

News release

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Environmental efficiency ratings added to nursery trees

A tree nursery in the East of England, Barcham Trees, has engaged consultancy Treeconomics to a ground-breaking project which will help customers make a more informed choice when selecting trees from its catalogue. Treeconomics has calculated an environmental efficiency rating which has been added to every tree species on the nursery, much like that which you would see on white goods in the UK.

Trees provide many benefits, seen and unseen. Perhaps the one we are most familiar with, is trees' ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere and store it within their woody structures. By offsetting carbon emissions generated by human activity, every tree planted is a credit to the environment, helping to mitigate climate change by ensuring that more carbon is stored than is released. Trees are currently the only scalable solution for removing CO₂ from the atmosphere. However, every tree species captures and stores carbon at a different rate. The question as to which species delivers what and over what time period has never been articulated in a way which is easy to follow by both professionals and the public alike.

By creating a tag for each tree in the Barcham nursery catalogue, it is now possible to illustrate exactly what each tree will be able to deliver in terms of carbon capture. Ratings range from the top environmental 'A' grade to the less contributing 'E' grade. The tags also show how long it will take, in years, before the tree will offset the carbon it took to grow, deliver and plant it. The idea behind this project was to help customers, most of which are public bodies, select trees which will help them achieve their specific carbon goals. Many local authorities up and down the UK have rather ambitious tree planting targets, as well as goals to reduce their carbon footprint. Trees have a critical role to play in achieving these targets and this is a fact that is recognised by both central and local government. In fact, in June 2019, parliament legislated that the government must reduce the UK's net greenhouse gas emissions by 100% relative to 1990 levels by 2050, making the UK a 'net-zero' emitter. Such targets make it imperative that the right trees are selected in each case.

However, it is not simply the case of selecting species with higher carbon captures; trees should also be selected based on the conditions they will be growing in. A poor scenario would be to plant an 'A' grader, such as a Sycamore, in a confined space so it can never fulfil its potential. Planting the right tree in the right place (and giving it the right care), will ensure that it is able to deliver its full suite of ecosystem services.

So, how were the trees rated? Over the past ten years, data has been collected from UK tree species, and put through a software system called i-Tree Eco. i-Tree Eco is a peer-reviewed, open source software suite, developed by the United States Forestry Service. It is used to assess urban trees and calculate their benefits to society. This tool was used to calculate the carbon storage of each tree species and variety based on the expected DBH (diameter at breast height) a tree would reach within its lifetime. These values have been displayed graphically on individual tree tags, which clearly indicate the carbon credit grade and the carbon capture potential of the species as it grows. Each tree in the nursery catalogue has received such a tag.

Mike Glover, Managing Director of Barcham Trees, commented: "We are delighted with the work that Treeconomics has done in classifying the range of trees we grow, this will make it easier for our customers to make informed planting decisions and maximise their ecological return on investment. This is very innovative work and we hope it will help to bridge the gap between science and end user tree selection."

Kenton Rogers, Director of Treeconomics, concludes: "This is a fantastic first step in the environmental rating of nursery trees. In time, we will be expanding these tags to include other environmental factors, such as how much air pollution each tree is able to filter, amongst others."

If you would like to talk to Treeconomics about a similar project for your own tree nursery, please contact: 07710 803339 or info@treeconomics.co.uk

www.treeconomics.co.uk/treecarboncertificate

ENDS

Treeconomics is a social enterprise which works internationally with community groups, research organisations, public bodies, municipalities and private business to complete projects which highlight the value of trees.

For further info., visit: www.treeconomics.co.uk/projects

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