

# Danish–Lithuanian Project “Afforestation of Abandoned Agricultural Land Based on Sustainable Land use Planning and Environmentally Sound Forest Management”

**Project presentation**

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Over the last decade increasingly more agricultural land in Lithuania have become abandoned and is no longer being regularly cultivated. Such abandoned farmlands can be economically re-activated by shifting to the alter-

native land uses. One such alternative land use is forestry. It is, however, very important that new forests are planned and established taking into consideration economic, ecological and social aspects.

In order to promote sustainable planning and establishment of new forests on agricultural lands in Lithuania, the project "Afforestation of Abandoned Agricultural Land Based on Sustainable Planning and Environmentally Sound Forest Management" was initiated in May 1999 by the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment, with financial and technical support from the Danish Ministry of Environment and Energy. The project was implemented within the Department of Forests and Protected Areas, and technical assistance was provided by the Danish consulting firm, Danagro a/s, jointly with Danish Forestry Extension, a national secretariat for private forest owners' associations in Denmark.

The planned duration of the project was 2 years followed by an extension of 9 months. The project ended on December 31 2001. Danish government for the implementation of the project allocated 3.9 million Litass to be used for technical assistance, contractors, training and education, equipment and machinery, establishment of demonstration forests on private land and various operational costs.

The project was implemented at three levels – national, county and regional – the latter consisting of a number of pilot afforestation projects as well as other activities in Utena and Lazdijai regions within Alytus and Utena counties.

### Project implementation was focused on:

*1. Formulation of policies and strategies at the national level, favouring sustainable afforestation, and contribution to the establishment of a revised framework and procedures concerning legislation and planning for sustainable afforestation*

The fact that the project was implemented at national, county and regional levels has encouraged the project staff to become aware of problems related to afforestation not only through reading the legal acts related to this activity but also through work with county and regional officials as well as landowners who actually want to afforest their land. The reality was that even though the regulations governing afforestation seemed to be in place, but actual implementation of those regulations was impossible due to the possible different interpretation by local authorities as well as complexity of afforestation procedures to be followed by the landowners wanting to establish forest. Since afforestation as a process in some years resulting in forest cover is affected and itself affects many other spheres of activities such as agriculture, nature in general and specifically biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage conservation and landscape preservation and improvement, the project was a facilitator in a consensus building process among many different institutions representing those mentioned spheres of activities. The aim of such a cooperation with the landowners, officials at local and national levels, as well as with representatives of different other institutions dealing with nature, cultural heritage, landscape, and other, was to identify the main problems hindering afforestation and develop recommendation on how to improve regulations for afforestation, which would promote afforestation but at the same time would ensure that forests are established in a sustainable manner and are not causing now and in the future any harm to the existing values but rather will improve them both in the short and long run. As a result, the project together with the project partners and stakeholders identified contradictions in the present legal acts governing afforestation as well as bottlenecks hindering afforestation

process and proposed changes in the regulatory framework aiming to promote afforestation.

*2. Development of proper land use planning procedures, and promotion of decentralized land use planning and mapping processes from the national to the county and regional levels;*

Land use planning for afforestation in Utena and Lazdijai regions based on effective regulations and on the guidelines prepared jointly by Danish and Lithuanian consultants was carried out. According to the present regulations land use planning for afforestation is mainly based on economic criteria treating the other aspects as less important. One of the objectives of the Danish-Lithuanian afforestation project was to promote such afforestation, based on economic, ecological and social aspects of the land use. As the result the project has decided together with project stakeholders and interested parties to draft guidelines for land use planning for afforestation and test them out in the pilot regions in parallel with the land use planning using the criteria embodied in the existing regulations. Main goal of such an activity was after testing, to draft realistic and easy-to-apply regulations for land use planning for afforestation. County and regional specialists, and public in general were involved in the planning to a great extent; public awareness about the planning was raised through mass media and direct meetings with public. So called alternative land use planning based on the draft guidelines, was to a maximum extent decentralized leaving more responsibilities and decisions to the local authorities and the public. After the technical part of the planning was finished, a comprehensive analysis of the planning process was carried out, and advantages and disadvantages of the legal and alternative land use planning highlighted. A part of the analysis dealt with inconsistency in the present legislation. Based on the accumulated experience and analysis, draft of the legal acts governing afforestation were prepared and presented to the decision-makers, project stakeholders, and interested parties. Planning was done by the State Land Survey Institute, Division of Landscape and Territorial Planning.

*3. Criteria and methods for afforestation, and the development of appropriate technical methods and approaches to afforestation of marginal agricultural land;*

The project also tested different silvicultural techniques and established demonstration forests under different management objectives, on both public and private land in Utena and Lazdijai region. In both regions 36 ha of private land and 100 ha of public land were afforested using different soil preparation methods, choice and mix of species, stand protection measures. The project has together with the selected landowners went through the legal procedure to get the permissions for afforestation, which provided project staff and consultants with a unique possibility to be in "the coat of the landowner" and learn about the complexity of this process. Such an experience was extremely valuable in drafting the new regulations aiming to promote afforestation. More information about the demonstration forests could be found in the article "Demonstration areas for afforestation on abandoned agricultural land in Lithuania" written by the afforestation consultants directly involved in the establishment of the areas.

*4. Advancement of the knowledge on afforestation through information, campaigns, training, study tours to neighboring countries and within Lithuania for policy makers, technical staff and landowners.*

Advancement of the knowledge on sustainable afforestation among landowners, public in general, specialists

as well as decision makers was one of the crucial activities during the project implementation. The project has organized 3 study tours to Denmark and 1 to Poland for policy- and decision-makers as well as technical staff; workshops for landowners on practical afforestation matters and training courses for consultants were held; as well as, nation-wide awareness campaign to promote afforestation consisting of a drawing contest for school children on the topic "My family forests". Among the other

activities, forest planting celebration was organized. Project also widely promoted sustainable afforestation through mass media – newspapers, journals, radio, national and local TV. Video film about afforestation was developed and so called "cook book" about practical afforestation for the landowners published. These extension materials were widely presented to the landowners and project stakeholders through mass media and further disseminated to the landowners and others interested in afforestation.