

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Examples of Forestry projects



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European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) contributes to the efficient implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) throughout the European Union (EU).

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN) which brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development.

At EU level, the ENRD ensures the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

Find out more on the *ENRD website* (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>).

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Information exchange is an important aspect of the NRN and ENRD operations. This brochure forms part of a series of ENRD publications that has been introduced to help encourage such information exchange.

Each edition of the brochure features different types of projects that have received RDP co-finance from The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

This edition of the brochure focuses on how the EAFRD is supporting different types of projects from EU forests and woodlands.

Other editions of the brochure can be downloaded from the *ENRD website's library section*¹ and a *RDP Projects database*² contains many examples of EAFRD assistance to rural development initiatives.

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1 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-library/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en/en/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en_home.cfm

2 <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/>

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Forestry and the EAFRD

EU forests grow in a variety of shapes and forms. This diversity of EU forest resources takes in the full spectrum of our woodlands. It ranges from commercial plantations managed for timber production, to outcrops of individual trees on farm or park land, as well as larger expanses of natural or semi-natural woodlands.

All of these forest resources combine to provide EU citizens with a multitude of different benefits. Raw materials for construction, fuel for renewable energy, spaces for recreation, habitat for biodiversity, carbon storage for tackling climate changes, food, fresh air, and clean water are some of the key benefits that forests provide.

Forest based industries also generate turnover in excess of €300 billion for the EU economy and account for more than two million jobs in the Member States.

Maintaining the quality and quantity of EU woodland resources helps to ensure that these benefits can be sustained in the long term. Such processes are being supported through

financial assistance from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which is being used by rural stakeholders in EU countries to support the multifunctional roles played by our forests.

EAFRD measures in the Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) have been specifically designed to encourage forest improvement projects at local and regional levels.

This brochure presents a selection of EAFRD forest project examples which explain the economic, social and environmental gains available from various types of rural development activity in European forests.

Published in 2011 during the United Nation's *International Year of Forests*³, the following set of articles aims to raise awareness about sustainable forest development opportunities and show how EAFRD support can be used by businesses, individuals and organisations to make the most of the EU's diverse array of different woodland resources.

Forest growth: EAFRD afforestation project sustains long-term benefits from Latvian woodlands

European forestry is a dominant land user which provides key sources of environmental and socio-economic benefits. The EAFRD is being used to safeguard these benefits over the long term through investments in future EU forests.



© Skogsvaldskapet SIA (Valentins Daudiss)

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Forests' importance to Europe's countryside is stressed by the EU which notes how, "Forestry is an integral part of rural development and support for sustainable land use should encompass the sustainable management of forests and their multifunctional role"⁴

Of the 40 EAFRD measures available for Member States in the programming period from 2007 to 2013, a total of 20 are relevant to forestry. Eight of these are specific forestry measures for improving the economic value of forests or targeted at environmentally sustainable use of land through forestry activities.

In the next programming period after 2013, seven specific forestry measures will offer finance to meet a wide range of economic and environmental needs of the forest sector.

Afforestation measures are one of the commonly used types of EAFRD support for forests. These fund actions involved in increasing the volume and variety of EU forest resources.

Afforestation action

An introductory section in the *State of Europe's Forests 2011*⁵ report confirms that there are 1.02 billion hectares of forest in Europe and over the last 20 years the total area covered

by forests has increased. However, the report also observes that about a fifth of all trees in Europe are damaged or dead. Afforestation provides a tool to help address this rural development challenge which affects all Member States.

In countries well known for their timber industries the challenge is particularly relevant. Latvia for example has a strong forest sector and a large number of jobs in the nation's wood based industries rely on a regular supply of raw timber materials.

*Latvia's RDP*⁶ contains (like most other countries' RDPs) measures from the EAFRD to co-finance afforestation. The Latvian RDP focuses its support for new forests on non-agricultural land and refers to this as, "a rational solution of land use" that not only increases wood stocks but also "contributes to preservation of biodiversity by creating forest ecosystem corridors in open landscapes and revival of historical values of characteristic forest ecosystems."

Latvian perspectives

Valentins Daudiss is the Field Foreman for a Latvian afforestation project from Zilupes District which received the equivalent of around €73 000 of EAFRD assistance in 2009 to create a commercial mixed forest on abandoned farm land. Mr Daudiss

4 See Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 governing the EAFRD

5 www.foresteurope.org/filestore/foresteurope/Publications/pdf/Forest_Europe_report_2011_web.pdf

6 [www.zm.gov.lv/doc_upl/RDP_final\(2\).pdf](http://www.zm.gov.lv/doc_upl/RDP_final(2).pdf)

values the EU support his company was able to access saying, “Establishing a new forest can be expensive, and we were able to plant a larger area than would have been possible without EAFRD funding. This is important because there is not very much forested land in Zilupes district and with this project we have been able to increase the area of forest.”

No real land management had occurred on the project’s 50 hectare site for a long time previously so Mr Daudiss recalls, “The first job was to cut the overgrown bushes that had colonised the land since it was last farmed, then plough the soil and plant the young trees. Since then the grass has been cut regularly, for some areas twice in the season, to prevent it growing over the young trees and weakening or killing them.”

Early results of the EAFRD project are already helping to store carbon in the 121 000 trees (spruce and birch) that were planted, and in the new woodland’s soils. Similar afforestation projects in other parts of the EU can help to reduce climate change concerns whilst safeguarding long-term supplies of multifunctional forest benefits.

