

# WESTAS

Westas Group's stakeholder magazine 1/2021

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In forestry management, issues of sustainability of operations are being faced more and more frequently. The PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) system guides the Finnish Sawmills Association's member companies' operations. This system was created to ensure that the sustainable operations aspects are truly implemented. Forest certification plays a particularly large role for Finland because the vast majority of the country's forestry products is exported to countries where consumers rarely have the chance to learn about Finnish forestry management on the ground.

Forest certification is continuous work to verify sustainability. Sustainable forestry management balances natural values and timber production: the diversity of the forest's natural environment and the forests' cultural and recreational values are preserved, and at the same time profitable, socially sustainable forestry is practised. For forest owners, forest certification provides a concrete means of demonstrating the responsibility of their operations: they certify their own forests by satisfying the requirements of forest certification.

Regional PEFC group certification involves both business owners and companies, proof of businesses' readiness for adhering to sustainability demands in their operations. Certification also ensures that the people working in the forest, and the work they do, meet these requirements, and that operations are at an internationally acceptable level. Certification requires forestry companies to control the quality of their work. Indeed, the criteria are built in as a part of the daily routines and in-house control of the companies committed to certification. Conformity with requirements is demonstrated in annual audits which inspect the organisation of certification and the operations of certifiable companies at a regional level. Information on satisfaction of requirements is collected from numerous sources.



Regional PEFC group certification is an easy way for forest owners to obtain certification. In Finland, Kestävän Metsätalouden Yhdistys ry (Sustainable Forestry Management Association, KMY), administers PEFC group certificates. KMY was established by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK), the Finnish Sawmills' Association, and Finnish Forestry Industries. Other service providers have also become members in recent years.

Westas has begun offering forest owners the opportunity to join regional PEFC group certification through its own certification group. In addition to this, the company is committed to meeting PEFC requirements in its forestry management and timber harvesting. This means that when doing business with Westas, a forest owner can sleep soundly at night, even without having read up on forestry management and sustainability in detail.

Forestry sector actors have done significant work in recent years to promote sustainability, and indeed more

awareness about it is needed. One example of this is the sawmill industry's Environmental Forestry Programme, the materials of which forest owners can also access. It also serves as a tool for dialogue on the values forest owners wish to highlight in their forests. An open conversational culture and sharing of good practices play an important role when the forestry community wants to raise the level of operations even further.

The background to forest certification contains a large number of various, broad-impact measures. The PEFC criteria, currently being updated, require more extensive monitoring of operations than before. This provides even firmer assurance that PEFC-certified forests are managed in conformity with requirements. ✕

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## WESTAS

Westas is Westas Group's magazine for forest owners, customers and other stakeholder groups. It is published twice a year.

Westas Group produces high-quality spruce and pine sawn timber for the domestic market and for global export markets. The Group is one of Finland's largest private wood-processing companies. Its current mills are located in Koski and in Pori.



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# MORE THAN JUST FINANCIAL VALUES

*In Finland's most spruce-dominated municipality, Vesilahti, in the peace and quiet of nature, the only sound that can be heard in the morning is the crackling of tree trunks in the below-freezing temperatures. The sound is soon drowned out by a tractor carrying bales to a barn.*

**T**he Lepola farm's old main building, or part of it, stands next to a newer building from the 1960s. The logs uncovered during the demolition paint a picture of when the grandfather of the farm's current owner, **Kari Lepola**, started building the farm in the early 1900s.

— No two logs are alike. Some of them were carved just for the house, some were taken from the old smoke sauna, among other places. The logs were hauled from wherever he could find them, recounts Kari.

## THE MANY USES OF FORESTS

Now, close to a hundred years later, the farm is run by the third generation of Lepolas. Around thirty young cattle are being raised in the tie-stall barn, and when they reach the age of two, the cows are moved to another farm and that farm's calves are raised at the Lepola farm. The fields provide the animals with grass and feed grains, and the extensive surrounding forests – 58.5 hectares to be precise, according to the owner – bring tremendous value to its owners.

– I can't pick out just one thing I value most. Of course the forest holds financial value for me, but that's not the most important thing. I love being in the forest in general, and it offers many other things, too, such as mushrooms and berries, he says.

Having taken care of the farm for over a quarter of a century now, Lepola has grown alongside the forest for as long as he can remember. His first job in the forest involved stacking firewood, and just before turning 15 he received his first chainsaw.

– It was a yellow Partner 500. Although it certainly wasn't the lightest or most ergonomic model, it was great to have my own chainsaw and be able to start using it, he recalls.

Although his Partner days are long behind him, Lepola still does all the forestry work himself, with the exception of harvesting. He says he is always happy to go to the forest and feels guilty if the work is not done.

– There is always work to catch up on. Forestry work is never-ending.

