



Case Study: Fern Tree Services

Richard Fern and his partner, Ann Kendrick, set up Fern Tree Services in 2005 from a base on Trough Farm at Rowelton, to the north of Longtown. Richard offers a range of services including coppice clearance, tree surgery and wood processing to create fuels.

"There are lots of smaller woodlands in this area as well as the large forestry operations and I was convinced that there was a market for my mix of services."
Richard Fern

Longtown Market Town Initiative involvement

Richard started out by buying a small kindling business as a going concern and gradually extending the range of services. A Business Expansion Grant from Longtown MTI enabled him to buy processing equipment for wood logs so that he could develop the fuel side of the business and he has just invested in a tractor-mounted chipper so that he can specialise even more with wood chip for biomass boiler fuels.

"Since we bought the equipment with the help of MTI money, business has grown tremendously and we haven't even had a lull at the start of 2008. It is hard to imagine how we would have kept up with demand without the extra equipment and it has certainly enabled us to expand the business."
Richard Fern

Achievements

Richard and Ann have juggled their jobs with childcare for a number of years and Richard is able to take on tree-felling work and similar projects now that their son is at school. He has an established reputation in the Lake District and is gradually building up the work closer to home in the north of the county.

"The way that the business has expanded has enabled me to give employment to five other people – not full time but sharing out the demand and creating work is very satisfying. I can now begin to focus on the environmental aspects of the business, concentrating on sourcing as much wood as I can within 50 kms of home and using the chipper to create biomass wood fuel for some of the newer boiler systems."
Richard Fern

Business Expansion Grants are targeted at small businesses with the potential to succeed, thrive and develop, securing the initial jobs and also creating new posts as they grow.

"Richard has found a gap in the market and is investing a lot of time and effort into creating a sustainable business for the future. The grant from us helped with equipment at a critical time and that extra help has enabled Fern Tree Services to expand and grow quickly."

Bev Bamford, Longtown MTI

Challenges

Fern Tree Services is now an established name in Cumbria and most of Richard's work comes in by word of mouth recommendation. The challenge is to meet a growing demand and maintain high standards of product and of safety while also reinforcing the environmental aspects of the company's work.

"The demand is certainly there – we processed about 60 tonnes of wood in December and a single customer in Ambleside sold 120 bags of logs in a day just before Christmas. The challenge is to dry, season and store these large quantities of wood properly so that we maintain the quality of the fuel for efficient burning."
Richard Fern

Future plans

Richard took delivery of a tractor mounted crane and chipper in early February and is already pursuing contracts to provide a service for businesses using wood chip boilers, especially in the Lake District. Richard will thin coppice, remove dead trees in the grounds and convert this to wood chip for fuel on site. As well as this investment in processing equipment, Richard would also like to be part of encouraging people to consider wood fuel for their homes.

"One ambition is to convert an outbuilding on the farm into a proper office for Ann's research consultancy and to set it up with a modern wood-fuelled heating system. We can then demonstrate the technology and be part of encouraging people to move to more sustainable energy."

Richard Fern

If you think that Richard and his team could help you on a woodland project or by supplying wood fuel, please contact Fern Tree Services on 01697 748481.

Nature of business: Woodland maintenance and wood fuel
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This project is being part financed
by the European Community
European Regional Development Fund