

Project network meeting in Latvia

To build a long-term regional partnership, the project meeting was organized for project partners and NGOs active in biodiversity conservation. Representatives from farming sectors, farmer associations and authorities also participated in the meeting. During this meeting NGOs network was strengthened and widened and it is used as the basis for transferring knowledge and experience between countries in regard of traditional and innovative farming methods supporting biodiversity. Project network meeting took place on November 18 – 20, 2009. It was held in Apšuciems, Latvia.

Programme

Apšuciems, Latvia, 18 – 20 November, 2009.

Wednesday, 18th November

14.00 – 19.00 Arrival and accommodation

Thursday, 19th November

- 9.00 – 10.00** Registration and Coffee
- 10.00 – 10.20** Opening words and introduction on project Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity
Inga Račinska, Latvian Fund for Nature
- 10.20 – 10.40** TRINET - project idea and possibilities for network widening and follow-up projects
Eckhard Jedicke, TRINET project
- 10.40 – 11.00** Farming for biodiversity in Norway
Ann Norderhaug and Bolette Bele, Nordic Cultural Landscape Organization and Bioforsk
- 11.00 – 11.20** Developing meat production for conservation of traditional pastures and biodiversity
Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden
- 11.20 – 11.40** Coffee break
- 11.40 – 12.00** Agri-Environment payments (AEM) in Latvia
Žanete Zaharova, The Rural Support Service
- 12.00 – 12.20** Current situation in farming for biodiversity in Belarus
Evgeny Shirokov, Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists
- 12.20 – 12.40** Finnish traditional rural biotopes, current situation and ideas how to increase quality management
Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland
- 12.40 – 14.00** Lunch
- 14.00 – 14.20** Organic farming in Latvia.
Dace Kalniņa, Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture
- 14.20 – 14.40** Landscape qualities as a potential for alpine agriculture
Ann Norderhaug, Bolette Bele and Marianne Østerlie, The Nordic Cultural Landscape Association, Norwegian Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research (Bioforsk) and Sør-Trøndelag University

- 14.40 – 15.00** Marketing of ecological meat products - practical examples from Sweden
Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden
- 15.00 – 15.20** Coffee break
- 15.20 – 15.40** Linking state institutions and NGOs for rural development and farming for biodiversity
Anita Anševica, State Rural Network
- 15.40 – 16.00** The Koski Manor: Cherishing traditions and keeping up with the present
Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland
- 16.00 – 16.20** Hay making and biomass energy for nature conservation-oriented grassland use
Brigitte Gerger, Weideverein Lafnitztal
- 16.20 – 16.40** Coffee break

Discussions

- 17.00 – 18.30** *Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET*
- *discussion on future TRINET follow-up projects*
 - *discussion on future networking between partner organizations and TRINET*
- 17.00 – 18.30** *Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity*
- *preparation of guidebook “Nordic-Baltic-Russian/Belarus solutions in farming for biodiversity”*
 - *organization of study trip in Sweden*
 - *organization of study trip in Belarus*
 - *discussion on future networking between partner organizations and TRINET*

After discussion *Small event*

19.15 – 20.15 *Dinner*

Friday, 20th November

8.00 – 9.00 *Breakfast*

9.00 ~ 17.00 *Seminar excursion*

During November 18th – 20th, 2009 the workshop focusing on the role of farming for conservation of biodiversity in rural areas was held in hotel Villa Anna, Apšuciems at the Western coast of Gulf of Riga.

The purposes of workshop were to exchange best experience in farming for biodiversity in Baltic and Nordic countries and Belarus and to organize it as a forum for discussions among participants in relation to the following topics:

- experience about the overall situation on biodiversity in rural areas (assessment, policy, existing support schemes *etc.*);
- best practical examples of farming for biodiversity;
- possibilities for further TRINET follow-up projects.

Workshop was also attended by representatives from the project Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET. Involving representatives from the Nordic countries and Belarus made our workshop as a joint seminar where not only practical examples of farming for biodiversity were discussed, but also much attention was devoted to international experience, further networking between the Baltic and Nordic countries and Belarus, and with the TRINET network.