While physically tough and mentally taxing forest clearing may not be the most enjoyable work phase, that moment right after the work is finished may be the most rewarding stage of a forest's growth.

– You get to see the outcome of your work right away, says Lepola. The brush already has the appearance of a forest, with more than just sticks growing out of it.

## MANY REASONS TO TEAM UP

In Lepola's opinion, the climate debate has taken on a negative tone and blames forest owners. Nevertheless, he intends to keep the nearly century-long tradition of good forest management alive also going forward. Even-aged trees are sold at regular intervals one clearing at a time to a proven partner, Westas.

The last regeneration felling took place in December, when a clearing of some 2.8 hectares of trees was harvested. Lepola concluded the transaction with the area's new purchasing manager and fellow hunting club member, Westas's Jaakko Kauppila. The men also know each other through Kauppila's work as a forestry contractor on Lepola's lands.

– When I studied to become a harvester operator and for a while after I graduated, I regularly carried out irregular jobs for the same contractor, says Kauppila with a smile.

What Lepola looks for in a wood buyer is, above all, good cutting, but quality work in terms of both regeneration fellings and thinnings is also important. On this harvesting site, precise cutting and a 15-cm top diameter brought the maximum log volume. The final log percentage was over 90.

– A sawmill is a good partner for a forest owner. The sawmill is interested in the most valuable part of a tree, the log, and always cuts the maximum amount of it. On the other hand, the forest owner should not be overly concerned with the financial side of it. This is because how one operates in the forest and the state the forest is left in after the work are also important for the forest's future, Lepola stresses.

# AT THE TABLE



## A MAN OF THREE FORESTRY PROFESSIONS

For **Jaakko Kauppila**, there was never any question about what work he would find himself doing as an adult. However, it wasn't exactly clear what colour his harvester would be. Perhaps yellow, he thinks now.

After compulsory school, Jaakko Kauppila began forestry equipment operator training in Kuru and graduated in 2012. After his stint in the army, he went back to studying, this time at the Evo forestry school. As part of his practical training, he worked at Westas as a felling and transport trainee. After graduating as a forestry engineer in 2017, Jaakko was hired by Westas as a replacement in both purchasing and transport and felling. His choice of a career in forestry came as a surprise to no one.

– My mother always talks about how I would boast to my neighbour's son that I was going to buy a harvester when I grow up. He asked me what colour, and I said I didn't know yet. The boy then charitably declared that I don't need to know yet, but he will anyways come and work for me during my holiday, he recounts.

With the forest being a big part of his life since he was a child and having worked in forestry, Kauppila says that the work he does today is exactly as he imagined it would be. When asked which he prefers – purchasing or felling and transporting – he doesn't hesitate.

– I've been asked this many times, and the answer is purchasing. Naturally, both jobs have their upsides and downsides, but, and I know this sounds cliché, the best part about purchasing is getting to meet new people and having the freedom to plan my days.

Last October, Jaakko took over responsibility for the Pirkanmaa area. The familiar office and routines established from his previous work as a replacement meant he quickly got a handle on things. His motto definitely sounds like the motto of a purchaser.

– I always try to perform my work such that when I leave someone's house, I feel like I can show my face there again. ✕



# STANDS WANTED FOR SALE!

*The 2020 timber trade peaked at the end of the year, and November ended up being Westas' busiest timber trading month of the year. Trade has continued briskly into the new year, and the Director of Forestry says now is the time to put the best stands up for sale.*

**T**he year 2021 began with normal inventory levels. However, in contrast with the already routine calm, the winter began at a high pace and trade was particularly strong in January.

— Last year, many buyers planned on skipping their timber purchases for the year entirely because of the pandemic, but on the other hand many needed the sales incomes financially, Westas' Director of Forestry **Juha Mäki** comments on the background to the intense trade. He continues:

— Because prices have risen above long-term averages, sales have naturally been profitable.

In addition to the market fluctuations, the weather has been favourable for timber trading and harvesting this winter, as periods of negative temperatures and abundant snowfall also allowed for all the previously sold timber to be harvested. Contractors have had their hands full, and their outlook is very different now to a year ago.

— At the start of 2020, the situation looked difficult due to a bad winter, a strike and the pandemic. However, the strong end of the year corrected the contractors' situation and almost brought them up to their targets. I'm sure that thanks to the brisk timber trade this year will also be a good one for our partners.

## NOW, IF EVER

Spruce has formed a higher share of Westas' purchases in recent years, with the species currently accounting for over 70% of logs bought. However, there is still plenty of demand for pine.

— The share of pine in our production is still around 30%, and at these volumes that's a lot of logs. So you can't say we're not interested in pine too — we're going to be active in that regard.