EAFRD support is helping EU Member States to promote the multifunctional features of our forests

Mr Daudiss illustrates this point by advising that, “People are employed to manage the new woodland which will produce high quality timber. This will in the future be used for construction, paper and furniture. The forest is also a popular recreational object used by people for picking berries and mushrooms.”

He continues, “Environmental benefits will be produced as forests purify the soil and air. The woods are home for many species of insects, birds, mammals, amphibians, mosses, and other plants. Lastly, an informal benefit will be a supply of fresh green birch branches, traditionally used in Latvia as decorations at the midsummer folk festival, weddings and other cultural celebrations.”



“The new forest will provide economic goods for a very long time, so I think it is a good investment.”

Valentīns Daudīss,
Forestry Field Foreman

© Tim Hudson

Multifunctional forests: adventure and fun generate new forms of income from Danish woodlands

Multifunctional forests are expected to become more common in the future as EU rural development policy and the EAFRD support initiatives by woodland managers to diversify into alternative rural business ventures.

While timber production still remains the main function of many European forests, other uses for forest ecosystems continue to grow. These include managing woodlands for ecological purposes and forests have long been popular with EU citizens as places of recreation.

Sustainable Forest Management and multifunctional forestry have been actively promoted by the Member States. This occurs through national legislation and policies on forests, as well as by the EU through its policies relevant to forests and forestry, among which is rural development policy.

At EU level, the *EU Forestry Strategy*⁷ and the *Forest Action Plan*⁸ (FAP) ensure co-ordination of the activities carried out by the Member States and those implemented by the European Commission. The Standing Forestry Committee, a high level advisory group, made up of representatives from EU countries, was assigned to ensure the effective implementation of both the EU Forestry strategy and the FAP, including monitoring the use of EAFRD support. It has acknowledged that rural areas may benefit in the long term by making use of forests' multiple functions (economic, ecologic and social) via implementation of the EAFRD forestry measures⁹.

7 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/forestry_strategy_en.htm

8 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm

9 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/opinion_en.htm

10 <http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/coste33/outputs.htm>

11 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=C2098A13-A094-502B-81FA-4C9E46AB658D

12 <http://www.gorillapark.dk>



© Gorilla Park Aps

Knowledge about best practice approaches in multifunctional forest management techniques is being developed in many countries. These complement *outcomes from an EU funded research project*¹⁰ examining forest recreation in different parts of Europe. Findings from the research showed how forest recreation can be a sustainable economic development tool in rural areas.

EAFRD co-finance is available for helping rural development projects convert and manage multifunctional EU forests. Member States are making good use of this forest support which is demonstrated by a forest park project in Denmark that received EAFRD assistance to establish a tree-climbing adventure centre.

Fun forests

Lars and Anders Ulrich own forest land on the Danish island of Funen. They had a vision for their woods which went beyond traditional timber uses. They wanted to find a way of allowing people to enjoy the nature benefits of their forests in a way that could also generate income for their rural business. Plans for a forest recreation park were prepared to fulfil these ambitions and EAFRD co-finance from the Svendborg *Leader*¹¹ Local Action Group (LAG) helped the Ulrichs launch their '*Gorilla Park*'¹² in 2010.

Recreation provides multifunctional forests with beneficial rural business opportunities

Anders Ulrich says, "With Gorilla Park our main aim is to create a healthy and sustainable natural experience for the whole family. Our park does this in a fun way and the project's adventure features can also inspire people to gain confidence from physical challenges. We want the park to be appealing to many different groups and we have designed a set of recreation services that meet all sorts of needs and interests. By doing this we also want our project to be a magnet for bringing visitors to this beautiful part of Denmark."

A Leader grant from the EAFRD of €63 758 was invested in the construction and marketing of Gorilla Park, which opened its doors to visitors in July 2010. Customer reactions to this new forest recreation facility surpassed the Ulrich's expectations and on most days they received double the amount of visitors they had originally hoped for. Some 4500 visitors enjoyed the park during its first season which saw all of the different attractions being highly used.

Positive results

"Our tree-top cycling and snowboarding routes have been favourites with both adult and younger generations and so have the tarzan swings, base jumps, zip lines and climbing walls", says Lars Ulrich. He goes on to explain that, "With the support from Leader funds we have been able to install more than 1.5 kilometres of fun and challenging tree climbing routes. Gorilla Park has completely transformed the way we view our forest. We now see that they can be very effective at generating a regular source of revenue and our visitors seem to get a great deal of satisfaction from the forests, so the project is good news for everyone involved."

Other positive outcomes from this forest recreation project come in the form of new employment opportunities. Job creation was part of the rationale that justified EAFRD support for this project and Kurt Sorknæs, Chairman of Svendborg LAG notes that, "This innovative and unusual project fits well with our Leader Local Development Strategy. It is a project which we expect will provide new jobs and provide a boost to the area's tourism sector."

Nine new jobs have been created at Gorilla Park so far and this exceeded the original plan to employ four local people. These initial successes have encouraged the Ulrichs to expand their range of attractions and in the words of Lars Ulrich, "The future of our forest looks secure and we are glad we have found such a positive alternative use for the woodlands."

“ Our forest adventure park offers local residents and tourists a completely new and unique experience in nature. ”

Lars and Anders Ulrich



© Gorilla Park Aps

High nature value woodlands: Portuguese forest environment project protects rare birds and creates business opportunities

EAFRD support can help Member States carry out actions in forests and woodlands that conserve habitat features for rare or endangered species by applying methods that also benefit land managers and other users of rural areas.