Summary of presentations

Opening words and introduction on project Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity (*Inga Račinska, Latvian Fund for Nature*)

Ms. Račinska opened the workshop by welcoming all the participants to Apšuciems, and pointed out the importance of the topic of this workshop to share best experience in farming for biodiversity and to strengthen cooperation between NGOs within project region. She emphasized that there are different solutions on how to maintain traditional rural landscapes in different countries and that makes exchange of experience between countries very valuable.

Further Ms. Račinska briefly informed on project objectives and activities. She also discussed further networking between the project partners and advantages from cooperation with the TRINET network.

TRINET - project idea and possibilities for network widening and follow-up projects (*Eckhard Jedicke, TRINET project*)

During his presentation Mr. Jedicke introduce workshop participants with the TRINET network idea and main aims of this network. He also gave an overview on situation of grassland management in Europe.

According TRINET philosophy ecologically optimal land use is (*should be*) simultaneously economically and technically rewarding land use. But in practice there are threats such as land abandonment or intensification of land use. To mitigate the impact of these threats on grasslands, TRINET promotes multifunctional grassland farming initiatives that are beneficial for grassland biodiversity and for farmers.

Mr. Jedicke presented main partnership themes of TRINET partner-organizations:

1. Finding the most effective ways of delivering biodiversity;
2. Evaluating Rural Development and other support tools which are available;
3. Building up systems to make farming for landscapes and biodiversity economically sustainable.

He also presented main partnership actions:

1. Networking;
2. Pooling and disseminating information;
3. Organising and financing the tasks.

Farming for biodiversity in Norway (*Ann Norderhaug and Bolette Bele, The Nordic Cultural Landscape Association and Bioforsk*)

At the beginning of her presentation Ms. Norderhaug introduced with Nordic Cultural Landscape. This NGO was established twenty years ago to give the possibility for farmers, nature conservationists and landscape planners to co-operate in management of rural landscapes and habitats. Other organisation working with rural landscapes and habitats is Norwegian regional institute for agricultural and environmental research Bioforsk. Ms. Norderhaug further briefly informed about general situation how farming for biodiversity is supported in Norway. As Norway isn't member of EU, there are remarkable differences at political level and support tools provided by authorities. There have been extensive studies on valuable rural landscapes and habitats of high importance for biodiversity, but country-wide total survey is still lacking. However, there is enough knowledge accumulated to manage and preserve cultural landscapes in Norway. All known valuable habitats are mapped and this information is available at website www.dirnat.no and authorities are responsible for updating this information (where it is located, what is a value and what kind of management needed for each habitat). There is also financial support provided at local, regional and national level for management of semi-natural habitats. Payments may be given to support different management activities, e.g. grazing for open landscape management, to support summer farming or to make fencing on grazed habitats. Due to cooperation between agricultural and environmental authorities there are good conditions for balanced rural development and open landscape management. However, during evaluation of existing support schemes needs for more knowledge's and more money to support biodiversity directly were found. Action or management plans for threatened nature types and valuable agricultural landscapes and development of Nature indexes were recognized as powerful tools to preserve the biodiversity of rural landscapes.

Developing meat production for conservation of traditional pastures and biodiversity (*Sven-Olov Borgegård, WWF, Sweden*)

Mr. Borgegård informed about open landscape management projects implemented by WWF Sweden. Up to now there are ca. 40 000 hectares fenced and grazed to manage grasslands in Sweden. Some projects were carried out also in Estonia and in North-West Russia. Mr. Borgegård stressed importance of close contacts with farmers and local authorities to be successful in grazing projects on the ground. During grazing projects it is also important to build barns and manure-holdings. The WWF Sweden helps to identify funding opportunities to build these buildings. Farmers are key persons with double mission – they produce food and they 'produce' landscape. But for long-term grassland management, these grazing projects should be economically viable. The solution for the sustainable management of grasslands is production of "green meat" or "grassland beef". It provides income for farmers and secures conservation of biodiversity in pastures. Economic benefice is achieved by producing extra high quality of meat (ecological and rich in taste). Another very important thing in these grazing projects is a co-operation between farmers to supply meat to customers all year round.

