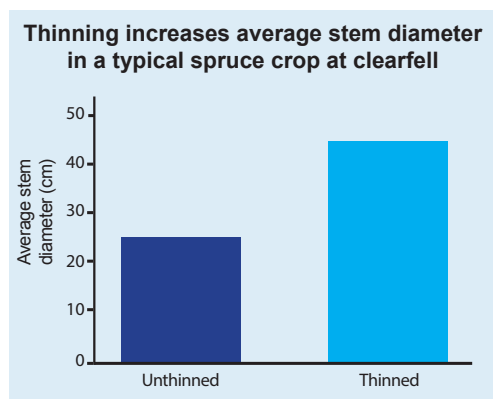
Thinning generates income from a woodland years before clearfell. A first thinning should be done when the trees are around 20 years old, followed by one or two more thinnings, at intervals of around 5 years. The optimal time to thin can vary by several years, depending on the yield class of the crop so it's best to seek advice and make a long-term plan.

As well as generating short-term income, thinning improves the volume and quality of timber in the remaining crop, increasing the value of the woodland. A thinned crop will produce more timber, of greater value, over its whole lifetime (rotation) than an unthinned crop.

Commercial timber trees are initially planted at close spacing, usually 2m apart, which encourages them to grow rapidly in height to compete for light, and minimise branching, which produces knots in the wood. Removing roughly 30% of the crop at around 20 years old allows more light in to each tree crown and encourages the trees to put on more girth. Typically, the first thinning removes one row in five, allowing machines access into the crop. Ideally there will also be some selective thinning of the four rows in between, choosing to remove the smallest and poorest quality trees. Second and third thinnings will focus on selective thinning, leaving a high proportion of big volume and good quality timber trees at clearfell.

### What makes thinning profitable?

- Income from timber sales is exempt from income tax.
- Current high demand for woodchip and biomass means smaller diameter logs have increased in value in recent years.
- Locations with good access to markets ie sawmills, chipboard manufacturers, biomass plants, allow you to pay lower haulage costs and receive more of the timber income as profit.
- Good access to site eg a good farm road, short extraction routes from forest to stacking area minimises harvesting costs.



### What should I do if I want to thin my woodland?

Ask a forestry agent to assess your woodland and advise on management actions, they can also help you apply for a Felling Licence. If your woodland is around 17 to 25 years old, and hasn't been thinned before - now is the time to act.

If you need more advice on farm woodlands or any other topic, the Farm Advisory Service has a range of support and help available:

### Advice line

For free telephone advice on a wide variety of topics including cross compliance, water framework directive requirements, climate change and other technical issues call us on 0300 323 0161 or email [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot). The advice line operates between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

### Bespoke Advice and Grants

FAS can also help you to increase the profitability and sustainability of your farming business through Scottish Government grants including Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) – worth up to £1,200. The ILMP will identify opportunities and cost savings for your business, based on an independent and confidential assessment of your business by an experienced farm business adviser of your choosing. As part of your plan you can choose to benefit from up to two further specialist advice plans.

### Online

Our website contains articles, videos and much more at [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)