In the year of COVID-19, the number of electronic timber deals grew strongly. It was precisely last spring that Westas adopted electronic signatures, which greatly eased doing business at a time when human contact was reduced. Even though various digital tools are here to stay, the Director of Forestry points out that timber is still traded in all formats — to forest owners' preferences.

Mäki has been surprised by the fact that supply has remained stable since the autumn. He is also glad of the steadiness which the timber market has long needed. Even though March has been calmer, the Director of Forestry believes it is only a momentary breather before the spring rush. The Forestry Department wants to make a concerted push before the annual leave season begins and then roll up its sleeves again in the autumn.

— Now, if ever, is the right time to put the best stands on the market and take advantage of our competitive forest regeneration and clearing services when selling timber, as well as our flexible forest funds investment opportunity, Westas Log Account. Good market conditions generally put the top stands on offer — real sawmill stands, the biggest and the best — and that's how we think it will go this spring, too. ✕

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*"Now, if ever, is the right time to put the best stands on the market and take advantage of our forest regeneration and clearing services."*

— Juha Mäki



# BENEFITS FOR ACTIVE FOREST OWNERS

**W**estas strives to serve its forest-owner partners increasingly diversely, offering a range of services and benefits to make wood trade as easy and profitable as possible.

Since the start of the year, Westas has offered the forest owners it engages in timber trade with the opportunity to take part in PEFC group certification through the company. The group certification is free for the forest owner, and it is valid for the current certification period, i.e. until the end of 2022, by current estimates. Forest owners can join the group certification in connection with a timber trade or by contacting the purchasing manager for their area.

Other benefits offered to our regular customers are forest management services, a 'Log Account' (Tukkitili), and the Westas stakeholder magazine. With the preliminary clearing services that are part of Westas's forest management services, the forest undergrowth that hampers log harvesting is removed where needed, giving the harvester operator a better view of the base of the trees. This leads to a better work outcome in the harvested area and better log recovery. The forest regeneration

service, for its part, includes a range of solutions that allow the forest owner to order soil preparation, saplings and planting according to the turnkey principle, or to procure, e.g. only saplings through Westas.

Westas's 'Log Account' has been very well received. It is an investment solution that gives forest owners the opportunity to safely invest the proceeds from their timber sales at a fixed 3.5 per cent interest rate over a period of six

months to two years. In addition to those benefits, Westas's stakeholder magazine is sent out to our regular customers twice a year. It contains the latest news about the forest, timber trade and the sawn timber markets.

These benefits are offered to all forest owners who sell their timber to Westas. More information is available from the purchasing manager for your area. ✕



## FINNISH SAWMILLS' ONLINE COURSE FOR FOREST OWNERS

**T**he Finnish Sawmills' Environmental Forestry Programme, which was launched a year ago, has wrapped up its courses aimed at professionals, and now an online course for forest owners has been launched. The course presents and delves deeper into the Environmental Forestry Programme's nature management measures, as well as the reasons for them and the ways they are implemented. In the course, forest owners can also test what they've learned and further their own knowledge. Those who complete the online course and leave their contact details will receive a diploma as proof of their accomplishment. ✕

**The online course, currently offered in Finnish, can be found on the Finnish Sawmills Association's website at:**

[sahateollisuus.com/metsaymparistohjelman-verkkokurssi](http://sahateollisuus.com/metsaymparistohjelman-verkkokurssi)

*FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER*

# ***A REGULAR WINTER, BUT WITH A TWIST***





*Although winter's arrival generally means calmer days for farmers, the work never really ends on the Tarkkio farm. Spicing up the daily routines are tasks that come courtesy of nature, new ideas and surprises – but not always the good kind.*



– I have water damage. Come and see. The shower had been leaking into the walls for a long time, but I only discovered it when I was standing in the kitchen and my socks started getting wet. This has now been open since the autumn. The cats moved into the barn and I moved to a rental nearby. The whole house has to be jacked up in order to change that big, soaked support log. Fortunately, the house is made of wood. You can change its spare parts, says **Anne-Mari Tarkkio**, when asked how she is.

Notwithstanding the water damage, autumn was as expected at Tarkkio's farm. The hay and threshing were taken care of well in advance, and the second shoots were no problem in the end. On a personal level, Anne-Mari has started a new chapter in her life, having switched from working in a bank to a more flexible job that also allows her to care of the farm.

### **NOTHING BEATS DRIVING A TRACTOR**

Winter arrived in Lankoski only in January. Whereas the old farm keeper's, **Aarno's**, favourite winter pastime was lounging by the heat of the wood stove, Anne-Mari takes pleasure in ploughing snow. She clears the village road and her neighbours' yards of snow and helps pull cars that have slid into ditches back onto the road.