More than 75 different classifications of forest ecosystems exist in Europe. A host of assorted forest habitats are found within these woodland ecosystems which are home to a sizeable collection of animals, birds, plants, insects and other EU species. The conservation of such forest biodiversity is important for the EU's *overall biodiversity strategy*¹³ which aims to halt the loss in species by 2020.

Support from the EAFRD is playing a role in conserving forest biodiversity through special forest environment measures. These measures have budgets which focus EAFRD resources into rural development projects that conserve 'high nature value' forests. The importance of forest environment support from the EAFRD is to be reinforced and widened in the future¹⁴ so that these measures can make further contributions to tackling climate change issues like soil erosion or water quality.

By providing continuity of EAFRD support, future forest environment measures will be able to develop the beneficial work that has already been established through RDPs to conserve forest biodiversity.

Experiences from Portugal highlight an interesting approach to illustrate how EAFRD is being used to protect and enhance habitats for endangered birds in oak wood habitats.



© Luis Félix

Integrated Territorial Interventions

Forest environment funds in Portugal are helping support biodiversity in 'Natura 2000'¹⁵ areas (which contain habitats for rare EU species) and other parts of the country. Natura 2000 sites can often require careful management of land uses in order to prevent loss of the habitat features which species depend on. The Portuguese have developed a unique method for coordinating EAFRD support to achieve such habitat management objectives.

Their tool is called an Integrated Territorial Intervention (ITI) which combines EAFRD budgets from measures financing forest environment, agri-environment and other nature conservation actions. Funding for work involved in running a partnership of land users and environmental organisations is also included in the ITI's EAFRD package.

Nine ITIs operate at different Natura 2000 areas in Portugal and all share mutual aims of promoting low-intensity land use that integrates farming and forestry to achieve biodiversity and landscape conservation. Each of the ITIs has its own partnership, known as Local Support Structure (LSS), and these are acknowledged by land managers as being essential success factors for the ITIs.

13 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/policy/>

14 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/proposal3_en.pdf

15 <http://www.natura.org>

Pedro Tonel from the *Tejo Internacional* ITI underlines this opinion. His *Herdade do Fervedouro* farm is participating in the ITI and he highlights how, "With the technical support provided by the LSS, I am implementing a Multi-annual Intervention Plan (MIP) that allows me to manage my oak forest plots in a way that preserves rare bird habitats and also creates other benefits for my farm business. The LSS helped me plan the way I manage my land and I am also working with them to help find new funding from the Rural Development Programme to protect natural regeneration of young oaks from damage by wild deer."

Advice from the LSS (paid for in-part by the EAFRD) has helped this young Portuguese farmer prepare and implement an MIP that uses forest environment payments to conserve ecological landscape features like groves of native trees and shrubs. Birds protected by EU law such as vultures, eagles, kites and owls use the oak wood groves as lookouts for prey which they take from the farm's surrounding forage land.

Previous intensification trends in agriculture had removed many of these important forest habitat features and replaced them with arable fields, but Mr Tonel is keen to ensure his oaks stay in place. He is committed to the ITI approach he adopts and believes that the high nature value of local oak groves also represents an economic value. "The benefits that I have had already and those that I expect to achieve are environmental, social

Forest environment support from the EAFRD can help halt declines in EU biodiversity and develop rural areas' potential

and economic. For instance, enriching groves of trees mainly with Holm oak, and protecting natural regeneration will help to improve the vegetative condition of these groups of trees. The associated acorn production will then benefit extensive production of pork from the native *Alentejano* breed of pigs, which is one of the objectives for my farm."

Continuing, Mr Tonel states that, "Diversifying my business with the support of forest environment and other EAFRD measures help improve economic results, and even brings social benefits, since there is a real possibility of creating jobs. I am planning to invest in agro-tourism with an environmental focus. Given the exceptional features of the habitats and birds of this farm and region, there is great potential for the development of ornithological tourism, and nature tourism in general."

Forest environment assistance from the EAFRD can therefore be shown to result in not only biodiversity benefits but also tangible economic outcomes for land managers as well as interesting wildlife experiences for visitors to Europe's countryside.



“The benefits that I have had already and those I expect to achieve are environmental, social and economic.”

Pedro Tonel, *Herdade do Fervedouro* farm

Wood fuel developments: EAFRD improves production processes for generating bioenergy from coppice crops in Ireland

Coppice woods can provide renewable sources of biomass for heat energy plants and the EAFRD has helped an agricultural business in Ireland to introduce innovative technology which reinforces its position as a specialist enterprise supplying quality wood fuel chips.



© Patrick Farrelly

The term 'coppice' means a growth of small trees or a forest coming from shoots or suckers. Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management which relies on the natural tendency of tree species to generate new growth shoots from the tree stump or roots if the tree is cut or falls. Land managers of coppice woodlands repeatedly cut back young tree stems to ground level as a way of encouraging a regular harvest of new branches and stems to grow.

Different types of trees are grown commercially as coppice crops in the EU. Species like willow (*Salix*), birch (*Betula*) and poplar (*Populus*) among others provide favourable and reliable yields. Coppicing trends for these species over recent years have seen a growth in short rotation cropping methods, and much of the increased output of coppice crops has been produced on farm land. Many EU farmers have welcomed the diversification opportunities provided by woodland crops, particularly as a source of income from *bioenergy*¹⁶ fuel.

One such example can be seen in Ireland County's Meath where the EAFRD has been used by an agricultural business to increase the effectiveness of its wood chip manufacturing operations.

