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Forestry officials discuss future of poplar in expanding Europe
Policy reforms urged for maximum economic and environmental benefits

28 November 2003, Rome -- European policy-makers and forestry experts meeting at FAO recently agreed that an expanded European Union (EU) stands to gain from the economic, social and environmental benefits of poplar and willow cultivation.

Participants at the "First International Conference on the Future of Poplar Culture", held at FAO Headquarters in Rome, 13-15 November, discussed the implications of integration of the forestry sectors of the EU, candidate countries to the EU and the broader pan-European region for the forestry sector in general and poplar culture in particular.

The conference was hosted by the National Poplar Commission of Italy, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agricultural and Forest Policies in collaboration with FAO.

Clearer policies needed

Conference participants called for the EU to make explicit reference to forestry and its benefits as key elements of its rural development policies.

The conference urged the EU to use its expansion to 25 members as an opportunity to draft clearer and simpler provisions on forestry support, especially in relation to afforestation of agricultural land taken out of production.

In the past, provisions of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy have resulted in productive land being taken out of agriculture, although that land is not necessarily available for forestry development.

Meeting participants called for the development of coherent and consistent policies that avoid bias and market distortions and for the promotion of a favourable investment climate in EU candidate countries in poplar and willow culture and processing through joint ventures and equitable partnerships to realize mutual benefits.

Benefiting economies and the environment

Poplars and willows, which account for an estimated 46 million ha of natural and planted forests globally, are among the fastest-growing trees in temperate regions. They are easy to cultivate and form an important component of forestry and agricultural systems, often for small-scale farmers, across the globe.

The trees are used for a wide range of wood products that create employment, boost exports and contribute to social and



Treating contaminated farm soil: a poplar stand in the United Kingdom.

Related links

- [International Poplar Commission](#)
- [FAO Forestry Department](#)
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Poplars in China on land that was desert 12 years earlier.



A poplar plantation irrigated with sewage water helps solve drainage problem in a rural village in India.



Poplars shelter crops and provide wood, fibre and chips for manufacturing.

economic development and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. Non-wood products from poplars and willows include fodder and biomass for renewable energy.

Poplars and willows protect soil and water, sequester carbon, combat desertification and provide shelter for communities, livestock and crops. They have also been used for soil remediation of contaminated sites.

"There is a lot of new science which clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of poplars and willows in remediating various types of environmental damage," says Jim Carle, Secretary of the International Poplar Commission (IPC), an FAO statutory body. "They have been used to rehabilitate mine sites and the land surrounding industrial plants, as well as in the treatment of landfills and other areas contaminated by harmful chemicals."

Sharing technology and knowledge

The conference underlined the role of the International Poplar Commission in providing a network to facilitate transfer of technology and in connecting individuals and institutions for the development of sustainable poplar and willow culture and use.

Other recommendations included:

- harmonizing rules regarding the environment and worker safety as a prerequisite for developing sound markets and avoiding conflicts between industries in developed and developing countries;
- promoting sustainable forest management with emphasis on participatory approaches and benefit sharing, protection of genetic resources and natural poplar and willow populations where they are threatened by human activities;
- exploiting molecular biology's potential for tree improvement without sacrificing conventional, long-term research and experimentation;
- strengthening poplar and willow research in the expanding EU through institutional collaboration and twinning, with particular regard to testing in different sites, and under different ecological and climatic conditions;
- promoting fast-growing poplar and willow plantations for wood and fibre production to take the pressure off natural and semi-natural forests managed primarily for conservation and other environmental and protective functions.

Conference participants urged the IPC membership, which comprises 37 of FAO's Member Nations, to contribute by linking at regional, national and international levels to collaborate in implementing these actions.

A follow-up meeting on the social, environmental and economic contributions of poplars and willows to sustainable rural development will be held at FAO headquarters on 4 December as a side event to the FAO Conference (29 November to 10 December), the biennial meeting of FAO's governing body.

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