

## **The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia**

Report by Trish Kevin  
2005 Churchill Fellow

Investigation of farm forestry extension and education programs in northern Europe.

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Signed: Patricia Kevin

Dated 25 October 2005



Beech farm forest in Zealand, Denmark

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## Introduction

The Churchill Fellowship enabled me to visit UK, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark and Sweden, studying farm forestry extension and education programs. These countries to varying degrees are experiencing rapid rural change, similar to that occurring in Australia. I wanted to see how these changes were affecting farm forestry uptake and how farm forestry education programs were being adapted to cater for rural change.

I am grateful to the Churchill trust for giving me this invaluable opportunity to meet and learn from others who are encouraging farm forestry adoption and I am enthusiastic about pursuing interest and uptake of my recommendations.



Swedish farm forester, Bert Nordin with his 80 year old fir trees ready for harvest

## **Executive summary**

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## **Fellowship objective**

To investigate farm forestry extension and education programs in UK, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark and Sweden.

## **Fellowship Highlights**

1. South West Forests in Devon, an organization concerned with rural development. Met with staff delivering farm forestry and revegetation education programs to landholders, community groups and schools. Met farm forestry practitioners.
2. Hill Holt Wood in Lincolnshire, a social enterprise located in a productive woodland. Met and discussed rural development issues with the founders, Karen and Nigel Lowthrop.
3. Forestry Commission, Golspie, northern Scotland. Met with staff working on forestry community consultation projects.
4. Attended IUFRO (International Union of Forest Research Organisations) Small Scale Farm Forestry conference in Galway.
5. Western Forestry Cooperative, Sligo Ireland. Met with staff and visited small scale forestry ventures coordinated by the cooperative.
6. Teagasc (Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority), Athenry, Ireland. Met with staff and visited farm forestry sites in western Ireland.
7. University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Met with staff and visited private forestry extension and education activities.
8. Danish Forestry Extension, Copenhagen. Met with staff and visited farm forest in Zealand.
9. Sveaskog (state owned forest company), Vaxjo, Sweden. Met with staff and visited ecopark showcasing the companies environmental resolve.
10. Sundsvall, Sweden. Stayed with the Nordins, a family managing private forests and farm.

## **Recommendations**

1. Farm forestry should be an important consideration in future rural development planning.
2. Land use planning to identify areas suited to plantation expansion needs to take place. Future plans need to include community aspirations, as well as economic and environmental considerations. Plantation companies and governments should ensure that local communities have access to information and the ability to voice their concerns about future plantation development.
3. Current farm forestry education programs with schools should be expanded to capture long lasting personal development benefits that can be achieved by teaching and learning in the forest.
4. In a climate of declining government resources for small scale farm forestry extension, new cost effective models of extension delivery that use private organisations should be considered.

## **Dissemination**

The findings of my Churchill Fellowship will be disseminated via:

- articles written for Agroforestry News and the Australian Forest Grower.

- presentations made to a range of forestry and landcare organizations. Currently presentations are planned for the statewide Private Forestry Team (DPI), a joint meeting of Otway Agroforestry and Corangamite Farm Forestry Networks and Bald Hills-Creswick Landcare group.
- discussion and debate raised through existing networks with government policy makers, program leaders and other organizations such as plantation development committees and farm forestry networks and associations.

## **Fellowship program**

May 24 – June 8, United Kingdom

Thames Chase, Upminster  
South West Forests, Devon  
Hill Holt wood, Lincolnshire  
Forestry Commission, Dornoch  
Forestry Commission, Golspie

June 17 – July 11, Ireland

IUFRO Small scale farm forestry conference, Galway  
Western Forestry Cooperative, Sligo  
Greenbelt Forestry Company, Collooney  
Teagasc (Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority), Athenry  
Farm Forestry Committee, Irish Farming Association, Dublin

July 12 – June 18, Slovenia

University of Ljubljana  
Interforst, Forestry Trade Fair, Munich  
Pokjuka Tableland  
Forest education centre, Masun  
Slovenian Forest Service, south eastern Slovenia

July 19- 25, Denmark

Danish Forestry Extension Service, Copenhagen  
Forestry Association, Jyderup, Zealand

July 26 – August 2, Sweden

Sveaskog (a state owned forest company), Vaxjo  
Nordin family, Sundsvall

## **Background to farm forestry**

Farm forestry is the integration of *productive* trees into farms and properties. Farm forests usually vary in size from 3 to 50 ha, depending on the overall size of the property.

