



The Väinameri Project

Final technical report



Väinameri project; Sida # 1999 – 005496 / 40; Decision # 187 / 00

This report summarises the result obtained in the WWF Väinameri project during the period 2000 – 2003. The total cost is 6.2 million SEK shared by Sida (3.4) and WWF (2,9). The report is compiled by project executant **Toomas Kokovkin**, Research Centre Arhipelaag, in co-operation with **Robert Oetjen**, Estonian Fund for Nature, local co-ordinators **Kaja Lotman**, Matsalu, **Lia Rosenberg**, Hiiumaa, and **Elle Puurmann**, Vormsi, as well as WWF representatives **Lennart Gladh**, **Vicki Lee**, **Clarence Lysén** and **Ola Jennersten**.

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Background

The Väinameri region in western Estonia was chosen by the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) in the early 90's as one of the most important biological "multi-function" areas in the Baltic Sea. Two of its areas, Matsalu and Käina Bay, were chosen together with an additional four areas along the eastern Baltic Sea coast for preparation of coastal zone management plans by the HELCOM working group on the management of marine lagoons and wetlands.

WWF's office in Sweden has been active in Matsalu since 1991, first within the area's local HELCOM working group (Area Task Team) when the integrated coastal zone management plan was established, and later as co-partner in the implementation of the plan. WWF Sweden has conducted the Väinameri project since 1997 as a model project using rural development as a tool for sustainable management of semi-natural grasslands. For the past 3 years, Sida has co-operated in the project as a partial financier and the Väinameri project has been able to increase its activities.

The project area is also used by the partly Sida-financed Baltic Area Agriculture Programme project monitoring sites and selected as a priority area for the World Bank Global Economic Facility's (GEF) Baltic Sea Regional Project.

Post-Soviet agriculture

During the last fifty years, traditional agricultural land use (haymaking and grazing) of meadows and pasturelands has decreased in Estonia. The background to this was strong cutbacks of agriculture with large-scale production and hard-driven specialisation via predominately *kolchos* and *sovchos* systems. This development has led to increased production but also increased use of artificial fertiliser and chemical use, as well as impoverishment of the biological diversity.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the privatisation of agriculture, cultivation decreased very strongly mainly due to the large-scale slaughter of livestock directly after the Soviet break-up. A direct positive consequence of the agricultural reform was a dramatic decrease in the use of artificial fertilisers and chemicals. A negative consequence of the decreased cultivation was that the area became overgrown, which threatened the nature values.

The conversion of agriculture also entailed high unemployment in the countryside. The Estonian agricultural situation has been extremely vulnerable because general agricultural support / tax subventions have not been used. Estonia also never introduced protective duties that benefit local agriculture, resulting in massive import of cheap agricultural products. This situation can be expected to change when Estonia becomes a member of the EU and can take advantage of EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

With the background described above, it was appropriate for the Väinameri project to develop conditions for an economically strong regional agriculture based on existing high natural values and where the current low use of artificial fertilisers and chemicals is retained. The project philosophy was also in total agreement with the proposal launched within the framework of Baltic Agenda 21 (*An outline of concept for analysing the sustainability of agriculture*).

At the same time, it is important to develop other sectors that use the area's nature and culture as base, such as tourism, handicraft, bio-energy and fisheries. These sectors represent 1) important complementary revenue sources, 2) employment opportunities for currently unemployed or underused groups, and especially, 3) a natural part of the long-term use of the area's natural resources that are necessary to maintain the area's great natural and cultural value in the long-term.

Project goals

Overarching goals

- A sustainable use of natural resources
- Conservation of biological diversity
- Increased knowledge, participation and involvement of the local residents towards the sustainable development of the area

Expected results

- Increased income from local production
- Increased number of visitors
- Maintained and restored biodiversity
- Shifts in the approaches to balanced ecosystem management, agricultural and regional development policies
- Increased awareness in Estonia and neighbouring countries
- Creation of complete production chains (meat, handicraft, tourism) including international links, capacity building of local authorities for enterprise support and thus giving the project a "market"-oriented base.