This EAFRD project was the brainchild of Patrick and Peter Farrelly. Their family-run agricultural business had a strong track-record of working with both farm and forest sectors. Coppicing

and wood fuel production are central parts of their enterprise and the Farrelly brothers actively encourage other farmers to take up the advantages from converting farm land into short rotation coppice woodlands.

Peter Farrelly explains that, "We use willow as our main crop which grows fast enough to give a regular harvest for up to 30 years from the initial plant. Once established the crop is relatively maintenance free compared to farm crops and they have almost no overheads. The profits are good, the wood provides a carbon neutral fuel source and the woodland acts as an excellent wildlife habitat." His brother also remarks with a wry but relevant humour that, "Willow is the most profitable and hassle-free farm enterprise we know of. I personally guarantee that nobody will phone you up at 10 o'clock on a Saturday night when you're in the pub, to say that your willow has escaped from its paddock and is causing problems on the road."

Bioenergy

Energy forms the main market for the Farrelly brothers' willow crops. In 2005 their business received EU rural development support from the Meath Partnership Leader LAG to help them set up a new venture manufacturing and supplying wood energy pellets. The new business (called Timberpro) involved cooperation with growers of other timber crops as well as

willow in order to meet their plans for processing around 900 000 tonnes of raw wood each year.

Timberpro's initial successes led the brothers to explore new options for strengthening their business. Higher productivity and improved product quality were considered possible from installing precision-built pre-drying equipment, which would extract moisture from the raw wood material before it was processed into dry wood chips.

Keeping in-line with the Timberpro's green energy credentials, the company wanted to use renewable energy as source of heat for their drier. However, no equipment of this kind was available in Ireland and so a dedicated drying facility needed to be commissioned. Technical specifications for the drying facility centred on building large boiler units which could produce enough heat to dry 20 000 tonnes of wood chip. Design, construction and installation costs for this innovative piece of wood processing equipment were considered eligible for funding support from the LAG which provided €150 000 of EAFRD towards the project's total cost of €319 325.

Now operational, Timberpro's boilers are fuelled by low grade, small sized wood particles which aid burning efficiently and produce large amounts of heat. A fan assisted motor drives dry hot air through the wood chips to reduce water content prior to the dry chip process.

Further developments from the EAFRD project are also in the pipeline. These include using excess heat from the wood chip dryers to fuel a Combined Heat and Power plant that could be linked into to Ireland's national electricity grid.



Wood fuel businesses can provide renewable sources of energy and offer environmentally friendly diversification opportunities for EU farmers

Centre of excellence

Although no dedicated forestry measures are included in the Irish RDP, this innovative rural business development project highlights how other parts of the EAFRD toolkit can support forest-related activities.

Michael Ludlow, Chief Executive at the Meath Partnership, describes the rationale behind the LAG's EAFRD grant noting that, "This type of wood fuelled boiler unit is the first of its kind in Ireland and is a demonstration model for

other renewable energy enterprises. It leads the way in this cutting-edge knowledge sector."

He continues, "What is even more interesting for us is that this specific technology was designed and developed locally at a plant just 500 metres from our LAG offices with the same company going on to manufacture and install both boiler systems. We are looking to the future and we have our sights set on establishing County Meath as a centre of excellence for all aspects of wood chip and pellet production."

“ This type of wood fuelled boiler unit is the first of its kind in Ireland and is a demonstration model for other renewable energy enterprises. ”

Michael Ludlow,
Chief Executive at the Meath Partnership

Forest employment support: Romanian EAFRD project creates fourteen new forestry jobs

Forestry employs large numbers of people in Europe's countryside and the sector represents a key driver of Member States' rural economies. EAFRD assistance through the RDPs can help promote forest employment through projects which improve forest management, develop forestry products and extend forested areas.

Conclusions from a *recent European conference*¹⁷ examining the future role of EU forests on a global scale noted that forest based industries provide jobs for more than two million people in the EU. Recognition was also awarded to the fact that, "In the face of the unprecedented economic and food crises, forests have a prominent role to play in sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation."

Closer examination of forestry's employment impact in the EU can be gained from *EUROSTAT data*¹⁸ which reveals how Romania is one of rural Europe's foremost forestry employers. The *Romanian RDP*¹⁹ reports that forestry has significant potential to stimulate national economic growth and rural development. However limitations on human capital, infrastructure and processing capacity are identified by the RDP as some of the obstacles which can limit this potential.

To counter these rural development challenges, the RDP provides co-finance from EAFRD budgets for projects run by small forestry businesses. The money is available to (among other things) help companies improve the competitiveness of their operations by investing in modern tools, machinery and equipment for harvesting, transport and processing of timber. Sustainable approaches and employment goals are closely linked to this sort of EAFRD project activity which needs to generate new jobs, promote labour productivity and operate with low environmental impacts.



© European Union

Demand for Romania's RDP funds from forestry firms has been encouraging and a range of positive outcomes have been created as a result, such as those at the Oct Trans wood-harvesting business located in Northern Transylvania.

Modernisation benefits

Oct Trans is co-owned by Gabriel Tarnavan and the company saw a business expansion opportunity that arose following storm damage to timber plantations in Suceava and Bistrita counties. Speaking about this EAFRD project during the 2011 AGRARIA fair in Romania, Mr Tarnavan described how Oct Trans was aware that, "Fallen trees needed to be felled and removed in order to help regenerate the woodland's productivity. We won the contract to do this work but we soon realised we could work more effectively if we invested in modern equipment to help us carry out the tasks."