Agri-Environment payments (AEM) in Latvia (*Žanete Zaharova, The Rural Support Service*)

During her presentation Ms. Zaharova informed on existing Agri-environmental schemes in Latvia. She briefly discussed objectives, existing sub-measures, and basic rules for application. Sub-measure Preservation biodiversity in grasslands (alias Preservation of biologically valuable grasslands) was discussed in details.

To apply for this measure:

- in case of extensive grazing – grazing of 0.4 to 0.9 livestock units per 1 ha. Pasturing intensity must be chosen within the permitted interval and according to grassland type, location, climate and other conditions to prevent grassland over-grazing;
- in case of late mowing – mowing shall be performed between August 1 and September 15, and the mowed grass shall be collected, removed from the field, or chopped.

Ca. 32.3 thousand hectares of grasslands are managed within sub-measure Preservation biodiversity in grasslands in 2009.

Agriculture for biodiversity in Belarus (*Evgeny Shirokov, Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists*)

Explaining ecological situation in agriculture in Belarus, Mr. Shirokov pointed to the historical background. Since the Soviet time, there was a lot of chemistry (fertilizers, pesticides *etc.*) used in Belarus. This led to contamination of soil and decline of natural fertility.

In nowadays Belarus ecological farming is used mostly in small farms. Large farms mostly have very intensive farming practice.

In his further speech Mr. Shirokov focused on amount of fertilizers and other chemicals used in different European countries. He compared situation in Belarus with situation in other countries.

Mr. Shirokov informed that there are virtually no regulations developed for ecological farming in Belarus. However, there are active NGOs that work on eco-labelling and market development. Market of ecological products has great potential. It was found that more than 40 % of customers are willing to pay more for high quality products. However, majority of ecological products are produced in very small farms with limited capacity to make continuous supply.

Finnish traditional rural biotopes, current situation and ideas how to increase quality management (*Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland*)

At the beginning of his presentation Mr. Härjämäki introduce with Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland – its main goals and activities. Then Mr. Härjämäki focused on historical changes in agriculture. He pointed that during the period of more sustainable traditional agriculture the direction of nutrient flow was from the meadows to the fields. This system included the mowing of winter hay which was stored in hay barns and fed to animals during wintertime. This regime was first interrupted by artificial fertilisers and changes to production systems during

the late 19th century, in the peripheral regions a bit later. Flatland meadows were mainly turned into cultivated fields, wherever the topography would just allow it. Eutrophication is now playing an important role in accelerating the disappearance of traditional rural biotopes: the nutrient flow is from the field and air to the meadows and other traditional biotopes, weakening the quality of habitats.

Nowadays, large open landscape entities have disappeared along with fences, open ditches, meadows, wooded pastures and coppiced and pollarded trees. Instead there are wider uniform fields, bigger roads, cultivated forests, garden trees and bushes. As a result, at the moment, about 1/4 of all threatened species in Finland have traditional rural landscapes as their primary habitat.

Then Mr. Härjämäki discussed existing sub-measures, gaps and development needs of Finnish Agri-Environment schemes. Other funding possibilities for grassland management were discussed as well.

Organic agriculture, biological value of grasslands; environmental health farms *(Dace Kalniņa, Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture)*

Ms. Klaniņa started her presentation with short introduction with Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture and brief history of organic farming in Latvia.

Speaking on development of organic farming she informed that 7.3 % of agricultural land in Latvia is certified as used for organic farming. Production of organic products is increasing.

Then Ms. Klaniņa informed about Environmental Health Farms – organic farms that offer services for strengthening and improving the health.

Requirements for Environmental Health Farms are:

- Farm has Organic Agriculture's certificate;
- Farm owners have certificate for medical or alternative education;
- They apply principles of sustainability in managing the farm;
- They implement new service: strengthening and improving the health (no medical treatment!);
- Offer organic food for quests;
- Information for healthy life style, environment, nature protection.

