

## NFU ENERGY

# Expert help to pick biomass crops

Envirocrops offers growers a helping hand when it comes to choosing the most suitable biomass crops for planting in your unique land type and climate

If you are a farmer looking to diversify your holding, you might want to get your head around the range of biomass crops (for example, miscanthus and short rotation coppice) and see if they are suitable for your land to provide an alternative income stream.

Now, you could surf the web and do your own research, talk to other farmers who have already gone into it, or pay a consultant to crunch the numbers?

**“THESE CROPS ARE PERENNIALS THAT STAY IN THE GROUND FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, SO IT’S IMPORTANT THAT YOU MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION. THE VARIOUS BIOMASS CROP OPTIONS ARE SUITED TO DIFFERENT LAND TYPES AND CLIMATES”**

There’s nothing wrong with this time-honoured approach, but it does feel a bit last century. What about if you wanted to get a quick answer, from an independent source, without forking out any cash? This is where the Envirocrops web app will come into its own.

## COMPLICATED PROCESS

The Envirocrops web app is a collaborative development (AFBI, Kevin Lindegaard of Crops for Energy, NFUE and Calvium developing the software).

These organisations have been working in the biomass crops sector for nearly 30 years. Kevin says: “It’s a complicated process. These crops are perennials that stay in the ground for more than 20 years, so it’s important that you make the right decision. The various biomass crop options are suited to different land types and climates. Yields can vary considerably. On top of this, there is the range of harvesting regimes to consider – miscanthus is harvested annually, SRC willow is harvested every three years, while short rotation forestry is harvested at least eight years after planting. The woody crops are harvested wet while miscanthus and other grasses



The Cropper game on the Envirocrops website offers a great learning tool

## Envirocrops

are harvested dry. It does feel like you are comparing apples and pears!”

The UK’s biomass strategy is due to be published in the spring of 2023. This is expected to highlight the massive need for expansion in biomass crop land coverage to meet essential net zero commitments. In order to meet the upscale challenge, farmers will need to be agile in their decision-making processes.

## PRICE COMPARISONS

The Envirocrops web app will enable this by providing price comparisons for producing and selling biomass crops, an encyclopaedia of information on how to grow and manage the crops, a directory of all the main players and an online trading platform with a local dimension.

If you imagine Envirocrops as a combination of Compare the Market.com, Wikipedia, Checkatrade and Gumtree

then you won’t be far away.

Be part of this revolution by joining our user forum and subscribe for the latest updates at [envirocrops.com](http://envirocrops.com). The project is just six months old and the first release of the web app will be live in March 2023.

Currently, the team has produced a useful game called Cropper which provides a quick way to understand the management of these crops and the important dos and don’ts. It should turn biomass crop rookies into clued up experts in just three plays.

 **Envirocrops is a project led by the Agri-Food and Biosciences**

**Institute (AFBI) with support from consultants Crops for Energy, NFU Energy and software developer Calvium. It is being funded by the Biomass Feedstock Innovation Programme managed by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). See more at [envirocrops.com](http://envirocrops.com)**