

Award for inspirational farming-forestry balance

Planting trees to provide shelter has helped a farmer to breed healthier and heavier lambs – and to win a coveted award. **David Lee** reports.

Peter Gascoigne, who farms at Broughton in Peebles-shire, close to the Scotland-England border, was the inaugural winner of the Farm Woodland prize in Scotland's Finest Woods Awards 2018. Judges described the balance of farming and forestry on his land as "exemplary and inspirational".

They said Mr Gascoigne had "demonstrated the direct benefit of the woodland to the agricultural business, with productive conifer woodland starting to yield returns and more productive, better-quality lambs being produced on the farm."

The judges also said: "Mr Gascoigne's efforts are an inspiration to other farmers considering planting woodlands on their farms. The owner is conscious of landscape design, with biodiversity, wildlife and conservation all factored [into] the woodland mix."

In his entry, Mr Gascoigne said: "Our main farming enterprise is breeding quality lambs, and this can only be achieved in my opinion by creating warmth and shelter by planting trees given the altitude of the farm."

Fergus Ewing, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy, who presented the award to Mr Gascoigne at The Royal Highland Show, said: "I'm determined that we work with hill sheep farmers to say that forestry and farming can go together. There are many benefits, such as providing shelter belts against the cold winter weather that is so injurious to young lambs."

Mr Gascoigne has planted 126 hectares of trees at Gascoigne Farm Ltd, combining soft wood trees for commercial use and hard woods to be retained for future generations. He has also built a farm house, steadings and ponds on the 385-hectare farm since buying it in 2002.

He attributed his success to his perseverance in 'redressing the balance' after many years of what he saw as the destruction of rural areas for purely financial reasons.

He said: "I think we enhanced the landscape. The wildlife we have now compared to what there was is unimaginable - red squirrel, frogs, badgers, brown hare. I have put back into the environment what was taken away when the trees were cut down and the ponds were drained in my youth by the policies of successive governments in the pursuit of money.

"I always said that if I ever owned a farm, I would repair some of the damage. We have commercial forestry to pay for it, but I have put a lot of hardwoods in and I'm putting in another 30,000 this year. I want those trees and the wildlife to be my



Left: Gascoigne Farm; right, Peter Gascoigne pruning trees at the farm

legacy, to survive for generations to come."

The Farm Woodland category was only introduced to the long-running awards this year, thanks to the support of the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and Confor member Scottish Woodlands.

Confor is also a supporter of the Awards, along with member companies Alba Trees, BSW, EGGER, Iggesund, James Jones & Sons, Scottish Woodlands and Tilhill Forestry.

In the same category of SFWA, John Strachan's Tullo Farm in Oldmedrum, Aberdeenshire was highly commended. The judges said it was "a remarkable project by any standard in terms of concept, design and implementation; a near-perfect example of an arable farm woodland integration project. It has enhanced the diversity of business opportunities in the future while dramatically enhancing the environment."

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On our high-altitude farm we can breed quality lambs by creating warmth and shelter from trees we have planted

2018 Scottish Finest Woods Awards winners

Community Woodlands Award K-Woodlands, East Kilbride

Farm Woodland Award Peter Gascoigne, Gascoigne Farm Ltd., Broughton, Peeblesshire

Highly Commended: John Strachan, Tullo Farm, Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire

Commended: Iain Stewart, Gain Farm, Cumbernauld.

New Native Woods Award Invercauld Estate for Craig Leek & Meall Gorm, Braemar, Aberdeenshire

Highly Commended: Trees for Life for Allt Fearnna, Dundreggan Conservation Estate, Glen Moriston, Highlands

Quality Timber Awards

New Commercial Woodlands category James Jones & Sons Ltd. for Rig of Airie, New Galloway

Small Wood, Compartment or Single Stand of Trees category Sandy Paterson for Senwick Wood, Kirkcudbright Bay

Whole Forest or Estate category Houston Farms Partnership for Elderslie Estates, Renfrewshire and Hunt-Grubbe Family Trust for Kenmore Forest, By Inveraray, Argyll

Schools Award St. Mary's School, Melrose

Joint Runners up: Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral Primary School, Motherwell and The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery, Letham, Near Cupar, Fife.