

LATVIAN STATE INSTITUTE OF AGRARIAN ECONOMICS



Latvijas Valsts  
agrārās ekonomikas  
institūts



EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL FUND FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT:  
EUROPE INVESTS IN RURAL AREAS

## **Report**

Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

### **Evaluation of the Measure 2.2.3 „First Afforestation of Non-agricultural Land”**

**July 2012**



PROJECT CO-FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Summary

This report is prepared in the scope of the system of ongoing evaluation of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP) on the measure 2.2.3 “First afforestation of non-agricultural land”. Mostly the data prepared by the Rural Support Service (RSS) and State Forest Service (SFS) was used for evolution of the measure 2.2.3. The measure was opened in 3 stages during the period between December 2008 and February 2010, when it was stopped, because the size of eligible costs of the projects submitted in the third stage was twice the size of the funding available for support. All submitted projects were, however, approved by 1 June 2012. 1277 projects in different areas of Latvia were implemented during the course of the measure. The amount of the disbursed public funding reaches LVL 12.1 million, with 13 656 ha of the land being afforested in the course of the project. The largest areas were afforested in Latgale region; however, afforestation of large areas took place also in Vidzeme and Kurzeme region. The project applications mostly state that the purpose for afforestation is to ensure efficient use of land, while preserving biodiversity and recreation and aesthetic characteristics of rural landscape.

Afforestation of non-agricultural land is a measure with a long-term perspective. Its implementation significantly changes the purpose of land use, and economic benefit will be gained only in 30-100 years, depending on felling cycle of the tree species selected for afforestation. Since the measure is mostly implemented in the areas with large proportion of unutilized agricultural land and significant proportion of forest areas, it may be concluded that the measure has not helped avoiding marginalization, and has insubstantially encouraged prevention of abandoning land.

Conditions for receiving support must be changed, in order to reach the goals of the measure and improve its results, by specifying areas intended for afforestation and any criteria thereof. Afforestation as a priority should take place in scrubland, exhausted quarries of mineral resources and naturally overgrown agricultural lands.

The study was performed by Peteris Lakovskis, a researcher of the Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics (LSIAE) Rural Development Evaluation Department in cooperation with the department staff.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Detailed evaluation of the measure is limited by data availability in RSS and SFS data bases.
2. The total amount of disbursed public funding reaches 12.1 million LVL, and 13 656 ha of land were afforested in the scope of 1277 projects.
3. Afforestation measures were carried out with pronounced concentration in individual areas. More than 100 ha of land were afforested in total of 28 rural territories. The largest areas were afforested in Isnauda (718 ha) and Rundeni (*Rundēni*) (358 ha) rural territory of Ludza municipality, as well as Pasiene (341 ha) rural territory of Zilupe municipality.
4. Afforestation in Latvia mostly took place in mosaic landscapes and woodland, i.e. areas with relatively high forest cover, thereby even more reducing the areas of open landscapes.
5. Evaluation of the measure showed that afforestation can take place not only on agricultural area, which has not been used for a long period of time, but also on currently unutilised agricultural area, which recently was in good agricultural condition. Therefore it can be concluded that previous activities of the measure and its conditions are in a way conflicting.
6. If the importance of the measure is rated in RDP context, we can conclude that purposeful afforestation supported by public funding in environment axis 2 in Latvia is not considered as high priority. It is important to understand for evaluation of the measures, what is a proportion of the following factors specified in the goal of RDP measure 2.2.3 - efficient use of land, preservation of biodiversity and recreation and aesthetic characteristics of rural landscape.
7. In addition to activities of the measure, afforestation without RDP support is carried out in Latvia, and natural afforestation process takes place in large areas. Therefore the impact of afforestation supported specifically in measure 2.2.3 on environment is not significant.
8. Current trends show that increase of afforested and naturally afforested areas in Latvia in near future is inevitable. Supporting of afforestation with the respective measure and conditions is not sufficiently justified in RDP. Afforestation should be supported more also in connection with other possible RDP measures (2.2.1, 2.2.2), which are not being implemented in Latvia, but their goals in many situations are more appropriate for the existing activities in measure 2.2.3.
9. Currently afforested scrubland areas (18%) compose a relatively small proportion of the total area and should be increased. The goal of the measure 2.2.3 should be specified with an emphasis on more efficient use of land, i.e. afforestation of existing in nature scrubland, quarries of mineral resources, objects for re-cultivation and other unused areas.

10. Since the indicators of the goal of the measure have in general not been reached, the fact that the measure was prematurely stopped and the answers provided to evaluation questions, allows us conclude that the implementation of the measure and its conditions must be improved.
11. In order to improve the results of the afforestation measure, conditions for the receipt of support must be specified – for example, to reduce the maximum afforestation area per one applicant (from 50 ha to 5 ha), setting the total limit for afforestation, and to define the desired areas and principles for afforestation. A different approach should be established for the status of legal persons, and to ensure the possibility to objectively evaluate the criteria of the measure.