

# Needs and Challenges of Private Forest Owners in Flanders (Belgium): A Voice for Small-Scale, Non- Professional Managers

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# Who We Represent

**Landelijk Vlaanderen vzw** represents private rural landowners in Flanders.

Over **60% of forest** and **over 80% open space** in Flanders is privately owned.

Most owners manage small forest parcels **non-professionally**: they are farmers, families, heirs, or individuals with a deep-rooted connection to the land.



# Key Challenges for Private Forest Owners

1. Complex regulations
2. Lack of professional support
3. Limited income opportunities
4. Fragmented ownership
5. Weak representation in policy processes



# We Need Clear, Accessible & Consistent Regulations

Small forest owners face **increasing legal and administrative burdens**. Private **ownership rights** are being restricted by societal needs (restrictions, obligations...) -> joy?

Policies around biodiversity, climate, zoning, and forest management often **overlap or conflict**.

We ask for **protection of ownership rights** and **policy simplification**, tailored to the reality of small-scale, multifunctional forest use.



# Respect Our Role as Partners

Forest owners are not obstacles; they are **part of the solution**.

We want **recognition** for the societal value we deliver:

- **Carbon capture,**
- **Water retention,**
- **Biodiversity,**
- **Cultural landscapes.**

We ask for a **voice at the table** when decisions are made.



# Strengthen Knowledge and Support

Most private owners are **non-professionals**: they lack technical forestry knowledge.

We need:

- **Practical tools and model plans**
- **Access to neutral expert advice**
- **On-the-ground training** and best practices

Public services are often not accessible or adapted to this target group.



# Fair Compensation for Ecosystem Services

Forest owners provide **public goods**, but face **private costs**.

We advocate for:

- **Fair payment schemes for ecosystem services (PES)**
- **Better funding instruments** for sustainable forest management
- **Fiscal incentives** for climate and biodiversity efforts

No sustainability without **economic viability** - geopolitical context!



# Space for Innovation

Owners want to experiment with:

- **Climate-adaptive species**
- **Agroforestry**
- **Bio-based value chains**
- **Multifunctional land use**

Innovation projects often focus on large-scale actors.

We call for **funding, support and regulatory space for small-scale innovation**



# Encourage Collaboration and Scale-Up

Forest parcels are highly **fragmented** in Flanders.

This complicates forest management and reduces efficiency.

Solutions:

- **Cooperative models,**
- **Forest clusters,**
- **Joint management frameworks**

Government support can boost these forms of collaboration.



# Cut Red Tape – Simplify Administration

Owners are overwhelmed by:

- Permit applications
- Reporting duties
- Subsidy bureaucracy

We ask for:

- **One-stop digital portals**
- **Pre-filled documents**
- **Less paperwork, more impact**



# Our Role in a Changing Landscape

Forests are at the heart of **climate, biodiversity, and water policy**.

Private landowners want to contribute, but only **with the right tools, trust, and incentives**.

Landelijk Vlaanderen helps bridge the gap between **owners and policy**, through:

- Capacity-building
- Networking
- Policy recommendations
- EU cooperation



# Concluding Message

"If we want resilient forests, we must empower those who own and care for them."

- Let us **invest in people**, not just in trees.
- Let us **remove barriers and overregulations**, not just set targets.
- Let us build **partnerships to develop income models** for non-professional forest owners



# Thank You – Contact Us

**Landelijk Vlaanderen vzw**

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 Representing over 80% of Flanders' privately managed rural land