An application to the RDP for financial assistance from the EAFRD was successful and helped pay for around €216 000 towards new forest equipment costing the equivalent of nearly €515 000 in total. "The money we received from the EU made a major contribution to our business since it meant we could improve our performance and ensure that we would honour the conditions of our contract. This was very important and it helped us to build good working relationships with our client that we still have today," comments Mr Tarnavan.

17 http://www.ebcd.org/pdf/en/60-Conclusions_EN.pdf

18 http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=for_emp_lfs&lang=en

19 http://www.madr.ro/pages/dezvoltare_rurala/nrdp-consolidated-version-june-2010.pdf

Funding was used to purchase different types of tractors including those capable of low-impact approaches for harvesting and extraction of timber. Mobile office facilities were also co-funded by the EAFRD project which, in addition to facilitating business efficiencies, provided improved working conditions for Oct Trans employees.

Mr Tarnavan appreciates the importance of forestry to the rural economy in this part of Romania and he is pleased that, "We created 14 new jobs in our business expansion project and the income from these workers is good for their families and communities."

EAFRD support on this project has thus helped to increase numbers of rural jobs in Romania and the employees have also gained new skills in operating high-tech forestry equipment (which can be used to advance their career prospects). In addition, productivity benefits associated with the modern machinery skills have played a part in protecting forest environmental features because the new technologies lead to less pollution risks from oil spillages and reduce the amount of waste produced during timber extraction.

Business confidence

Another important spin off from the EAFRD project has been a boost in business confidence at Oct Trans. They now feel they

Forest and wood-related industries offer significant opportunities for sustainable economic growth in Europe's countryside

are adequately equipped to compete in the forest harvesting sector and are currently looking to diversify into timber processing. Their new plans involve adding value to the timber they harvest, as well as recycling wood wastes.

A follow-up RDP application is being prepared for this business diversification venture which will draw on Oct Trans' previous experiences in securing RDP funds. Referring to the application process for EAFRD assistance Mr Tarnavan concludes that, "The biggest challenge was to admit that there is a certain bureaucracy involved in putting together such applications. We realised that knowing forest management would not be enough for applying for funds. Business planning involves much more specialised knowledge. Seeking professional business planning advice from a specialised company was a wise thing to do that turned the project idea into a successful application."

Such lessons are being transferred to the new EAFRD application which includes proposals that will help to further sustain and strengthen local employment in rural Romania.



“
The money we received from the EU made a major
contribution to our business.”

Gabriel Tarnavan, Oct Trans

Protecting forests' potential: EAFRD project helps restore storm damaged woodland in Lithuania

Sustaining the long-term productivity of forest resources is an important aspect of EU rural development policy and EAFRD support can help Member States to carry out restoration action for forests damaged by natural disasters.



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Changes in Europe's climatic conditions over recent years have had differing types of effects on EU forests. Droughts, forest fires, floods and storms can have major adverse impacts on forest ecosystems (in terms of both productivity and biodiversity). Figures from the *European Environment Agency*²⁰ confirm a steady increase in the incidence of natural disasters across Europe. A framework of EU policy guidance is facing this challenge by working towards better *preparing our forests for climate change*²¹.

Member States have access to specialised EAFRD support for protecting forests from long-term damage caused by storms, fire, drought and pest infestation. The scope of this EAFRD support covers funding for actions that help to strengthen forests' ability to cope with natural disasters, plus also financial assistance involved in restoring forest production potential following damage by natural disasters.

Eligible costs for such EAFRD support are flexible and can be used to address a wide range of preventative or rehabilitation purposes. In addition, the EAFRD rules for these types of forest projects do not set limits controlling the proportion of EU funds that can be used to respond to natural disasters. Similarly, no eligibility criteria exist for the categories of people, businesses or organisations who can apply for the funding.

As a result, the EAFRD's forestry support systems hold important and beneficial rapid reaction capacities which can be used by different stakeholders in different circumstances. An example of how this works in practice can be shown from an EAFRD project in Lithuania, where the EAFRD has helped to restore a business woman's forest after it was damaged by the country's worst storm in recent records.

Storm damage

Around 412 000 cubic meters of Lithuanian wood were estimated as being lost during the thunder storm of August 8th 2010. High winds reaped havoc in forests throughout the countryside, and woods around the village of Darsunickis in Kaisiadorys were badly affected. One of these forest plots in Darsunickis is owned by Daina Balasevičienė who received EAFRD support to help her restore her damaged forest.

Ms Balasevičienė explains, "I am not a professional forester but I take care to look after my forest which I inherited from my parents and grandparents. They taught me what I know about how to manage my forest but I am a working mother and so my time for the forest is limited. My cousin Gintautas helps me manage the forest to keep it in a productive state and I employ local contractors if I need to."

20 <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/mapping-the-impacts-of-natural>

21 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>

Climate changes and natural hazards affect the functionality of EU forest ecosystems

“Contractors were very useful to help me to repair the damage caused by the storm. The damage was terrible and it blew down a large part of my forest which created problems because fire risks were increased by the open space that was littered with broken trees and branches. The storm also reduced the productivity of my family’s forest so I wanted to get it cleared and restored as soon as I could”.

Working as a director for a regional business information service, Ms Balasevičienė was aware that EU funding might be able to help her. She contacted the RDP authority to apply for assistance and an EAFRD grant equivalent to around €2340 was subsequently approved. This covered approximately 80% of the costs involved in redressing the storm-damaged forest.