Activities and Initiatives

1. The Landscape / Grassland management

Increased cultivation of naturally unfertilised grasslands is a necessity to maintain the area's biological values

- a) Model pastures/meadows
- b) Establishment of high-quality beef cattle herds
- c) Education
- d) Study visits
- e) Indicator species survey

Results:

Marketing, restaurants and shops, Swedish brand-making expertise, showcase restaurant with grand premier opening, cleaning and clearing of landscape.

Result: All farmers who entered the project are still working – a fact that must be considered as a positive project result considering the difficult situation for Estonian agriculture and also confirmed by farmers.

Elaboration of “green” meat marketing for a retailer chain

Result: under completion. The interest and readiness among local farmers and entrepreneurs is very high. In 2003 the seminar in Matsalu with the participation of the Swedish expert Peder Larssen (ICA) and Lennart Gladh (WWF) became the main event. The seminar presented seven talks followed by extensive discussion by the 55 participants. The participants identified that one of the main economic obstacles for the development of local nature-friendly beef is importing of dumping-priced meat. The participants made several proposals for decentralisation and of meat processing and concerning the national policies under EU accession. During the next 1.5 years, a person has been hired by the project to work part-time to complete the establishment of “green” meat in Estonia and work with agricultural policy.

Creation of a “green” meat brand in some high-level restaurants

Result: under completion. This action is solved as a sub-project to run a pilot project in a high-level restaurant in the town of Pärnu in Estonia. The necessary components of the marketing chain, such as *coastal grasslands – farmers – meat processing – restaurant* have been identified. The restaurant is willing to promote the beef as a means for biodiversity enhancement. Unfortunately, there are still considerable obstacles in the model. The main problem is that the restaurants want to have only the best parts of the meat, whereas there is yet no “green butchery” to process the whole carcass into semi-processed products, such as sausages. Here lies one need for the extension of the project into the topic of regional quality food products.

Self-sustained beef cattle production grazing semi-natural grasslands

Result: ongoing. In the course of the project, the serious beef farmers are shifting from the initial Highland Cattle breed towards more productive breeds such as Hereford and Aberdeen-Angus. As a direct result of the Väinameri project, the number of Limousine breed has also increased. The most substantial event has been the creation of the **pure breed farm** of Aberdeen Angus in Läänemaa county, close to the Matsalu Nature Reserve. For this purpose, 10 cows and 2 bulls were purchased from a Swedish farmer. The farm deals mainly with embryo-technology to provide pure breed cattle to farmers in the semi-natural coastal areas.

Indicators of success:

- Consumer awareness about the relation “*nature conservation – today’s menu*”
- Two full-breed farms that will assist in supplying the project area with grazing cattle. One existing in Hiiumaa county (Kogermann’s farm, Highland Cattle) and one in Läänemaa county (farmer Tauno Tähe, Aberdeen Angus)
- More than 2000 ha well-maintained semi-natural grasslands

Actions completed in 2003:

- About 15 ha of wooded meadows restored in Matsalu, several hectares in Vormsi with the project machinery.
- About 22 ha of grassland opened from bushes in Matsalu.
- About 1200 ha of grassland grazed in Hiiumaa, about 800 ha in Matsalu and 25 ha in Vormsi by the project partner farmers.
- ICA seminar in Matsalu, 6th of August 2003, with the participation of Peder Larsson and Lennart Gladh (Sweden)
- Estonian TV: Problems with green beef marketing brought up in the programme “*Tasakaal*” (“equilibrium”)
- Estonian TV: “Green” beef discussion in the programme “*Osoon*”, interview with expert Stefan Thorssell (Sweden)
- Import of 12 cattle of Aberdeen-Angus (2 bulls and 10 cows) to launch the pure breed farm
- Presentation of the results by Kaia Lepik, the green-meat project manager, at a seminar in Brussels in February 2004.

Table 1. Historical and extrapolated change in herd size and grazing area on project farms.

