



Farming Connect Management Exchange

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Denmark

Large scale export Christmas tree production, Noble Fir foliage production and Langesø trade show – Part 2

13-19 August 2019

1. Background

Denmark is the largest producer and exporter of Christmas trees and foliage in Europe through their large-scale production, nursery stock production and trees professionally managed for foliage production. The objective of the visit was to see their methods of production, gain a better understanding of the industry as a whole and meet companies involved within the industry.

Also, I wanted to see the management of trees for production of Noble Fir foliage.

2. Itinerary

Day 1

The first visit was to Oster Skovgard, a very large retail site in Herning, central Jutland. They are a medium sized tree farm with the largest retail shop and Christmas attraction in Denmark.

The family have created a farm attraction which opens early September each year.

Coach parties travel up to 100 miles to buy a tree and decorations, and it is a noted office Christmas party destination with a cafeteria open from early November.

They have a 'choose and cut' area of around 15 acres with pathways and a family trail included, but they also display many of their own pre-cut trees from off-lying land.

Due to the large number of trees grown in their area, they sell 1.8m trees for around £25 which is considerably cheaper than the UK, but they also have a 100-cover café and sell decorations and candles, which reuse redundant farm buildings.



Oster Skovgard Café – open for Christmas parties from 2nd weekend in November.

Examining trees with Pia Pedersen of Oster Skovgard. The Danes give a lot of attention to pruning for shape.



A very well pruned Noble Fir





Just a few of the decorations on sale at Oster Skovard.

Day 2

Langesø Fair

The main reason for travelling to Denmark was to visit Langesø Fair. This is the premier technical trade show for Christmas tree growing and foliage production in Europe.

From the car park it was evident that it was well attended by Danes and Germans, with quite a number of Czech and Polish registered vehicles in attendance. I understand after the event that the attendance was 3,000 people.

With over 200 trade stands and including everything from plants to palletising machinery for the professional tree grower, it was certainly an interesting visit. The day was spent talking to a number of seedling producers trying to gain a better understanding of the various provenances and seedling types available. I have been planting four-year-old 'two plus two' seedlings but now understand that 'two plus one' (three-year-old) may be better suited to my system and ensures better growth. I also met the largest seed producers in the industry who would be able to supply me should I wish to plant my own trees from seed. It was encouraging to see the huge depth of background research and trials that have gone into the industry over the last 40 years.

There was a large amount of specialist machinery present from narrow interrow tractors to specialist netters. The pruning demonstrations were very interesting in showing methods of narrowing trees for the current market fashion.

Plastic free netting was a hot topic, with a return to 'old fashioned' sisal twine tree balers and also decomposing starch based netting solutions on offer. A fertiliser spreader with pneumatically fed discs above the hopper to spread over trees of up to 3m in height, and a mist blower on a boom to spray insecticides were some of the novel machines on display.

One of the most interesting meetings was with the Danish small foresters' association. They are a trade association which look after the interests of Danish Christmas tree growers. The Christmas tree growing industry is a very small proportion of total forestry area and operates on a subsidy free basis. In the past, there was a subsidy for Christmas tree production but it simply led to an oversupply of trees of poor quality.. There is concern that additional tree plantings for climate change mitigation, if not properly regulated, could lead to market distortion if thinnings find their way into the Christmas market.



Fertiliser spreader with discs at top to go over trees.



Trade stand selling eco-friendly tree netting made from biodegradable maize starch.



Chemical applicators for leader control in Nordmann Fir.

A specialist tree gantry tractor fitted with machine to remove trees for potting.



Day 3

Henning Pedersen Overgaard - Large scale export production



Henning Pedersen Overgaard I/S Large scale export grower

The accepted level of grass/weed cover is higher than we would like in the UK.

After Langesø show, I returned to the area of Central Eastern Jutland. The land here is loam over sand on gently rolling hills. The climate is milder than Denmark's usual temperature, giving better spring climate with fewer late frosts. Mr Pedersen grows over 500 acres of trees and I was shown many stands of well pruned trees. He would happily sell medium grade 1.8m trees for €11/tree by the artic load of 1,000 trees. He has been involved with tree production for 25 years, and felt that whilst these prices were very low, he could turn a profit. He also said that there were very few new entrants into the industry in Denmark. He expected prices to remain depressed until the mid 20's. The area is windy and there were regular windbreak hedges of Blue Spruce between compartments. He has some well-established Noble Fir stands for foliage and sells foliage for €220/tonne. He also grows some Spruce and Omorika for export to Germany.

Day 4: Majland Tree Nursery

Majland Nurseries supply my seedlings. The farm is around 400 acres in size and mainly set out in 30m wide by around 400m long compartments. These compartments have a road at their end and access to an irrigation main. Each compartment has a hedge of about 3m high to divide them. The main business is Christmas seedlings, potted trees and field grown trees.

I was able to see first-hand the different provenance of each variety and see seedlings of various ages and densities. There were no signs of disease and not a weed in sight.

Seedling sales have reduced from a 2012 peak; therefore, they now are increasing the area of potted trees that they grow. These are planted into fields in the pots and grown in these for up to five years.



