

“Chicken and (wood) chips”

An agroforestry system combining the production of free range eggs and short rotation coppice for bioenergy.

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Background

TV Bioenergy Coppice is an official Department of Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) sponsored short rotation coppice (SRC) producer group based in the south east of the UK. In partnership with a number of local authorities, regional and national government bodies and commercial organisation we are working with our sister company TV Bioenergy to develop the wood fuel industry in our region. This briefing note describes one of our most interesting SRC schemes to-date.

The Scheme

In 2004, one of our members, a leading supermarket chain in the UK, Waitrose plc., planted just over 9 hectares of willow short rotation coppice on their own farm in Hampshire. The SRC was unusually planted in 4 large blocks with wide grass strips about 10 meters wide separating each block. The purpose of these strips was to allow the 3 chicken sheds erected at one edge of the strips to be moved to the opposite side of the field, during periods when the SRC was being harvested. Small wind turbines and photovoltaic panels were erected to supply most of the power used by the sheds. In November 2004 after one season of growth, to allow the willow to grow above ‘pecking height’, around 12,000 Columbian Blacktail hens, Waitrose own specifically bred variety were introduced into the plantation. They are fed a natural cereal based organic diet, and they supplement their diets with the weeds growing between the young willow trees, thereby also benefiting the willow by reducing weed competition. Electric fencing surrounding the plantation serves three purposes, keeping rabbits and foxes out and keeping the chicken in. In 2007 the SRC will be harvested and the wood chips produced will be burned to produce electricity or heat in a combined heat and power (CHP) power station in Slough or in one of the increasing number of local, small scale biomass boilers that are being installed in south east England.