Farmer	Initially		2003		2008		2010	
	# animals	ha	# animals	ha	# animals	ha	# animals	ha
Kaptein	82	110	125	213	150	250	200	300
Tikk	84	197	110	300	140	300	170	300
Vichterpal	25	20	31	24	35	40	40	50
Pruul	48	89	63	89	100	100	120	120
Hein	35	45	107	105	125	130	140	150
Uusoja	42	147	92	200	100	200	110	200
Streng			14	27	20	27	25	27
Reppo	10	15	16	15	20	15	25	15
Lepik			36	70	36	70	36	70
Madisson	0	0	9	110	25	110	25	110
Kogermann Ly	3	10	9	25	14	25	20	25
Total	329	633	612	1178	765	1267	911	1367

2. Handicrafts

Handicraft production makes use of the area's natural resources, which are obtained when maintaining the landscape and ensure long-term subsistence for the local residents:

- Promotion of handicrafts based on coastal grassland management
- Establishment of new marketing solutions (fairs, market days)
- Education
- Information leaflets
- Study visits
- Labelling (Väinameri brand),
- International contacts (Swedish handicraft association),
- Improvement of wool quality – sheep breeding.

Results:

Establishment of a “Väinameri label” including design and criteria.

Result: under completion. The label has been designed, and the information signs about the objectives of the project, to be placed in the partner enterprises, have been printed and distributed. The final criteria are under discussion, although the exact organisation for the labelling system has not yet been finally decided upon.

Establish international handicraft contacts

Result: Established. Operational contacts within the region are sustainable and based on mutual interest. International contacts established with the Stockholm region handicraft society (Eva Anderson) and the Olonets region artisans in Russian Karelia. The seminar in July 2003, held with

Eva Anderson and two teachers from the Estonian Academy of Art, was very successful. The main issue was quality of handicrafts and the need for new ideas.

Import sperm from high quality wool sheep and inseminate local sheep

Result: Completed. Changed into purchasing of pure breed Icelandic rams.

Indicators of success:

- Consumer awareness about the direct influence of the purchase of the labelled product on the state of the semi-natural grasslands - under completion
- Active contacts between Swedish and Väinameri crafts organisations
- High quality wool from Väinameri sheep available

Actions completed in 2003:

- Handicraft seminar with the expert Eva Anderson (Sweden), 18 July 2003 in Kärkla.
- Handicraft summer market in Hiiumaa, 19 July 2003.
- Handicraft winter market in Hiiumaa, December 2003. Contest “*New Christmas gift*” to promote ideas about improving handicraft quality and design.
- Annual handicraft seminars in Vormsi.

3. Nature Tourism

Increase the area’s attractiveness for small-scale nature tourism, which adds to the local resident’s earning potentials:

- a) Education
- b) Information leaflets
- c) Study visits

Development of network including international nodes, the WWF member test case, fulfilment of tourist network including international contacts.

Results:

Elaboration and implementation of three nature tourism packages for WWF members: bird watching, orchid visits, and family at a farm.

Result: These three packages have been elaborated. The tourism component has been successful, especially in co-operation between local entrepreneur Marika Mann and the Swedish expert Jan Wigsten. The elaborated package for WWF members (bird tourism lead by professor Staffan Ulfstrand) was successful according to trip report by professor Ulfstrand.

The study tour for local entrepreneurs to Hiiumaa in September 2003, focused on family accommodation issues. The tour examined both positive and negative examples of Hiiumaa farm tourism, bed and breakfast and guesthouse accommodation.

