

Danny Frost, Lowmoor Farm

Danny Frost, a former teacher turned furniture-maker and now sawmill operator who, with the help of Forest Futures, has seen his business grow from two to seven employees in just three years.

Danny's business is based at a former dairy farm - Lowmoor Farm - just outside Wigton, in the north of the county. Standing in his delivery yard, he talks of sustainable business models and boosted confidence as a wagon arrives carrying freshly cut timber from just over the border in Scotland. As the clutching claw of the lorry's crane struggles with the large trunks (the driver has, apparently, brought a soft wood crane by mistake), Danny outlines his vision for a business that has seen its turnover treble in six years.

"We're integrating the value chain, from wood right through to products, so that we're paying fewer processing premiums at each stage of the supply chain. That's helped us to survive," says Danny. A walk around his business paints a clear picture of what he's describing: an integrated and dynamic business model that clearly works well. The sawmilling operation feeds two kilns and a drying shed, which in turn feed a well-equipped processing area and, finally, Danny's furniture workshop.

The two businesses - sawmilling and furniture making - run side by side and both are doing well. He's employing two full-time furniture makers, two sawmillers and three further part-time staff. Last year his turnover reached £107,000. "I couldn't have expanded this quickly without Forest Futures," says Danny, who also says that the programme, and Cumbria Woodlands, helped him to get to grips with the true potential in his business. "I'm passionate about what I do, but having my business examined through the Forest Futures programme helped to really boost my confidence, so much so that I'm now investing considerable amounts of my own profits back into the business."

Danny has also planted five hectares of broadleaved woodland and is committed to investing personally in at least one thousand further trees for every year that he's in business. Danny's commitment to sustainable development doesn't end there. He sources his wood locally (one good example is the oak from woodland thinning on the Greystoke Estate which has been processed by Danny and will now be used as roof trusses in a valuable restoration project) and is working to reduce energy use across the business. One of his kilns benefits from solar heating and he has plans for medium-sized wind turbine on the site. "I'm aiming for added value through the business, tangible local economic benefits and all achieved with an environmental footprint that's as small as possible," he says.

The £20,000 grant from Forest Futures supported more than just planting, it helped to finance a side loader for the drying shed and processing equipment to prepare the dried wood for a DIY and construction market that is taking 250 tonnes of Danny's timber a year. Even though his furniture making business has a waiting list of up to twelve months, it is the sawmilling operation that is driving growth: "Sometimes I think that side of my business has started to sponsor my furniture making hobby."