In a wider context, we desperately need more trees back in rural landscapes to control environmental problems such as, salinity, erosion, degraded streams and water quality, declining biodiversity and increasing greenhouse gases.

Farm forestry is a great way of revegetating rural landscapes because the trees planted can not only help to control environmental problems, but provide products to diversify farm income and ultimately provide new rural industries to boost rural economies.

Careful siting of trees can also improve property production by providing shade and shelter to crops and livestock and they can also improve property aesthetics, making the property a nicer place to live and work.

Despite the wide ranging benefits of farm forestry, the uptake by landholders has waned over the last five years.

Being a rural activity, farm forestry is affected by the rapid changes that are occurring in rural areas. Changes to land use and land ownership impact on the way farm forestry is perceived and the rate in which it is adopted.

Land in close proximity to cities or major rural centres is being sub-divided and new settlers are moving in, often with 'life style', as opposed to economic aspirations for the land. This provides a potential opportunity for farm forestry expansion.

In other rural areas traditional farm businesses are facing long-term real decline in the value of agricultural commodities. To stay ahead some farmers have looked to subsidising their income off-farm. Others have increased their production by buying more land. Many have retired from farming altogether and moved to regional centres. The overall effect is that populations, associated services and businesses, are in decline in many rural areas.

Against this backdrop of changing land ownership, new and often controversial land uses such as industrial tree plantations have been able to compete for land in these areas. In the long term increased industrial forestry may provide positive spin-offs for farm forestry, by ensuring there is increased forestry expertise and equipment in rural areas. However, in the short term industrial forestry has created community concern and a backlash against trees; some of which is rubbing off on farm forestry.

This is a hot and current issue with potential to impact on the image of farm forestry. The benefits that small scale farm forestry can bring to land holders, catchments and rural communities are not widely appreciated and lost in the controversy over the rapid expansion of industrial plantations. This coupled with an increasing rural urban divide, means that the image of farm forestry is declining amongst potential new farm foresters.

The aim of my Churchill Fellowship was to investigate farm forestry extension and education programs in northern Europe, namely United Kingdom, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark and Sweden. These countries, to differing degrees, are all experiencing similar rapid changes to rural land use and populations. I wanted to see how these

changes were affecting farm forestry uptake and in particular how extension and education programs were being adapted to cope with rapid rural change.

In many cases the rural changes were more advanced to that in Australia, so I was able to see how farm forestry programs had adapted to rural trends, which are likely to hit Australia in the future. This means that recommendations and subsequent programs built on knowledge from this study tour will have the advantage of incorporating measures that cater for both current and likely future trends.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

### ***1. Farm forestry can play a key role in rural community development***

In the United Kingdom I visited and met people from 2 inspiring projects that were using small scale forestry on private land as a base on which to build community enterprise ventures.

Hill Holt Wood, is an example of a social enterprise developed on a 14 hectare degraded woodland purchased by Nigel and Karen Lowthrop in Lincolnshire in 1995. Originally the Lowthrops intended to live and work on the property generating income for their family and one or two staff members. The venture grew to become a, not for profit, community controlled membership organization. It provides vocational training for young people on various government schemes and now employs 14 people, including the owners themselves.

Hill Holt Wood manages their woodland sustainably whilst training disadvantaged young people in forest related activities such as production of posts, poles, hurdle fences, firewood, charcoal as well as provision of environmental consulting and ranger services in neighbouring districts. Students are also trained on site in traditional subjects such as maths, computers and English.

The venture is economically viable because it maintains a diverse income stream. Income is derived from conducting government training schemes, the sale of forest products and provision of consulting services. In addition, the woodland is a locally valued amenity that is open to all community members and groups and is controlled by the community.

Although Hill Holt Wood is centred on native forest (or existing forest) management, the venture has relevance for farm forestry development. It shows that, by combining forestry with other rural development programs, much wider benefits can be achieved.

In the Australian setting, farm forestry could be combined with rural development programs to increase rural sustainability. This type of scenario would be very suited to areas that already have a hub of farm forestry activity.