Nordmann seedlings

Trees being grown in pots in the ground (planted out in 2015)

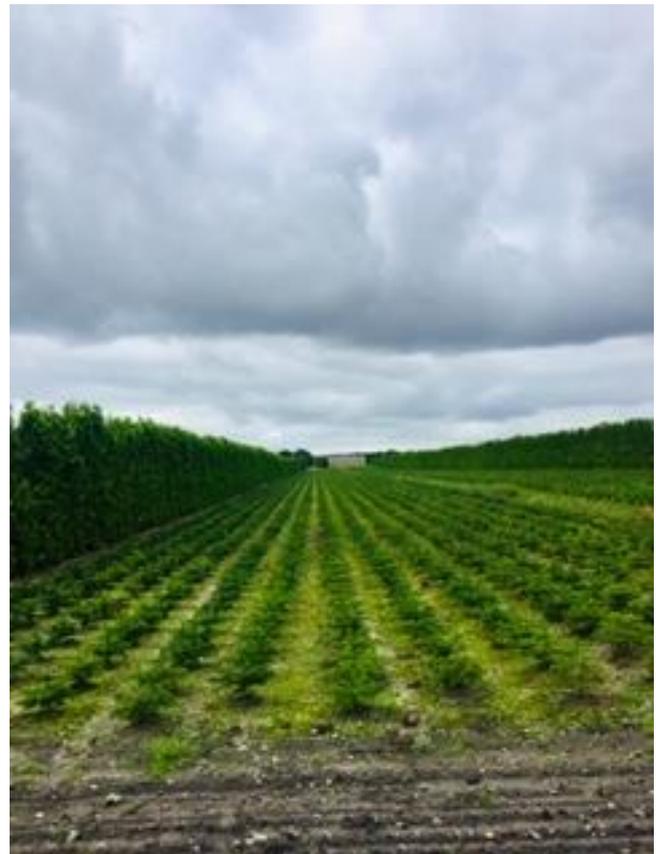




A typical compartment with irrigation chamber 30m wide by 400m long.



Potted grown trees after one year.



Day 5: Aarhus

Travel day.

Day 6: Duelund Plant nursery

Duelund are a roadside retail nursery, but also have a large acreage of Noble Fir specifically grown for foliage. The trees are grown at high density of around 4,500 per hectare and annually harvested for foliage. I saw many similar stands in Denmark. The trees here were about 7m tall and completely bare for the bottom 3m. From 3m to the top, branches are kept short to encourage fresh growth which is hand harvested every year from ground level by using tree loppers.

The trees are heavily fertilised to produce lush growth of a blue colour.

Christmas harvest starts as early as mid-October and bundles are sold at £1.1 /5kg

There are many areas of foliage production in this part of Denmark but I saw no young stands - they all seem to be of the same age.



20-year-old Noble Fir at 1.5m square planting.



Bottom of trees stripped bare to 3m and foliage harvested at 3m-6m.

Impressive show of very spikey blue Spruce for the local market.





An exceptional Noble Fir for retail sale at Duelund Nursery.



This photo was taken at Langescø fair and shows what a good bundle of Noble foliage should be like blue colour and stiff toothbrush like needles. This is exported to floristry wholesalers all over Europe.

3. Next Steps

There is definitely an oversupply of foliage into the European export market for the next few years. Talking to growers, they are very concerned about Brexit, and the drop in Sterling. They also have high transport costs into the UK market. They are more interested in sales to EU countries and there is also a good developing market with Russia.

It reinforces my view that at the moment my relatively small enterprise, which mainly retails into the local market, is the correct size for my farm.

Following on from both this visit and my Irish visit, I am going to plant some Noble Fir specifically for foliage. I have seen which provenances I prefer and taken advice on which ones are best suited to my climate and soil type. I am also considering starting to grow some pot trees in the manner I have seen in Denmark.

I will now also start pruning one year earlier than my current practice.

4. Key Messages to the industry

1. A large-scale high capital-intensive industry exists.
2. The industry is generally on free draining soils in relatively mild areas. Late frosts after the trees begin to grow are a big worry.
3. Currently, there is an oversupply in the market with 2012 planting being very high, therefore, it will be 2025 before there will be a fall in supply.
4. The Danes can grow average quality trees for €11/tree loaded for sale. This price needs to be an aim for growers in the UK to ensure they remain competitive.
5. Established producers of high quality pruned trees are able to make a profit.
6. Poor quality unpruned stands of trees are unsaleable in Denmark.
7. There is an increased potted tree production industry actually grown in pots in the soil.
8. Denmark exports to 17 countries-including Russia.
9. Phytosanitary passports can be an issue. This is a Brexit worry that they may face more paperwork when exporting into the UK.
10. It is very important that forestry subsidisation specifically excludes the planting of Christmas tree varieties. This will lead to market distortion.
11. There is very little new foliage planting which could provide opportunities.
12. High density foliage stands of 20 plus years of age are still productive.
13. Labour, lack of youngsters in the industry and transport are big problems.