Indicators of success:

- Three well-managed package tours
- Increase in nature tourism numbers in the area
- Co-operation agreements with small-scale tourism entrepreneurs
- Väinameri travel information in international publications

Actions completed in 2003:

- Tourism seminar in Lihula 24-25 January 2003

- 3 tourism packages elaborated (bird-watching; rare plants; nature holidays in west Estonia). The latter package advertised in the website at http://www.arhipelaag.ee/vainameri/nature_holidays.html
- Production of leaflets in English and German for nature trails in Hiiumaa island.
- Study visit of the Olonets tourism entrepreneurs (Russian Karelia) to Väinameri in August 2003.
- Study tour of the tourism entrepreneurs from Väinameri area to Hiiumaa island in order to learn about rural accommodation, 18-20 September 2003.
- Study tour of the tourism entrepreneurs from the Finnish archipelago to Hiiumaa island 29 Sept – 3 October 2003.
- Presentation of the Russian version of the Väinameri film in Olonets (Russia) in the tourism seminar, 24-30 October 2003.

Related Activities:

New enterprise called Moonsund Eco started in 2003, with emphasis on high-quality lodging for demanding birdwatchers. This enterprise has used know-how elaborated by the Väinameri project, in particular in terms of appropriate service style, and relations to local agricultural and handicraft market. New bird-watching package elaborated.

Establishment of an international network

Permanent link to the ecotourism associations close to WWF Sweden established. Co-operation of ecotourism package providers from Matsalu and Hiiumaa with German agencies and bird clubs. Established contacts with the Russian Karelia ecotourism enterprise.

4. Awareness & Outreach

Outreach of information, experiences and result to general public, media and authorities.

Results:

Completion of the project website in Estonian and English, with several dynamic possibilities for downloading and query-making.

Result: The website is active, updated and popular. On average, the website has 1000 hits per month. There are several materials available for downloading in pdf-format. The most popular is the Handicraft Manual, which has been downloaded about one hundred times. The address of the website is <http://www.arhipelaag.ee/vainameri/>. The project is also presented on WWF Sweden's homepage (www.wwf.se).

Study visits to the Väinameri area from Estonian rural areas, Latvia, and Russia (Olonets project), 5 visits in total.

Result: Two study visits of local level were arranged. Väinameri project partners (mainly farmers) visited Saaremaa in the end of May 2003. This visit proved that activities similar to Väinameri project (in particular, landscape restoration via farming and holistic approaches to tourism) are emerging in parts of Saaremaa Island. There are very good prospects to enlarge the network of partners to this, Estonia's largest island. The second visit studied tourism accommodations on Hiiumaa Island. As a result of the study tour, several entrepreneurs decided to start their own ecotourism business. We expect to see about 3-4 small tourism enterprises emerge as a result of the Väinameri project.

People from the Engure Nature Reserve, Latvia, visited the project in 2002. There was no visit from Latvia in 2003. However, the tourism entrepreneurs from Turku archipelago (Finland) visited the area and were extensively introduced into the Väinameri project. Two study tours from Olonets

(Karelia), namely one for handicrafts and the other for tourism, took place in August and September 2003. The visits were extremely successful, with very good responses and promising results in Karelia.

A study tour for Estonian local and regional authorities to Sweden.

Result: This study tour took place in October 2003. Nine local-level administrators from eight municipalities and one association participated in the study tour. The aim was to learn from Swedish experiences in assisting local and regional enterprises to start and sustain, not least by effectively using EU funding opportunities for capacity building and investment.

The project has enrolled a reference group with members representing national (ministries and universities) and regional (municipalities) authorities to ensure dispersal of project experiences among local, regional and national organisations and authorities. Seminars with invited media and authorities have presented project experiences and discussed sustainable rural development in relation to EU accession. State grazing payment to farmers in Matsalu area is a result of the project and has effected a national rural development programme.

For the reference group, the following meetings were organised:

1. November 200 in Hiiumaa island
2. June 2001 in Matsalu south coast area
3. May 2003 in Matsalu north coast area

In November 2003, an international conference of the Väinameri project was held in the town of Haapsalu, with 56 participants and 6 presentations.

Indicators of success:

- Number of visits to the website consistently high
- Number of study tour participants and application of results in neighbouring countries
- Regional authorities actively engaged with assisting establishment of enterprises dealing with sustainable natural resource use.