A larger project, the National Forest in the centre of England goes a step further and demonstrates how farm forestry can actually drive rural development. The project began in 1996 and aims to create a new working forest by ultimately revegetating 13 500 ha within a total project area of 500 square km. Much of the land had been degraded by coal mining. To date 5000 ha of forest has been established on mostly private land.

The National Forest Company has been established to run the venture and it employs 16 full-time and 3 part-time staff and is overseen by a board of 9 directors. It

receives 3.7M pounds in government funds and attains further funds from sponsorships, national lottery funds and other sources.

They administer a tender scheme, whereby farmers and private landholders submit a plan and costing for their revegetation proposal. The tender system encourages originality and innovation and landholders tend to have a greater ownership of their projects. Tenders are scored against set criteria and projects that allow public access, receive higher scores. Revegetation costs vary from 7 000 to 9 500 pounds per hectare.

Evaluation of the National Forest project has shown that, people are moving into the area because it is now an attractive place to live. As a consequence land prices are rising. Tourism based on outdoor activities such as walking, horse riding, bike riding and fishing is flourishing. New businesses and service industries are moving to the area. New activities have brought new social networks, the breaking down of exclusive traditional farming networks and development of new more inclusive networks.

Both Hill Holt Wood and the National Forest show that forestry can play a key role in rural development. Instead of traditional land uses such as forestry and agriculture operating in isolation, both examples seek to combine with new enterprises. The potential for farm forestry to act as a base for rural development needs to be recognised.

## ***2. Tempering the impacts of industrial forest expansion***

Industrial plantation expansion is a topical issue in Australia. Plantations are often unpopular with local communities. There are some striking similarities to large scale plantation expansion in Ireland and Scotland over the last 20 to 30 years, and as a consequence some lessons that can be learnt.

As with Australia, plantation expansion accelerated in Ireland and Scotland mainly due to increased institutional investment under positive tax environments.

The reasons cited for the unpopularity of plantations by local communities were that:

- blanket afforestation is alien to the landscape
- plantations were thought to bring depopulation
- they block the view
- most re-afforestation was done by large institutions without a local presence (for the Irish and Scottish this was akin to the days of absentee landlords)
- there was no local forestry contact or representative with which to voice concerns
- employment opportunities were considered to be low
- where local landholders were involved in forestry, it was more palatable to local communities

Reasons for dislike are strikingly similar to those cited by local communities in Australia.

By comparison, farm forestry is a rural land use that people like. Integration of trees into rural areas provides a mosaic of cleared and treed landscapes, not wall-to-wall trees as is the case with industrial forestry.

In Scotland, Ireland and Sweden, there was a growing realisation that people feel a sense of attachment towards the way their landscapes look. The mosaic pattern of open and cleared landscapes is one that they like and efforts were being made to incorporate peoples' landscape perceptions into future land use planning. Social

research in south western Victoria has also found that people are used to and like their 'open' landscapes.

In Ireland and Scotland it was found that, local unrest over industrial plantations can to some extent be eased by increased community engagement. In Ireland community angst began to dissipate once forestry organisations maintained a local presence, so that people could voice their concerns. Coillte, a state owned commercial forestry company in Ireland, began 'social forums' which also enabled local discussion and debate.

In both countries Indicative Forest Strategies have been developed for many regions, identify areas suitable for plantation expansion and areas that are sensitive to this type of development. These strategies are a useful reference point for both sides of the debate and have also helped ease tension.

Even though it is in a slightly different context, similar approaches to easing community concern were found to be successful in Sweden. In the 1980's and 90's community concern over forestry practises were at their height. It was generally agreed amongst forestry circles, that once forestry companies got better at engaging with communities, sharing information in an open and frank way, community angst began to dissipate. At the same time, forestry practises improved as a consequence of community pressure.

Experience overseas suggests that increased dialogue, which is open and sincere, between local communities and forestry organisations can help ease the angst created by industrial forestry expansion. Land use planning, can help clarify the location of potential future plantations and should include community aspirations.

### ***3. Bridging the rural urban divide***

In all countries visited, there was concern about the increasing divide between urban and rural populations and, the detrimental impact this can have on rural populations. Awareness of the benefits of rural activities such as agriculture and forestry, can help engender a positive environment in which they can flourish. Urban populations hold political sway, so even though they may not actively participate themselves they can influence political policy and decision making that can impact on rural industries.

