

FarmLands



Department of Human Geography

Farmlands, or agricultural landscapes, captures the interest of a number of researchers based at the Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University. On this blog we share information about research findings, activities, events and comments related to our work.

Our interest in farmlands has three roots: farming, landscape and society.

Farming as a practice, including farmers knowledge and labour investments

Landscape as society-nature relations, congealed history, and as space and place

Society as a short form for institutions, gender relations, political economy and scientific relevance

Most Welcome to FarmLands!

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2013

Swedish Black Earth?

(originally posted March 2013, updated October 2013)
I've put together a table with what I think are the main Swedish land investments in Russia and Ukraine. In doing this, I ran into some of the known difficulties associated with monitoring the phenomenon of large-scale land-acquisition (as well discussed in Visser and Spoor, 2011, "Land-grabbing in post-Soviet Eurasia," *Journal of Peasant Studies*). For example what can we call Swedish when shareholders come from the whole world? To make things more difficult, these companies appear to restructure and change shareholders faster than you can say "large-scale land acquisition." Another question is how can we keep track of how large land areas the individual companies have when public promises to scale up aren't always implemented or reported on by the company or the media?

Take for example Redland Farming, which is listed in Grain's [recent overview](#) as a Swedish company with up to 180 000 hectares in Russia. Concerning the size of the operation, the Redland farming web-site states the following:

"Today, Redland Farming is mainly a grain producer, but is developing quickly within the vegetable- and animal segments. The company is controlling and financing agricultural operations harvesting on around 3 000 hectares and storing 200 cows (100 milk cows), divided into two production clusters."

Of course Redland Farming could have more land and they just have not gotten around to updating their web-site or perhaps they ran into difficulties in scaling-up. As for the ownership, Planeta Holding is listed as a majority shareholder in the operation with 64% of the shares. According to their web-site Planeta Holding is based in Singapore, but the Planeta Holding web-site states that it is copyright Lupus Holding, and Lupus is an investment company owned by a Swede (Gunnar Nilsson). Both the Lupus Holding site and the Planeta Holding site link to Redland Farming, so for the time being I will consider this "Swedish."

Another example is [Trigon Agri](#), which is listed on the Nasdaq OMX Nordic Stock exchange. Grain calls Trigon Agri a Danish company because it is based in Denmark. However shareholders from the US and Sweden appear to have a plurality, with the Swedish shareholders slightly edging out

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the Americans (I'm including Nordea Finland as Swedish, since the Nordea Finland web-site states that it is wholly owned by Nordea which is, of course, the largest bank in Sweden). Swedish entities similarly appear to own a plurality of shares in Swedish-based [Alpcot Agro \(Agrokultura\)](#). [Black Earth Farming](#) does not list its shareholders on its web-site, but Swedish Kinnevik is one of the major shareholders. [Grain Alliance AB](#) with 40 000 hectares in Ukraine, is listed as an American investment in the Grain report, but the company was bought out by Swedish [Claesson Anderzen](#), a private Swedish property company based in Kalmar. [Raw Agro](#) was listed in the Grain report as being 30% owned by Swedish Kinnevik, but the Raw Agro web-site states that the Swedish investors were bought out in 2011.

The point of all this is not to argue that Grain has got it all wrong. I rather want to illustrate how difficult the task is to monitor these investments, and make an argument that scholars in source countries can make a contribution by keeping track of locally available details. Plus, I wanted to highlight the difficulty of talking about national origins of land investments in a globalized economy. What makes something Swedish? Being listed on the Swedish stock exchange, majority or a plurality Swedish ownership, being based in Sweden, Swedish management?

Anyway, if you add up the total hectareage of the seven companies with links to Sweden that are investing in land in the former Soviet Union, you get a total of 924300 ha. Sweden itself, according to the [Statistics Sweden](#), possesses 3431336 million ha of agricultural land, so these four companies alone have a land bank that is 27% of the Swedish cultivated area. This, I think, puts into perspective how this type of farming is really a fundamentally different business model compared to farming in Sweden. Am I missing something? Let me know.

| Company | country of investment | year of start up or Swedish involvement | Specialization | size of land holding ha |
|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Black Earth Farming | Russia | 2005 | grains, oilseeds | 318000 |
| Alpcot Agro / Agrokultura | Russia and Ukraine | 2006 | grains, oilseeds, and dairy | 281300 |
| Trigon Agri / Trigon Dairy | Russia and Ukraine | 2006 | grains and dairy | 180000 |
| Claesson & Anderzen AB / Grain Alliance AB | Ukraine | 2008 | grains, oilseeds | 40000 |
| Volga Farming | Russia | 2007 | grains, oilseeds | 67000 |
| Redland Farming | Russia | 2010 | grains, vegetables, milk | 3000 |
| AgroRegion | Ukraine | 2007 | grains, milk, pork | 35000 |
| Total: | | | | 924300 |

2 comments:



Ian Luyt March 16, 2013 at 11:07 AM

Brian, thanks for an interesting analysis. You can probably add AgroRegion in Ukraine (www.agro-region.com) to your list of Swedish-led investments in primary agriculture in the CIS. The company is controlled by East Capital. By the way, we estimate the total area of foreign-led investments in primary agriculture in Russia and Ukraine to be approximately 3.2 million hectares (over 98% of these investments made since 2005/6). Regards, Ian

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Surelia Dev November 16, 2014 at 12:21 PM

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