“I used the funding from the Rural Development Programme to help pay contractors to clear, clean and replant 1.3 hectares of damaged woodlands. They prepared the soil in the correct way to protect the environment and we also included fire breaks in the planting as a safety consideration for later on. I invested my own funds in this project and I am very pleased that the outcomes will mean that my family’s forest will stay in a good condition for a long time to come.”

In the future Ms Balasevičienė expects to harvest timber crops from her woods and she is content that the full productivity has been restored. “At the moment I am just happy that the forest is cleaned and replanted. It can now be looked after and properly managed again” she says.

“*I invested my own funds in this project and I am very pleased that the outcomes will mean that my family’s forest will stay in a good condition for a long time to come.*”

Daina Balasevičienė



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Forest tourism: Slovakian EAFRD co-finance used to convert traditional timber cottage into luxury forest chalet

Recreation offers EU forest regions with important rural development opportunities and EAFRD support is being used to broaden the range of quality tourism services that are available for visitors to enjoy whilst staying in EU forest areas.

EU contributions to celebrating 2011 as the United Nations International Year of forests include appreciation of the diverse benefits that forests provide. In its publication titled *Europe's forests sustaining life*²², the EU lists some of the multifunctional services that our woodlands provide us with. These underline the fact that forest areas are popular places for people to relax and pursue outdoor activities. A *Forest Communication Strategy*²³ produced by the European Commission in 2011 also highlights the tourism value of our forests.

Forest tourism is considered a rural development tool suitable for both public and private sector forests. The *Confederation of European Forest Owners*²⁴ for instance note how their members' privately-owned forests are used by visitors, "who come for hiking, biking, jogging, horse-riding, bird watching, berry picking, meditation and other leisure activities."

These sentiments are echoed by *EUSTAFOR*²⁵ (a body representing Europe's State-owned forest companies) in their recent *case*

*study materials*²⁶ which includes a demonstration from Poland of what can be achieved by converting unused forest buildings into tourist accommodation.

Other Member States are taking advantage of the rural development opportunities offered by nature tourism in forests. As part of this process, businesses and organisations in EU forest areas are improving the range and quality of local tourism infrastructures. Slovakia is one of the Member States noted by *commentators*²⁷ as making progress with this, and a Slovakian example from the *ENRD's RDP project database*²⁸ shows how the EAFRD has been involved.

Quality approach

EAFRD support for this Slovakian project (from Roháče in the mountainous border region near Poland) led to the restoration and conversion of a traditional forest cottage into high standard tourist accommodation.



© Jan Urban

22 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/publi/leaflet-2010_en.pdf

23 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/publi/communication-strategy_en.pdf

24 <http://www.cepf-eu.org>

25 <http://www.eustafor.eu>

26 <http://www.eustafor.eu/failid/File/Publications/Ecosystems%20Services%20Case%20Studies.pdf>

27 See: Management of Recreation and Nature Based Tourism in European Forests, by Ulrike Pröbstl <http://goo.gl/sO1UD>

28 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/en/projects_home.cfm

A total of €73 957 from the EAFRD was provided for the chalet construction work. These EU funds were awarded on the basis that the project would support new employment in the forest region.

Designed with a luxurious finish, the chalet's high quality specifications also held good potential for attracting new visitors to enjoy the surrounding forest area's natural assets.

Chalet owner, Ján Urban, describes the reason why he thought it was a good idea to seek EAFRD support for starting up his tourism business. "We have hills, waterfalls, lakes, natural thermal pools and lots of unique forest wildlife here that visitors like. Skiing and mountain climbing are also reachable within 10 km from our chalet."

Mr Urban understands the relevance of his EAFRD support saying, "The importance of similar tourism projects for this region is incalculable. Such projects support the spread of other services and create jobs for local people. Without EU co-financing, this process would take much longer."

Special efforts were made to ensure that the construction work involved in converting the timber cottage respected local building techniques. Mr Urban notes how these traditional log house details have been well received by visitors. "Feedback from our customers is very positive thanks to the location of the chalet and maintaining a distinctive architecture, which together with sensitive reconstruction improved the comfort of accommodation significantly."

Now an established part of the region's forest tourism infrastructure, the 'Jasenica Cottage' log house provides high quality accommodation for up to eight people and is open all-year round. EAFRD was used carefully to help make maximum use of the chalet space which includes a kitchen and common room.

European citizens enjoy spending their spare time (and holiday money) in forest areas

Forest investments

Forest tourism investments like Mr Urban's chalet can be assisted by the EAFRD throughout the EU. Dedicated budget lines are available through most RDPs for rural tourism projects that (among other things) encourage tourism activities, conserve or upgrade rural heritage, and create new businesses.

“The importance of similar tourism projects for this region is incalculable.”

Ján Urban, Jasenica Cottage



Woodland culture: oak festival in Belgium's Flanders helps rural residents to conserve the countryside

Trees are awarded cultural value in many parts of Europe and certain trees receive special protection as heritage monuments. Peoples' historical connections with such individual trees can be nurtured to create nature conservation benefits for a wider range of EU forest resources.

*'Forests for People'*²⁹ was agreed by the United Nations as a central theme for its International Year of Forests in 2011. This aimed to highlight the value of forests in terms of their "economic and social relationship with humankind". A plethora of events were held under this 'Forests for People' banner on a worldwide scale to celebrate the International Year of forests 2011. These included actions which raised the profile of forests' cultural heritage value (as well as their environmental and other socio-economic benefits).

Forests serve a variety of cultural and symbolic functions. In Europe, for example, forests have been the subject of mythical legends or folk law and older woodlands are known to have strong ancestral links with rural areas' cultural heritage. Individual characteristics and histories associated with Europe's oldest tree specimens have led to some of them being protected by law.