Education programs that raise awareness of the benefits of forestry were considered mandatory activities in Denmark, Sweden and UK. As forestry is a long term venture, programs that engage young people were given high importance.

I met with educators working with South West Forests in Devon, an organization promoting rural development through revegetation. They were involved in delivering 'Forest School', an education program which is gaining momentum in England. It is based on the Scandinavian model, which uses forests and the environment to teach students in a way that incorporates different learning styles.

It is a long term educational process where young people attend regular and frequent sessions in the forest. They attain practical skills, awareness of health and safety issues, as well as understanding of the environment in a less formal setting. The program enhances mainstream education and offers alternative curriculum in an outdoor setting, which encourages inspired learning especially for students that do not excel in the classroom.

Evaluation of the program has found that not only do students have a better appreciation of the environment, but the program reduces exclusion, improves

motivation to learn and raises achievement. In many cases children were so enthused by the program, they related their experiences to parents and encouraged their involvement as well.

Education of school children in farm forestry is now finally recognised as an important activity in Victoria. It is seen as a way to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of farm forestry, and to encourage interest and possible participation in later life. Current programs usually involve a practical activity in a farm forest, such as tree planting or measurement, accompanied by introductory and follow up sessions in the classroom.

However, broadening farm forestry education along the lines of 'Forest School' would realise greater personal development benefits for students. The basic farm forestry messages could still be maintained, while the wider learning benefits are achieved. As with the English example, it is likely that this would also extend the reach to parents, further increasing appreciation of farm forestry amongst the wider community.

#### ***4. A new model for farm forestry extension***

For several reasons government resources available for small-scale farm forestry extension (advice) in Australia are declining. If farm forestry is to grow, new ways of delivering extension are needed.

In Denmark I met with representatives from Danish Forestry Extension (DFE), a consulting service for small-scale farm foresters controlled by its members and partially funded by government. The Danish government funds farm forestry extension because of the environmental and economic benefits it can deliver. DFE is not the only extension service for small-scale farm foresters, but it is the largest and receives 90% of the government funding available for farm forestry extension.

Approximately 1/3 of DFE's total revenue comes from government to provide extension and training service to landholders as well as assisting them to apply for subsidies for farm forestry and revegetation. The remaining 2/3's comes from membership fees and contracting and marketing services.

DFE has 9 local associations across Denmark, each with its own staff and board of directors representing members. The local chairs from each of the associations are represented on the central board of directors in Copenhagen. Local units operate independently, but the central office ensures that efficiencies in national coordination are achieved.

Membership entitles landholders one site visit from an association forester each year, and follow up written report. The local units organise field days to build members' skills and to attract possible new members. They also produce newsletters 5 – 12 times per year. Other additional services provided by DFE and paid for by the landholder include coordination of contracting (for planting, thinning, harvesting etc), further silvicultural advice and marketing of forest products.

The benefit of this type of system is that it is controlled by members, so is responsive to growers' needs. Government gets the outcomes it requires by stipulating and paying for activities that improve the environment. The costs to government are cheaper than a government extension service.

In an Australian setting, government could pay forestry consulting services to deliver extension that contributes to environmental benefits. With appropriate skill development, farm forestry networks could also have the opportunity to play a role in extension. Coordination from a centralised body would be important to ensure that local bodies share information and that strategic activities be carried out on a state or national level.

### **Recommendations**

1. Farm forestry can play a key role in future rural development planning.
2. Land use planning to identify areas suited to plantation expansion needs to take place. Future plans need to include community aspirations, as well as economic and environmental considerations. Plantation companies and governments should ensure that local communities have access to information and the ability to voice their concerns about future plantation developments.
3. Current farm forestry education programs with schools should be expanded to capture the long lasting personal development benefits that can be achieved by teaching and learning in the forest.
4. In a climate of declining government resources for small scale farm forestry extension, new cost effective models of extension delivery that use private organizations, should be considered.

As a private forestry development officer working with Department of Primary Industries in Victoria, I am well positioned to raise discussion and debate on the recommendations from my Churchill Fellowship with government policy makers, private forestry program leaders and organizations such as the Australian Forest Growers, Plantation Development Committees and farm forestry networks. I intend to do this through my existing networks (as a guest speaker and as a representative on a range of committees) and via articles written for relevant farm and private forestry journals.