

# Elite for forests of the future

Belarus is among Europe's leading forest states, with woodlands occupying around 40 percent of its territory. In fact, a third of these are planted by human hand.

By Mikhail Serovsky

Many of us might think that our forests are grown from seedlings. However, forestry workers know well that huge pines and firtrees are grown from small seeds. Their quality directly influences the potential of future forests. Accordingly, each winter, around ten tonnes of coniferous seeds are gathered. The number might seem small but each cone contains no more than 1.5 percent of seeds.

Naturally, some further preparation is needed for around 300 tonnes of cones. In the past, dry cones were placed into special stoves — cone dryers — to allow them to 'open' their petals. Later, seeds were shaken out by an electric or hand-driven engine before being cleaned. Today's technologies make the job easier of course.

At the end of 2011, a new forestry-seeding centre was launched at Shchuchin Forestry — becoming the largest project to be realised by the forestry as part of the State Programme for Belarus' Innovative Development. Only a small number of em-

ployees are needed. They remove cones from special bags, placing them into containers and sending them down a sorting line. Those not meeting quality requirements are thrown away, while the best are sent to dry and centrifugal forces used to extract seeds.

The spent cones are then sent to boilers as fuel, while the seeds are dampened and dried in turn, with compressed air. Double sorting follows, with computer controlled air flow allowing weak seeds to be blown away. Only the healthiest and fullest remain, sieved by size. Seeds can then be refrigerated, lasting up to ten years without their germinating capacity being affected.

All these high-tech procedures are organised at the new forestry-seeding centre. According to Deputy Prime Minister Valery Ivanov, the facility cost around \$1m. "The con-

of this new facility will bring our forestry selection branch in the Grodno Region to a whole new level, meeting global standards for quality," he asserts.

Coniferous seeds — extracted with the help of the latest equipment — boast at least 95 percent germinating capacity. Importantly, their careful selection ensures that the forests of the future are more disease resistant,

estries is improving, while productivity and disease resistance are being

Numerous scientific experiments in the field of forestry genetics, selection and seed preparation have proven that trees which have grown in the same location for many years tend to develop resistance to disease and other unfavourable factors. Accordingly, it has been a true necessity to launch the forestry-seeding centre in the Grodno Region. "Similar centres have operated within the forestry system previously: at the Vitebsk Region's Glubokoe Experimental Forestry, at Ivatsevichi Forestry (in the Brest Region), at Gorki Forestry (in the Mogilev Region) and at the Republican Forestry Selection-Seeding Centre (near Minsk)," Mr. Amelyanovich tells us. He continues, "The launch of the Shchuchin facility allows us to completely settle all issues regarding seed processing (covering all Belarusian regions). Moreover, we have the chance to process the necessary quantity of elite seeds, which are partially exported."



Tatiana Statkevich, from Vitebsk, among volunteers planting forest seedlings

quick growing and strong. "Global experience and the history of our domestic forestry convinces us that the structure of our for-

estries is maintained — primarily through genetic selection," stresses the Forestry Minister, Mikhail Amelyanovich.



Forests countrywide decorate landscapes — even in snowy winter

## Reserves as never before

By Alexey Overyanov

**Preliminary data indicates that, as of January 1st, 2012, Belarus' gold and currency reserves have reached a record high, totalling \$7,915,900,000 (by IMF definition)**

In 2011, our reserves (as defined by the IMF) rose by \$2,885,200,000 — up over 57 percent. These considerably outstrip the forecast (envisioned by the monetary-credit policy for 2011, which estimated \$6,230,700,000 by January 1st, 2012).

Considerable growth in gold and currency reserves in late 2011 was influenced by the arrival of \$2.5bn, from the sale of the remaining 50 percent of Beltransgas'

shares. In December, the second tranche of funds also arrived from the EurAsEC Anti-Crisis Fund (worth \$440m)

as did a syndicated loan worth \$1bn, from Sberbank of Russia and the Eurasian Development Bank (allocated to Belrusskali JSC). Meanwhile,

the Government and the National Bank have fully met their external and internal obligations in foreign currency.

Belarus' gold and currency reserves are currently sufficient to cover almost two months of imports. The National Bank prognoses that, by the end of 2012, the country's international reserve assets should stand at \$7bn (by IMF definition) — taking into account payment of external and internal obligations in foreign currency and the actuation of foreign investments into the national economy.



## Residential district built in a month

By Andrey Serovsky

**Maracay commissions first hundreds of apartments constructed by Belarusian and Venezuelan specialists**

720 apartments — built by Belarusian and Venezuelan specialists — were commissioned in the Venezuelan city of Maracay, Aragua State, on New Year's Eve. Another 1,800 apartments are to be commissioned soon, built with the participation of Belarusians, for occupation by Venezuelan families who lost their homes during the devastating floods of late 2011, as well as those badly in need of housing.

Taking part in the solemn ceremony of commissioning the new apartments was the Ambassador Extraordi-

nary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Venezuela, H.E. Mr. Valentin Gurinovich. He praises the high level of co-operation between Belarus and Venezuela in housing construction, telling us that, in January 2012, Belarus will complete construction of a plant producing building materials in Guarenas Guatire (Miranda State) and plants producing Belarusian tractors and trucks.

Belarusian specialists are currently building about 20,000 apartments in Venezuela, in addition to agro-towns and a plant to manufacture road construction machinery. In line with agreements reached by Alexander Lukashenko and Hugo Chávez, Belarusians are helping with a major state housing construction programme in Venezuela.