Actions completed in 2003:

- Study tour of local administrations to Sweden in October 2003.
- Publication of ecotourism folders/maps for Matsalu, Vormsi and Hiiumaa in 2003.
- Production of the Russian version of the Väinameri film (the Estonian and English versions were produced in 2002)
- Publication of the project's newsletters and distribution as add-in to local newspapers in the counties of Hiiumaa and Läänemaa. Distributed also to Saaremaa county.
- Programmes "*Tasakaal*" and "*Osoon*" in the Estonian national TV, presenting the discussions and results of the Väinameri project.
- Regular presentations in the Estonian news Internet portal *Green gate*.
- Presentation of the project in Swedish radio, TV and other Swedish media.
- Constant updates of the project's website at www.arhipelaag.ee/vainameri/
- Production of the Väinameri project partners information signs (see Figure 1), which was given to the 50 most active partners to identify the project objectives, and the relation to the project philosophy.

Links to other programmes

- WWF's project in Olonets, Russian Karelia - Very good links established, where the Olonets project may be considered as a continuation and test of the "Väinameri approach". (Supported by Sida through Forum Syd).
- GEF Baltic Sea Regional Programme. (Partly supported by Sida).
- WWF's Green Spots project – linking environmental education to ongoing conservation projects. (Supported by Sida through Forum Syd).
- EU-LIFE project with Natterjack Toad as flagship species, "*Boreal Baltic Coastal Meadow Preservation in Estonia*" co-operates with the Väinameri project and uses the Väinameri project as model and an example of good networking within the area.
- EU-LIFE project Engure in Latvia uses Väinameri as model. Cattle grazing is now used as a nature conservation method in Engure.
- UNESCO MAB Biosphere reserves programme - The UNESCO MAB Biosphere Reserve programme would consider the Väinameri project results as one of the most successful examples of the sustainable coastal rural development.
- WWF International has recently decided to use the Väinameri project as a model in its *One Europe More Nature* initiative.

Lessons learned

WWF considers the following keywords as being the main factors of success in this project:

- **fulltime regional project executant**
- **local co-ordination and delegation**
- **process-oriented implementation**
- **timing (early post-soviet period)**
- **linking on ground actions with policies**

The main message from the project is that biodiversity can be an important factor for rural development.

The substantial WWF co-funding in the project has been of crucial importance as it mainly has been used for local investments and salaries not eligible for Sida funds.

The Väinameri project has, via a regional project executant and local co-ordinators, managed to mobilise a broad variety of local stakeholders in the project area. This has caused many unforeseen but positive side effects - local NGO's have been established, jobs have been created and the project has affected Estonian practices and been seen as a model for other areas both in Estonia and the surrounding region. This wide spread local engagement as well as the administrative and political support forms a base that is as solid as possible before entering the EU.

Summary of progress indicators

The Landscape / Grassland management

Area grazed in 2003	2025 ha
Area cleaned from bushes	110 ha
Area mowed in 2003	2800 ha
No of cattle related to project	261
No of sheep	37
No of bush cutters	18
No of chainsaws	8
Length of electric fence	~ 60 km
Study tours (# participants)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agriculture 1999 (18) 2. Sheep breeding 2000 (9) 3. Vormsi to Läänemaa (8) 4. Abattoir, Nov 2001 (9) 5. Saaremaa, May 2003 (12) 6. Individual course for T. Tähe in Öland
Seminars arranged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beef production, Jan 2000 2. Project management and labelling, Apr 2000 3. Beef cattle breeding, Sept 2000 4. Environmental issues, Oct 2001 5. Beef cattle breeding (Thorssell), Feb 2002 6. ICA-seminar in Matsalu, Aug 2003

