



MILLING POPLARS

MAKING USE OF AN ON-FARM RESOURCE

Across Hawke's Bay there is a massive resource in terms of millable poplar. But is it worth the hassle? The Hawea catchment used a TLC demonstration grant to investigate the economics of milling poplar.

Some landowners see poplar trees as an annoyance at best and a liability at worst. Most poplars planted in the 1960-70's were never pruned or thinned properly and as a result have grown into monsters. These monsters can be very awkward, costly and unsafe to deal with.

In the next 10-15 years these old-man poplars will have to come out. The question then becomes what to do with this material to avoid it causing destruction or just being added to burn piles.

WHAT ARE MILLED POPLARS WORTH?

After all costs including cartage and treatment, Tim Forbes from Elsthorpe has been getting \$3,000/tree cutting 10 trees per year – that's an extra \$30,000 towards the bottom line.

Tim's top tips: find a good on-site miller to reduce wastage and transport costs, and find your markets first so you can cut to the correct specification.

Harvesting poplars can save money on farm given the amount of product produced, and there is room to expand the market for timber products.

LOCAL MILLERS

CHB millers with experience in milling poplars include:

Justin at Felling, Milling, Firewood (FMF): 0276284990

Tony at TC Systems: 0274800544

Estelle at Rakaū Saw Milling: 0274248453

H A W E A T R I A L

As part of a 2024 TLC funded trial, Hawea farmer Evan Potter milled three poplars on his farm to be used for sheep and cattle yard timber and battens.

Here are the facts:

3 trees dropped, plus one windfall that had been on the ground for about three years.

All the trees were about 50 - 60 years old with no silviculture.

There were three big logs per tree, plus smaller logs

Felling took three days and on-site milling took another five

The timber will be treated at a later date at \$150 - \$195/m³

About 2-3m³ (approx 1 tree) milled per day at \$350/m³ - approx \$1,000/day plus labour to assist miller

PROJECT COSTS (excl GST)

Tractor hire for felling: \$2,500 (excl labour)

Onsite milling: \$6,000

Labour for tailing out: \$1,000

BATTENS AND RAILS

50 x 50: 852 LM (Battens)

125 x 40: 1349 LM

100 x 50: 395 LM

150 x 150: 38 LM

150 x 40: 189 LM

150 x 50: 745 LM



HAWEA TRIAL: EVANS'S NEXT STEPS

Evan Potter will continue to plant poplars as they are a good option for combating erosion and silt. He intends to prune all newly planted poplars to give him more options in the future.

Evan may harvest some more stream-side trees as he still has a lot of trees left and they pose the same risks to the streams and infrastructure during flood events.

POPLAR USES AND VARIETIES

On-farm, poplar timber can be used for cattle and sheep yards, battens, posts, fence railings and truck decks. It is also great for household products such as paneling, furniture, toys, chopping boards etc. If you end up with too much for personal use you could investigate poplar markets on Trade Me or advertise locally.

Most poplars in Hawke's Bay are of deltoides x nigra parentage. Veronese and Kawa are the newer varieties. Most can be milled except Lombardy and silver poplar.

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more head to www.tukitukilandcare.org or contact the following organisations:

- The National Poplar and Willow Research Trust
- The Farm Forestry Association - Poplar and Willow Action Group
- HBRC (Hill Country Erosion Scheme)



POPLARS TIME TO SHINE



Can harvest from 30 years old including unpruned conservation trees

Can use trees that have been on the ground for a few years already

A hardwood: slow growing in terms of girth, good growth rings

More durable and lighter than pine

Doesn't bruise, dents pop back after rain

Knots can be half the size of pine, green knots; usually don't come out, helps make it strong and adds character

Minimal wastage - can use tailing for firewood - no sap so clean burning

One CHB farmer has fence battens that are now 65 years old

5 times stronger than pine

Similar lifespan to pine

Poplars are a good option for combating erosion and silt - plant at wide spacing to stabilise hill country

Cheaper to plant a hectare of poplars than pine, and you still have the grazing

