

The Forests— Our Neglected Income

NORWAY IS A LAND OF FORESTS. They spread out over the countryside and climb the slopes of the mountains. They cling to the steep sides of the fjords and even invade the cities. The famous ski jump, Holmenkollen, is inside the city limits of Oslo, but it is surrounded by deep forest.

In the slack winter season, Norwegian farm hands spend the short days in the forest cutting the snow-laden trees and dragging the logs to the roads and rivers. They use small, chunky horses, to drag out the logs. They leave behind long trails through the snow under the dark green boughs of the pine and spruce.

Otto Langmoen is a lumberman in Hof, a county in eastern Norway. From his sawmill lumber goes to all parts of that small country and even across the border into Sweden. Part way by train and then by ship to Narvik in the far north go loads of his lumber to rebuild the houses and buildings destroyed by the Germans during the war.

Otto Langmoen is not a big lumberman. By nearly any standard his sawmill is small. He employs only forty men and he cuts only six to seven thousand cubic meters of lumber a year. Otto Langmoen's sawmill is typical of the many local sawmills scattered throughout Norway.

Because he has no lake in which to store the logs, he cuts his logs into lumber during the winter and spring. Farmers who hold their logs to be cut into lumber in the summertime must store the logs in water to keep them from splitting in the summer sun.

Did you ever tramp through a forest in America and come upon the deserted location where a sawmill once stood? Did you notice the mountains of rotting sawdust? You'll see nothing like that at Langmoen's sawmill. He has just completed a long building with large bins in which to store the sawdust and keep it dry. Overhead pipes blow the sawdust directly from the saws to the bins. Nearby farmers haul the sawdust to their farms to use in their barns for bedding down the cattle. Mixed with manure, the sawdust is eventually put on the cropland to add organic matter to the soil.

A tall, lank man with sincere blue eyes, Otto is more than a sawmill operator. He is a forest owner himself, and you will not talk to him long before he will begin to tell you about the importance of good forest management to Norwegian farmers. It is one of the chief incomes of Norway.

You'll find few deserted sawmill sites in Nor-

way. Sawmills just don't cut everything and then move on to new forests. With properly managed woodlands, Norwegian farmers cut some timber every year. The sawmills stay on the same location year after year with a constant supply of logs.

Take the forest of Ragnar Baanrud. Test borings on random selected trees on his 1,200 acres of forest land tell Baanrud how fast his trees are growing. In years when lumber prices are low, he may not cut much, but choose to wait and cut more when prices are good. It is just like leaving the interest on money in the bank to use next year or the year after that. Most of the logs come from thinning out stands of trees. But each year in the Baanrud forest, about 10 to 15 acres — depending on how fast the trees are growing — are cleared off to establish new plantings. Large, straight trees are left scattered over the clearing to furnish cones to start new seedlings. In five to ten years the new seedlings push their way up through the needle and moss covered soil and a new forest is on its way.

It will be approximately 80 to 100 years before these seedlings will be large enough to produce saw logs. For every forest tree, at least five, and more often twenty or so seedlings start. Where seedlings fail to come up at once, or where spruce is wanted on land that has had pine forest, the seedlings furnished at nominal prices by government nurseries are planted with spades or mat-ticks.

The life of a young seedling in the Baanrud forest is rigorous. Only the fastest growing trees survive in the competition for soil and light. After 30 to 35 years, the trees are about ten to fifteen feet high. It is then time to thin the stand. The crooked and smaller trees are cut up into firewood to burn during the long, cold winters. Each room in the many roomed farm houses has its own wood stove, frequently an old European model of the Ben Franklin type. Surplus wood is sold in town or to nearby farmers who have no forests.

Later some trees may be thinned out every 10 to 20 years. Until they are large enough for lumber, the trees go for firewood or to the paper mills.

Twenty-five to thirty farms with forests similar to Ragnar Baanrud's furnish a steady supply of logs for Langmoen's mill. Much of the timber in Norway moves on the rivers. As the logs are cut in the forests, they are dragged or hauled to the rivers and put on the thick winter ice. They are bought by the various mills when they are delivered to the river. In the spring when the ice thaws, the melting ice and snow fill the rivers and send millions of logs down toward the ocean. Many large sawmills are located on rivers near the ocean. Much of the lumber of eastern Norway goes down the Glomma River to the port towns of Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad, where the logs are stacked under water until they can be sawed, and much of the lumber is shipped then by water to the various ports of Norway or exported to other

countries. Langmoen's mill is a small local mill and the logs are delivered by the farmers on sleds and trucks and piled outside to be sawed immediately into lumber.

Even in eastern Norway, the main farming section, most farms have large forests, for even here much of the land is too steep for cultivation. Less than 20 per cent of the total land here is in cultivation. For the whole of Norway less than 10 per cent is in cropland. Firewood, pulpwood, and logs for lumber make up a large proportion of the farmers' income. Most of the forests have pine on the poorer land and spruce on the better forest land.

Because of its large, well managed forests, lumber, lumber products, and paper are plentiful and cheap. Much of the land in the northern half and central part of the country is high — above 2,000 feet — and the summers short, less than 120 days of growing season, so trees are nearly the only crop that can be grown.

Today, facing many shortages and badly needing foreign exchange, Norway can well be proud of the Otto Langmoens and Ragnar Baanruds through whose wise management she has a plentiful supply of lumber now and a bank account of lumber for the future. In Otto Langmoen's words, "Trees are the life blood of Norway."

Timber could be an important crop to American farmers. Let's take my home state of Illinois. In Illinois we don't think much about our forests,

yet we have four million acres of woodland. Many a southern Illinois farmer who never thinks that he has a forest will have from one to four acres out of every ten in trees. He isn't in the forest business — he has only useless brush, or rotten, scraggy trees not even fit for good firewood.

A short time ago I drove through northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. Weatherbeaten houses and dilapidated barns seemed to struggle for their very existence on the few cleared acres. Here farm income is low. Crowding up to the very farmsteads were acres and acres of second growth brushland. With the exception of some pulp wood, these acres give little income. It will take a lot of work to get rid of the weed trees and a generation of time for these acres to produce useful lumber.

Yet here, at their very back doors, could have been the solution to good living for these people had we taken care of this forest land. It can be in the future, if we start now to build good forests.

Because we have not thought of forests as a crop, the American farmer loses millions of dollars every year. Lumber prices soar as we continue to plunder our forest land. Farmers strive for their very existence on land where they could make a decent living.