



REFOREST

Living Lab 1: Czech Republic

***Establishing
grazed orchards
with Daniel Pitek***

**České
Středoohoří**



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Living Lab 1

The Organic Farm of Daniel Pitek

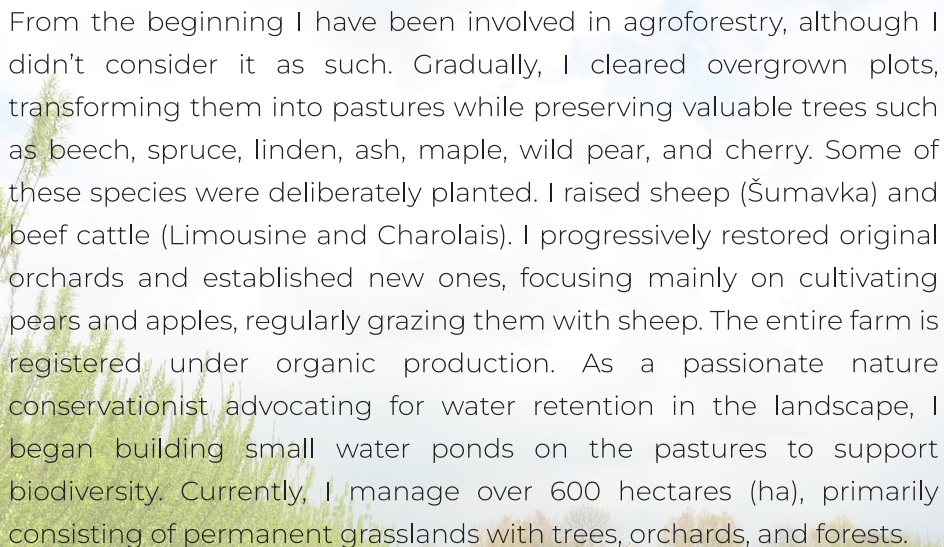


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The farm

Originally, I worked as a forester, serving in the Czech Central Mountains during compulsory military service and later as a gamekeeper in the Šumava region. From there, I moved to Prague and, after some time, to Munich, where I started working with plasterboard and attic constructions. Around 1994, having returned to the Czech Republic with a friend, I continued working with plasterboard. My company employed up to 80 people, but it became unsustainable. I continuously downsized the company and realised that I wanted to return to nature. Eventually, in 2015, I left the company and began selling wood. When the opportunity arose to acquire land near Milešovka at a favourable price, I took it. Thanks to that I could start realising my dream of managing it on my own terms, according to my vision of proper farming of the land.



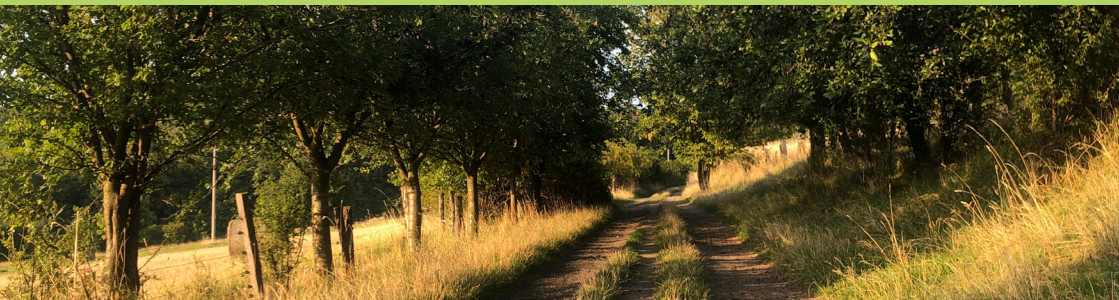
From the beginning I have been involved in agroforestry, although I didn't consider it as such. Gradually, I cleared overgrown plots, transforming them into pastures while preserving valuable trees such as beech, spruce, linden, ash, maple, wild pear, and cherry. Some of these species were deliberately planted. I raised sheep (Šumavka) and beef cattle (Limousine and Charolais). I progressively restored original orchards and established new ones, focusing mainly on cultivating pears and apples, regularly grazing them with sheep. The entire farm is registered under organic production. As a passionate nature conservationist advocating for water retention in the landscape, I began building small water ponds on the pastures to support biodiversity. Currently, I manage over 600 hectares (ha), primarily consisting of permanent grasslands with trees, orchards, and forests.

The way to agroforestry

I use a natural and traditional type of agroforestry system. It is therefore a return to the original agricultural economy, which was disrupted during communism. It favours close-to-nature interventions and does not support large-scale agricultural systems. As part of the establishment of new grazed orchards, I took into account the history of the landscape, as the area around Litoměřice was a large producer of fruit with tall and extensive orchards traditionally either grazed or cultivated with other agricultural crops. No subsidy support was used for planting trees; the farm has subsidies within the framework of ecological management, but this is not used for planting trees.

Since I am a forester, I already have both theoretical and practical knowledge of growing trees. Planting always involves a certain amount of trial and error. I also get additional information from experienced growers.

I am a member of The Association of Private Farming of the Czech Republic (APF CR). This organisation represents family farms and private farming in the Czech Republic. Activities focus on economic, social, and political interests that support family farms and private farming. The organisation respects old peasant traditions and believes that family farms are the basis for modern European agriculture and rural development.



Agroforestry in practice

Agricultural legislation was once tailored to large agribusinesses, and what was left of subsidy support for small and medium-sized farms was thanks to the intervention of the European Commission. Otherwise, nothing would have been left of small and medium-sized farms. What is extreme in Czech agriculture is not the current changes in the Strategic Plan, but the structure of Czech agriculture. The average farm size in the Czech Republic is 135 ha compared to 18 ha for the European Union as a whole.

The agroforestry system on my land creates a better, wetter microclimate. Trees provide shade for animals, protect the soil from erosion with their roots, retain water in the soil, and also create the character of the landscape. Biodiversity also improves in places where farming is done in this way - there are more plant and animal species.

My recommendation is that everyone learns what will work in a given location and what won't. It is necessary to consult the experience of someone who already runs something similar. It is also a good idea to attend seminars and training organised by ASZ. Last but not least, it is good to look for relevant specialist literature.



What is ahead?

I am committed to ensuring a diverse range of plant species and habitats, actively managing threats from invasive species, diseases, and pests. This approach involves carefully balancing the needs of different plant and animal species, fostering a harmonious ecosystem.

To ensure the economic viability of our farm, we optimise costs while making strategic investments in biodiversity conservation. We focus on establishing our family organic farm brand, enhancing marketing activities, and implementing new technologies and production methods, such as the introduction of a cider house and fruit dryer.

Engaging with local communities is integral to our biodiversity safeguarding efforts. We actively partner with environmental organisations and institutions, emphasising the support of small family farms. This collaborative approach enhances communication channels, fostering a shared commitment to sustainable and biodiverse agriculture.

Engagement in scientific and academic projects, along with active involvement in public outreach, is a crucial element for me in disseminating awareness about agroforestry and the nature-friendly management of our environment. Through participation in these initiatives, I strive to promote understanding of the importance of sustainable agriculture and the preservation of natural balance.





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