Various reasons are associated with the cultural interest in historic trees. As survivors from the past, they may represent relicts of former landscapes and trees can also act as landmarks in history. Cases exist where Europe's older tree specimens are protected because they mark the sites of key cultural events like battles, societal meetings or political agreements. Even trees linked to incidents such as Newton discovering his gravity theory are protected.

Management of trees holding heritage value is promoted by the EU to reduce risks of their damage or loss. Raising awareness about the relationship between specific trees and local society can also help to secure support for the sustainability of a special tree from neighbouring communities. This type of support for trees as a rural heritage resource can attract financial assistance from the EAFRD, and Belgium's Flanders region has been the location of an example where the RDP helped to set up a project preserving ancient oak specimens.

Heritage conservation

Historic trees are known as Living Heritage (Levend Erfgoed) in the Flemish language and they form part of the Flanders region's cultural landscape. The EAFRD project in question targeted its support towards a Living Heritage tree in the province of Limburg. Here, near the village of Lummen in Lower Kempen, an old pollarded oak called locally the '1000 year old oak' (which is actually estimated to be approximately 700 years old) is growing. With a circumference that stretches nearly six and half meters in total, the '1000 year old oak' has been protected as a natural heritage monument in Flanders since 1940.

Despite its cultural relevance to the regional landscape, the old oak and hundreds of other pollarded oaks that were discovered in the area had fallen into neglect. The EAFRD project was



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29 <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/pdf/TudorRose.pdf>

therefore established to reverse this decline and also use the '1000 year old oak' as a rural development tool for promoting involvement in actions of landscape care by rural residents.

Ilse Ideler, Director of the Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen which organised the oak preservation project, tells how. "Our organisation's job involves encouraging people to connect with our landscape and nature. The oak project has been successful in helping us achieve these aims. We have a saying that 'unknown is unloved' so we are pleased that through this EU funded initiative many more people now know a lot more about the 1000 year old oak and pollarded oaks. As a result, the trees are taken care of again by the community."

Ms Ideler and her colleagues planned their EAFRD project carefully so that its public participation aspects could be complemented by scientific studies to gain management information about how best to preserve the trees for the long term. Findings from the research helped to fully restore the oak.

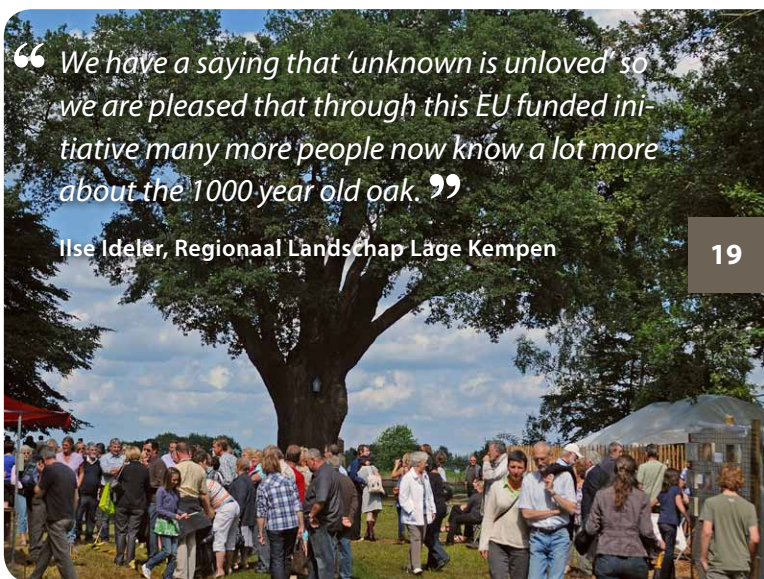
Schoolchildren also contributed to the project by collecting acorns that were used to produce 1000 seedlings from the veteran tree. Being the off-spring of this ancient forest specimen, the new young oak trees have now been replanted and will continue to sustain the provenance of Limburg's oaks for centuries to come. "Results from our oak project have been very useful for other landscape care activities that we are involved with. These help farmers to use agri-environment schemes for restoring lapsed oak pollards in the Lage Kempen", says Ms Ideler.

Oak Festival

Overall the Limburg oak project received an EAFRD grant of €190 000. A proportion of this money was used to launch an awareness raising campaign about the oak and the regional landscape's value as a socio-economic resource. Ms Ideler explains, "We produced a set of information services based around the oak theme. These have been used by the community and also by tourists. The services include interpretation boards, teaching materials, and all of our project information is also hosted on a state-of-the-art interactive website [www.duizendjarigeik.be]. A variety of different material is presented on the website to show how important the oak trees have been, and can be, for local people and for biodiversity."

EU rural development funds can help valorise our forests' cultural characteristics

Contents on the website have been especially designed to act as educational resources for local schools. Environmental, economic, historical, health and cultural topics are covered. Recipes were published using acorn ingredients and oral history research was carried out with older people from the surrounding villages. Outcomes documented useful records and memories about the actual coppicing processes, plus how the pollarded oaks had been used for wood fuel.



“ We have a saying that 'unknown is unloved' so we are pleased that through this EU funded initiative many more people now know a lot more about the 1000 year old oak. ”

Ilse Ideler, Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen

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A special oak festival then took place to publicise and celebrate all of the EAFRD project's work. Festival goers were also able to listen to oak poetry, taste the acorn recipes and find out more about how to look after the environment. Summing up the festival, Ms Ideler is enthusiastic that, "Our event really helped people from this picturesque part of the Flanders countryside to discover and connect with their environment. This has made a constructive difference to the way the landscape is cared for now."