Handicrafts

Names of new companies (15 new jobs)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lihula handicraft shop 2. Close Knit World OÜ 3. Tuulepesa OÜ (handicraft shop)
Titles of 8 fairs organised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-2. Summer, Christmas market 2000 3-4. Summer, Christmas market 2001 5-6. Summer, Christmas market 2002 7-8. Summer, Christmas market 2003
Study tour (# participants)	Handicrafts, 2000 (15)
Titles of workshops (# participants)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felt making, 2000 2. Booklet preparation, 2000 (7) 3. Natural Tanning, 2001 (32) 4. Taxes and legislation (15) 5. Handicraft developments (24) 6. Plant dye making and felting, 2002 (29) 7. Handicraft in Hiiumaa, 2003 (25)
Other arrangements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation on Handicrafts in Hiiumaa 2. Handicraft Booklets 3. Handicraft contest "Forgotten techniques" 4. Children handicraft contest 5. Handicraft contest "New presents" 6. Book "Nature friendly skin tanning, dyeing and felting"

Nature tourism

Location of Nature trails	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sviby-Rumpo, Vormsi 2. Laiandi demo area trail 2 km, Matsalu 3. Kiideva-Puisse trail, Matsalu 4. Kirikuküla trail, Matsalu 5. Ristitee trail, Kassari 6. Pihla trail, Hiiumaa 7. Nasva trail in Hiiumaa
Location of Demo area	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sviby-Rumpo grassland, Vormsi 2. Salmi grassland, Matsalu 3. Kirikuküla-Laiandi, Matsalu 4. Laisna grassland, Kassari
Titles of study tours (# participants)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study Tour to Sweden, 2001 (9) 2. TUR 2002 in Göteborg (9) 3. Sollentuna Fair, 2002 (9) 4. Study Tour to Hiiumaa, 2003 (13)
Tourism packages created	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vormsi nature & tradition 2. Bird watching 3. Plant watching 4. Nature holidays 5. Moonsund Eco bird-watching package
Connected activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crane day in Matsalu 2. Training of guides 3. Estonia-wide handicraft days 4. Bird guide training course 5. Ecotourism seminar 6. Seminar in Lihula, 2003

Awareness & Outreach

Titles of leaflets	1-3. Vormsi, Matsalu and Hiiumaa (handicrafts) 4-6. Hiiumaa, Matsalu, Vormsi (ecotourism) 7. Newsletter, Feb 2001 8. Newsletter, Nov 2003
Titles of brochures compiled	1. Nature-friendly skin tanning, dyeing and felting 2. Coast needs care 3. Beef cattle manual
Titles of radio programmes	1. Pereraadio "What is up in Matsalu" 2. KUKU, Väinameri project 3. Naturmorgon "green meat" 4. Naturmorgon "nature & tourism"
Titles of TV programmes	1. ETV, Osoon 2. ETV, Osoon 3. NTV, Russia, about the Väinameri Project, 2000 4. ETV, Osoon, Dec 2001 5. ETV, Tasakaal, Nov 2003 6. ETV, Osoon, Dec 2003 7. Mitt i Naturen "Matsalu"
Titles of films made	1. Coast needs care, 2000 2. Eco-trips, by Sergei Vorobjev, Russia, 2000 3. Väinameri – Coastal nature and people, 2002 (in Estonian, English, Russian) 4. People & Nature in East, by Arnbom, 2004 (in prep)
Exhibitions	1. Estonian horse, photos by Ago Ruus 2. Birds in nature, photos by Ivar Ojaste 3. Values of coast, photography contest exhibition 4. Natural materials used in handicrafts
Study tours (# participants)	Estonian local authorities to Sweden, Oct 2003 (9)
Examples of presentations	1. Vormsi Swedes, meeting 2001 2. Nybro commune in Sweden, Villnet project, 2001 3. AVA seminar, Denmark, 2001 4. FoodChain, Uppsala, 2001 5. Envisions, Västerås, 2001 6. Biosphere reserves in Russia, Krasnoyarsk, 2001 7. Green week, Brussels, 2002 8. Farming with Nature, Utrecht, 2002 9. Grazing seminar, Brussels, 2004 10+. Several presentation in different Swedish universities (e.g., Uppsala, Gävle, Stockholm, Karlstad)
Websites	1. http://www.arhipelaag.ee/vainameri/ 2. http://www.wwf.se (project presentation)
Other arrangements	1. Sustainable Day of Vormsi 2. School conference Väinameri, 2001 3. Green Spots meeting, 2002 4. Väinameri door-sign, 2003 5. Sida Baltic week, Apr 2004 (in prep.) 6. WWF International <i>One Europe More Nature</i> (in prep.)