At the end of her presentation Ms. Klaniņa concluded that:

- Organic farming takes significant place in rural development;
- Organic farming is suitable management for biological value grasslands;
- Organic farming and Environmental Health Farms continue to acquire new skills for farming, human and nature health;
- Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture makes data basis of Organic Farms, their service, offered organic products; spreads information about organic farming, cooperates with Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, with other organizations etc.;
- Organic farming is good challenge for farmers through the times.

Landscape qualities as a potential for alpine agriculture

(Bolette Bele, Ann Norderhaug, Marianne Østerlie, The Nordic Cultural Landscape Association Norwegian Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research (Bioforsk) Sør-Trøndelag University Colleg)

During presentation Ms. Norderhaug informed about current situation on farming in alpine habitats in Norwegian summer houses. Large alpine grassland areas are now overgrown and biodiversity has diminished. But further she pointed that summer farming may strengthen the financial condition of mountain farms for instance by labelled products getting a higher price in the market.

Then possible habitat management options were analyzed by using preliminary data from a project in Budalen. Landscape pattern in Budalen is characterized by mosaic of species rich vegetation types influenced by long and continuous summer farming. Project in Budden was highly scientific with GPS tracking of cows and goats, deep analysis of vegetation communities on grazed areas. Product analyses also were done to compare industrially produced products with those produced in summer farms.

Speaking on results, Ms. Norderhaug concluded that milk and milk products produced in species-rich alpine pastures are of special quality compared to industrially produced products. Therefore, maintenance of landscape values as well as food quality may be defined as “added values” to summer farming products. In addition, grazing is necessary if we want to keep the summer farming landscape open and maintain the high biodiversity.

Marketing of ecological meat products - practical examples from Sweden

(Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden)

In his second presentation Mr. Borgegård continued with discussion on pasture beef production in Sweden. There is national-wide labelling system for these products in Sweden, but the same label is marked with regional marks so that it is possible to know origin of products.

Mr. Borgegård pointed necessity of co-operation among farmers, local slaughter companies, local butchering companies, and local retailer companies. The co-operation is mechanism how to increase income per animal. He pointed that without co-operation turn-over is not big enough for an efficient and professional sales organisation. Developing new products is also important when pasture beef is produced. WWF in Sweden have a good knowledge on how to breed cattle and how to manage high quality of pasture meat. Thus, WWF as a guarantor is still important for the image of products and for the image of farmers' stability.

Linking state institutions and NGOs for rural development and farming for biodiversity *(Anita Anševica, State Rural Network)*

As Ms. Anševica informed that the main aim of State Rural Network is to promote active participation of rural development organizations and administrations in implementation of the Rural Development Program, creating environment for coordinated actions of rural development policy.

Representatives of State Rural Network in their daily work deal with organizing seminars of good practice, organizing exchange visits to Latvia and EU countries, promote implementation of LEADER projects. Important issue also is working with Local Action Groups (LAG). LAG is an association of local organisations and rural population operating on a specific rural territory with the population of 5–65

thousand, representing the interests of the population of this territory and addressing rural development issues at a local level based on multi-sectoral strategy and developed as a result of cooperation of the local representatives of those sectors.

Then Ms. Anševica informed that LAGs are key players in building local development strategies on the following measures:

- Support for creation and development of micro-enterprises;
- Encouragement of tourism activities;
- Basic services for the economy and rural population;
- Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage sites.

The Koski Manor: Cherishing traditions and keeping up with the present.
Practical examples of farming for biodiversity in Finland (*lirio Ikkonen, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland*)

Mr. Ikkonen briefly introduced with farming in Koski Manor. This farm is large even in Finnish scale – there is 1200 hectares managed by Koski Manor owner. As fragmentation is an increasing threat for rural habitats management of large farms is very important to prevent this threat. This farm was first to introduce Hereford grazing in Finland during 1960s. During the last years there was habitat restoration works carried out in Koski Manor. When performing basic restoration of traditional rural landscapes farmer looked at old names and local history and used information available in old maps. There were meadows and wooded pastures restored.