Mountain forests: EAFRD project strengthens the long-term viability of an agroforestry business in upland Slovenia

Europe's mountains experience particular natural constraints and the suitability of forestry to upland conditions can represent useful development opportunities for rural businesses from around the Member States' mountain areas.

Forests are the most common land cover of Europe's mountains and the *European Environment Agency*³⁰ estimates that wooded areas account for around 40% of land use in our uplands. Forestry is therefore important to the rural economies in mountain areas and the EU's *Standing Forestry Committee*³¹ has noted a need to consider the special conditions faced by mountain forests. The Committee promotes the creation of specific and effective measures for supporting forestry in mountainous areas in order to secure socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Recent *proposals for EU rural development policy after 2013*³² also stress that mountain areas warrant special attention for RDP assistance, including the possibility to implement thematic sub-programmes for mountain areas. The importance of forestry (in areas defined by the new EAFRD proposals as experiencing 'natural constraints') is recognised by organisations like *Euromontana*³³. This pan European organisation is a member of the ENRD and considers that EU mountain forests could be better used.

Euromontana encourages enterprises working in mountain forests to gain from rural development projects such as those that improve the competitiveness of timber productivity, add value

to basic wood resources, organise supply chains, or promote sustainable approaches to quality.

All of these forestry goals can be achieved through support from the EAFRD, and an agroforestry project example located in northern Slovenia shows what type of difference EU rural development funds can make to the business operations of a mountain forest enterprise.

Upland agroforestry

Stanko Hribernik and his family manage land at an altitude of 600 metres in the Velenje municipality of Slovenia. Here the Hriberniks work 21.5 hectares of forests as part of a mixed farm enterprise which also rears organic livestock and produces arable crops.

The farm has a permit to harvest up to 210 cubic metres of wood annually and this timber in its raw form has a limited value. However, the Hriberniks were aware that they could generate more money from their mountain woods if they could process the logs on-site into timber for use in products like roof trusses, boards, joinery timber, or pallet products. Such added



© Tim Hudson

30 <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-ecological-backbone>

31 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/opinion_on_forestry_measures_en.pdf

32 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/proposal3_en.pdf

33 <http://www.euromontana.org/en/themes-de-travail/forests.html>

value timber products sell for better prices but accessing this opportunity for increased income required a considerable outlay of funds to upgrade and modernise the farm's existing sawmill facility.

Support from the EAFRD totalling €46 954 provided the catalyst to help Mr Hribernik accomplish his business development plans. "If no EAFRD support was granted it is unlikely that we would have decided to invest in modernisation of the wood processing facility", says Mr Hribernik.

Thanks to the EAFRD though he has been able to take forward his agroforestry aspirations by purchasing new automated saw technology as well as a specialised dust collector and low-voltage power connector. He also used part of his EAFRD grant to offset the costs of a new forklift truck that was needed to improve the productivity of the family's timber processing venture.

His investments happened in two phases. By June 2010 the new saw for cutting logs and the forklift truck had been purchased. By May 2011 the dust collector and the low-voltage connector were on site and functional.

Positive outcomes

Outcomes of these investments have significantly improved the capacity of the Hribernik's wood processing facility. Mr Hribernik describes how, "The business benefits of the project include better quality of wood processing and we can produce a wider range of products. Our productivity has increased by 30 %."

Modernisation has also led to cost savings from the new technology which uses 10% less energy than the old sawmill equipment. Environmental benefits are thus also part of this EAFRD project example and the farm reuses wood waste from its new sawmill facility as wood chips for heating.

Furthermore, the modern technology has contributed to safer and faster operations in the sawmill and reduced manual work. Mr Hribernik sees this as a positive long-term outcome stating that, "It is now easier and safer to work in our sawmill. This is good because it gives greater scope for the next generation in the family to work with the farm's woodlands. We expect to

Forestry provides economic development opportunities for parts of rural Europe that experience 'natural constraints', like many mountain areas

recoup the investment in five years and in the long term we intend to retain and further develop the forest and wood activities. We also plan to invest in a new and bigger wood processing building."

Future horizons appear prosperous for Slovenian mountain businesses like the Hribernik's forestry venture, and EAFRD support has been an important success factor in the family farm's development.



© Stanko Hribernik

“*The business benefits of the project include better quality of wood processing and we can produce a wider range of products. Our productivity has increased by 30 %.*”

Stanko Hribernik

The European Network for Rural Development ONLINE

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

The screenshot shows the ENRD website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with options like Home, Policy in Action, Country, Themes, Leader, Networks & Networking, Publications & Media, Events & Meetings, and Info. Below the menu is a search bar and a 'Share' button. The main content area includes a map of Europe with country flags, a 'Connect with EU' section, and a 'Key Tools' section with a 'Leader Gateway' button. There are also news items and a 'News' section.

Connect with EU
Click on a country flag to connect with rural Europe

Key Tools
Leader Gateway

News
International Green Week in Berlin

POLICY IN ACTION
Rural development policy overview
Rural development policy in figures
RDP project database
Improving implementation
CAP towards 2020
Communicating Rural Development

COUNTRY
THEMES
Agriculture
Environment
Public Goods
Entrepreneurship

Local Food And Short Supply Chains
Forestry
Innovation and ICT
Rural-Urban Linkages
Social aspects
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FARNET
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