

# Discovering untapped value in Europe's forests

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Non-wood forest products can help boost the economies of remote mountainous areas of Europe, maintain local traditions and preserve unique landscapes for generations to come. Exploitation of a variety of non-wood products also means that rural communities are less dependent on just one 'cash crop'.

These key findings from the EU-funded STARTREE [project](#) were discussed at the recent annual International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE) World Congress. STARTREE partners from the University of Padova, Italy told the congress that products such as [forest](#) fruits, mushrooms, nuts and [essential oils](#) present an untapped opportunity for many [rural communities](#).

Since 40 % of the EU's landmass consists of forests, better use of their products and services has the potential to benefit both rural communities and forest-based businesses. The critical question is how to sustainably exploit this potential in a manner that produces both economic and ecological benefits.

The EU-funded STARTREE project began in November 2012 by providing a clear overview of all non-wood forest product resources at Europe's disposal. Until now, research into non-wood forest products has been fragmented and only implemented at the regional or country level.

STARTREE therefore sought to provide a truly European perspective for the first time and to make much more explicit the potential of these

products. The project has focused on 14 European regions stretching from Portugal to Finland. In Alentejo, Portugal for example, work has been carried out to support forest management in the production of cork, pine nuts and mushrooms.

Building on the knowledge gained from the case studies and working throughout with forest owners, resource managers and other public/private entities, the STARTREE project has developed management and marketing strategies for specific non-wood products.

Another key element of the project has been to improve the commercialisation of non-wood products. Rural communities are often unaware of urban demands, and therefore miss potential new market openings. Identifying and servicing urban markets with new products can be economically beneficial, and also lead to a greater appreciation among city dwellers of the value of sustainable rural communities. Diversification into non-wood [products](#) also means that the forestry sector and related business activities are better prepared to deal with economic crises that may hit the commercial value of a particular product.

In addition, a wealth of new information and spin-off projects has resulted from the project. Consortium partners from 12 countries met for the Sixth STARTREE General Assembly in May 2015 to discuss progress and exchange ideas, with interesting new discoveries on bees, bluebells, mushrooms, lichens and black cherries shared. New research into medicinal benefits, apps and label certification was also discussed.

The STARTREE project is due for completion in October 2016.

**More information:** For further information please visit STARTREE: [star-tree.eu/](http://star-tree.eu/)

Provided by CORDIS

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