It was discussed with Koski Manor owner how do enhance meadow meat production in Finland? Main suggestions were:

- To show production methods for key persons;
- To share knowledge (such as farmer to farmer);
- To develop marketing;
- To increase planning and research;
- To increase networking and co-operation;
- To allocate investment supports (and other supports) for right areas in Finland;
- Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest owners (MTK) in key position for better marketing of meadow meat.

Then Mr. Ikkonen focused on best examples how meat marketing is developed by using internet, local shops, and “meat-boxes”.

Discussions on problems in grassland management and key findings on how to improve grassland management in economically viable way.

It was concluded that in case of farming for biodiversity it is important:

- to make farming with less or on chemicals;
- to follow nature-friendly methods (*e.g.* animal density, time of hay mowing *etc.*);
- to introduce waste management;
- to save water;

- to get support from local society;
- to use 'green energy' when possible;
- to improve knowledge on nature protection;
- to diversify products (multi-functional farming - meat, craft trade, eco-tourism etc.);
- to work on market development;
- to be self sustainable as much as possible.

The need for initiatives to strengthen the market for organic food was discussed during the workshop. It was agreed that strengthening market is an important condition for further development of the organic production and grassland management in economically viable way.

Cheap imported products were mentioned as a serious obstacle for development of economically viable farming for biodiversity. Development of different niche-products was mentioned as possible solution. Campaigns like "Buy local!" also needed. However, research on existing market is still needed.

It was found that there are a lot of gaps in existing support schemes (overregulation, a lot of bureaucracy, not enough support for farming for biodiversity etc.). The needs for improvements were discussed.

During the discussions farmers also pointed the need to learn more from best practice in farming for biodiversity. It is important to co-operate to share experience with farmers from Latvia and from other countries. Questions on nature conservation and on economical solutions should be included as topics in study tours.

Lack of small-scaled local slaughterhouses was identified as obstacle for development of local meat market. Example was discussed. There was restaurant owner in Valmiera, who would be willing to buy the sheep meat from local farmers, but as there are no small local slaughterhouses it is difficult to "trace a piece of meat" to be sure where it comes from.

It was found that co-operation between farmers should be developed to optimise costs of marketing. Development of labelling (and criteria for them) also was found to be important to develop niche products.



Project meeting in Apšuciems.

Post-seminar excursion

In the last day of the seminar there was excursion to farms that serve as example for integration of biodiversity issues in farming.

Farm was visited where herd of mixed Scottish Highlander, Latvian Brown, and Latvian Blue crossbreed cattle is used for year-round grazing on coastal grasslands of Lake Engure. Feeding during wintertime, fitting to animal welfare requirements and grazing impact on grassland biodiversity were discussed. Role of grazing for limiting the spread of reed also was found as important nature management aspect in this example.

Another farm visited during the field trip was certified as *Environmental Health Farm*. This was example where solutions were demonstrated on how to secure economical viability of farm mainly with eco-tourism, production of herbal teas and small crafts. Some areas in farm were grazed with a few cows, but most of grasslands were managed for environmental values like biodiversity, landscape appearance, outdoor recreation, and the cultural heritage. Grassland management has a significant role in the tourism business (creates nice, traditional and well managed landscape) and in herbal teas collecting.

Charolais cattle breeding farm also was visited during the field trip. Farm is one of founders and member of society Charolais Latvija and has herd with *ca.* 100 cattle. This was good example how farming for biodiversity can be organised as successful business. Cattle at low density are kept on pastures during summertime and stay in cattle-shed during winter. Pastures are located in river Abava valley. These pastures are certified as Biologically Valuable Grasslands and majority of them are natural grasslands on valley slopes or floodplain meadows.

It was found that farm serves as example on how farming for biodiversity can be done in an economically viable way – on the one hand cattle breed is productive enough to secure profit but from the other hand – farmer keeps animal density low to avoid overgrazing of highly valuable grasslands.

Small numbers of year-round grazing *Konik Polski* horses also are kept in farm.

Invited participants:

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