

Roads comfortable and safe

According to a recent study by the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup Poll), Belarus is ranked 68th for the quality of its roads — among 148 countries. This is significantly ahead of its partners in the Customs Union and its neighbours: Poland, Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania.

By Vasily Khromchenko

This year, Belavtodor carried out minor repairs on over 850km of roads, with major repairs on 42km. A number of important projects were completed, including a southwest bypass for Vitebsk, a new bridge over the River Dnieper in Shklov and a new segment of the M4 Minsk-Mogilev motorway. Road surfaces are being improved by the addition of rubber 'crumbs', with the M4 piloting the innovation. The motorway features rest locations with parking and roadside services while cameras can transmit information in real time to monitor traffic flow.



First stage of Roads of Belarus project includes reconstruction of Minsk-Mogilev highway

Display boards can then inform drivers of delays ahead. A wire cable guardrail divides the traffic in some segments, to help deter head-on collisions, while forested areas have a net barrier to keep out animals.

"This year, reconstruction began on the M5 Minsk-Gomel route, between Pukhovichi and Bobruisk, to be completed in 2013. The M5's Zhlobin-Gomel segment is also due for improvement, in 2014, with funding sought from the Export-Import Bank of China. We expect that, over the next three years, the M5 will match that of the M4 in quality. Negotiations are also underway to attract credit

to reconstruct the M6 Minsk-Grodno road," notes the Deputy Director of Belavtodor, Grigory Shulga.

In the near future, all regional centres are to be linked with the capital by high-quality roads. By 2017, a second ring road around Minsk should be operational; to achieve this, two sections (85km long) should be joined with the existing ring road to create a total length of about 160km.

In the field of road construction and repairs, Western European experience can be drawn upon, alongside its methods of financing. Belarus will boast roads like Germany when citizens pay for them in the same

manner as the Germans. The only road currently featuring a toll is the Brest-Minsk M1/E30 but Austrian company Kapsch is now contracted to introduce an automatic payment system, requiring about 260m Euros of investment. The reconstructed Brest-Minsk, Minsk-Mogilev

and Minsk-Gomel roads will be the first to trial the new system.

Despite obstacles, the main task is to keep roads in good condition via maintenance. This ensures comfort and safety for transit vehicles and passengers while aiding the smooth functioning of the country's economy.

Research:

According to research by the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup Poll), 52 percent of Belarusians are satisfied with the state of domestic highways. Belarus is significantly ahead of its neighbours. Lithuania is in 97th place (41 percent), Kazakhstan is 105th (40 percent), Latvia is 122nd (32 percent), Poland is 125th (32 percent), Russia is 128th (30 percent) and Ukraine is 133th (27 percent). The Moldovans are the least satisfied among CIS citizens, with only 17 percent expressing a positive view of roads. The top five countries are the UAE, Luxembourg, Hong Kong, Netherlands and Singapore.



By Leonid Svetlovsky

It took several months for me to arrange a meeting with Nadya and Sergey, from Minsk, since the arrival of their first baby occupied most of their spare time. Moreover, they recently launched their pioneering business, opening an online organic farm shop — the first in Belarus. They have no idea whether their risk will pay off; even now, they're unsure how successful their venture will prove to be.

The young couple visit farmers to inspect growing conditions and admit that most treat them sceptically at their first meeting. They've clearly never grown vegetables themselves but they have

City style will not hinder country's rural efficiency

Young family dare to open first organic farm shop in Belarus

firm ideas about quality. Village farmers have no chance of passing off inferior produce, as the pair have studied their sphere well, gaining specialist advice.

Their database already includes a dozen farmer suppliers. Among them is a pig breeder whose animals roam freely in the forest, eating white truffles. Another also keeps his animals in the open air, even feeding them whey. Sergey smiles, "I guarantee, you can't look at another meat after tasting that pork." One of their suppliers is a female hard-cheese maker: very unusual for Belarus. Another is originally from South Africa but arrived in Belarus in the 1990s, taking up his father's sheep breeding pro-

fession after abandoning ideas of evangelicalism. Interestingly, one supplier is a gestalt-therapist (also a lawyer and a swimming coach); he's the only Belarusian farmer to boast a European bio-certificate.

Your new project must have taught you a few agricultural tricks. Have you ever thought of farming yourself?

We aren't excluding this possibility; we'll certainly try it sometime in the future.

You're city residents. Aren't you afraid of failing?

I spent all my holidays until the third year at university at my grandfather's. He had a large farm



where I helped, so village work is nothing new to me; I can mow hay, collect a stack and chop wood.

What about milking a goat?

I've never tried but I've milked a cow.

The couple lament that eco-friendly products are currently viewed as being elite, being more expensive, but assert, "Our grandparents never ate potatoes filled with nitrates or meat with colouring agents. Natural food was the norm, making those generations healthier. With this in mind, we'd love to see organic food become more widely developed in Belarus. We hear a lot about rural revival so, if people see that selling organic products is profitable, they may move to the countryside to run such businesses," Nadya and Sergey believe.