Local networking

Names of societies initiated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vormsi handicraft society 2. Upkeepers of Väinameri heritage landscapes 3. Society of handicraft of south Läänemaa 4. Hiiumaa handicraft society 5. “Salumäe society” in Matsalu 6. “Kiideva Greens” in Matsalu
Numbers of private Nature Guides	Eight nature guides as private entrepreneurs
Other arrangements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local co-operation with NGO's, biosphere reserve, and entrepreneurs 2. Co-operation with Olonets region in Karelia

Gender perspective

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
# farmers that participated in study tours	11	19
# artisans that participated in study tours	9	6
# tourism entrepreneurs that participated in study tours	21	8
# decision-makers that participated in study tours	6	6
# jobs created as a result of the project	15	0
Project management in Estonia	4	2



Figure 1. The sign printed for the 50 most active partners of the Väinameri project.

The Sustainability of the Väinameri project

The Väinameri project has been successful in influencing a region and some of its inhabitants. Some 50 enterprises or about 100 people has been directly involved in the project, several of the enterprises established as a direct result of the project. Since the success of these enterprises is also of major importance for WWF's overarching project goal – the conservation and management of semi-natural grasslands and their associated flora and fauna, their long-term sustainability is vital.

The plan for the near future is therefore to follow-up and support these enterprises in different ways. WWF plans to have a budget line for Väinameri for at least the next coming years. In this report we summarise ongoing and planned activities that aim at sustaining obtained results.

For 2004, WWF has budgeted the following activities:

- ◆ Part-time project co-ordinator* in Estonia (Lia Rosenberg, Arhipelaag) who will function as contact person for project participants and focal point for the whole project network. Lia is working both nationally and internationally. The main task is to co-ordinate seminars, visits, meetings, other events, to work with media and to report quarterly and give an annual report about activities in the project area.
- ◆ Part-time “green meat” promoter* (Kaia Lepik, Estonian Fond for Nature), who will promote the production chain “grass to entrecote” by communicating and linking farmers with production and market. Local farmers, Estonian Cattle-breeders society, meat industry and restaurants are taking part in the discussions. A special meat label called “Looduslikult karjamaalt” (“From a natural grazing land”) is under creation.
- ◆ Follow-up study tour*: the three Swedish experts, Stefan Thorssell (agriculture), Eva Anderson (handicraft) and Jan Wigsten (tourism) will visit the area and discuss problems and opportunities with the project participants. This sustainability evaluation will guide WWF on how to continue with activities in Väinameri project.

On-going activities

The non-governmental organisations created by or because of the Väinameri project are all active. For example, the cattle-breeders society is expanding and organising study-tours for themselves and farmers from neighbourhood areas.

The handicraft and local-product fairs have become a tradition in Hiiumaa!

The tourism packages arranged by the project are still being used and are regarded as good examples that have encouraged people to put together more, new packages.

Väinameri as a model for others

The Väinameri project has become a study area for similar projects in Latvia and Russia. To date, one group from Latvia, two from Russia and one from Finland have visited the area, and more are scheduled in the near future.

The Väinameri project has been chosen by WWF programme *One Europe More Nature* (OEMN) as one of four demonstration sites as a good example for rural development and nature conservation. It will increase overall attention from the Western European countries, and may help attract more people to visit the area.

The outputs of the Väinameri project are used as “inputs” in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve programme, which is under development in the West Estonian archipelago. It means that the best examples and the networks established serve as a local supporting system in the biosphere reserve.

As a result of the Väinameri project, the Estonian Government pays grazing premia for semi-natural grassland management. In addition, as a new EU member, grassland management is also included in the Estonian CAP system as an agri-environmental measure.