– I get to drive a tractor while playing my music at full blast! My work position is also so ergonomic that by the time spring arrives, I'm all twisted up, she says wryly.

Other than that, winter means selling hay – small amounts to horse owners, larger amounts to farms – and fixing up the farm. Besides the water damage repairs, a log frame will soon arrive to a piece of land a stone's throw away. The old farmers are building themselves a house.

– They'll have their own love nest right next door, says Anne-Mari with a laugh.

### **WOOD PROCUREMENT AND CHIPPING**

Trees that have been downed by wind are also cleared out of the forest during winter. Storms have downed a few spruce trees in a traditional biotope, among other places, and removing them is actually an obligation.

– The neighbour's cows graze here, and the fallen tree trunks and branches must be removed so they don't hamper the growth of the plants the cows eat.



The division of labour in the forest is clear. Or maybe not?

– My dad used to drive and I would saw, but at some point, we switched. Now he is driving again because he thinks I don't know how.

As Anne-Mari begins lopping branches off the tree trunk, Aarno watches patiently for a bit, but soon grabs his own chainsaw and starts cutting the tree trunk.

– She left her helmet at home and borrowed mine. I think I can be in the background of the photo without a helmet; after all, this old guy's noggin is not that important anymore.

A good trunk is chopped into logs for a procurement pile, and the rest is turned into chips. The chips are used either in a boiler that heats the Tarkkio's own farm buildings or by the old village school's thermal plant, for which Tarkkio takes care of fuel supply.

– The building, nowadays used for catering services and as a residence, has a 100 kWh boiler that consumes roughly 80–100 m<sup>3</sup> of wood chips. Our 150 kWh boiler consumes 150–200 m<sup>3</sup> annually, but in our case we also dry hay and grain, in addition to generating heat, says Aarno.

### **TIME FOR DAYDREAMING**

Lounging by the wood stove and building a house gives you time to think. Aarno follows the forest industry and debate with a keen interest and awaits new innovations.

– You never know what lies ahead. Wood has given rise to all kinds of innovations, from clothing to medicine, he says.

Both father and daughter find the current anti-forestry attitude to be amusing and worrying at the same time. This estrangement from nature and fundamentals is even comical at times.

– Like this Christmas tree rental business. Cut Christmas trees suffer a painful death by dehydration, but the exact same thing happens to rented trees. Their root

clump is not big enough to keep them alive longer, says Anne-Mari.

– Yes, and then there are these young people in Helsinki who share their profound thoughts on felling and humanise every living thing. They should come spend a bit of time here, one at a time, to see what really goes on, says Aarno.

While the debate escalates, Tarkkio's forests continue their life cycle, just as they have done for centuries. The soil of a patch of forest that was harvested in late summer was scarified in December and now awaits the spring plantings. This time, Westas and its co-operation partners will take care of the planting.

– This is the only patch to be planted, and fortunately, someone else is doing it, chuckles Anne-Mari.

Other than that, this year's forest work is limited to sapling stand thinning, which, according to Anne-Mari, there will be a lot of.

– If we get them in shape now, we will be able to see how they grow, she concludes. ✕





# CLEARLY SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

*During a crisis, operating quality, flexibility and trust are put to the test. A customer satisfaction survey that was sent out during the year of the Covid-19 pandemic proves that Westas has managed to create permanent partnerships and that our customers are happy with the service they receive.*

In November and December 2020, Westas carried out a customer satisfaction survey to determine how our Finnish and foreign sawn timber customers feel about working with Westas. The last time such a survey was conducted was three years ago. Even back then, the results were mostly favourable, but the latest survey reflects a further increase in customer satisfaction.

The phone interviews were conducted by the consulting and research firm Innolink Oy, which also analysed the data. A total of 40 representatives of our client companies were interviewed out of 103 companies contacted, resulting in a final response rate of 39%. Most of the respondents were from Europe, and a few were from outside Europe.

## MAJOR LEAP IN CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a globally utilised indicator of customer loyalty. It provides information about the customer's service experience and satisfaction with the company's products. Posed as a question, the NPS score reflects how likely the person is to recommend the company's service or product to a friend or colleague. Westas' NPS in the 2017 customer satisfaction survey was 35, but in the three years since then, the figure took a major leap. The latest NPS was 54, which is significantly higher than the average score of 37 for the B2B companies in Innolink's benchmark database (scale of – 100 to 100).

*"Everything works very well. A good, reliable operator."*

Customers were also asked more detailed questions about their experiences with Westas's contact persons. Despite the travel bans and lockdowns imposed due to the pandemic, the interviewees were largely satisfied with the level of communication maintained by Westas's contact persons. The contact persons' way of working was also considered to be either the best in the industry or above average (total 62%). As much as 88% of those interviewed said that if they were to choose a partner right now, it would be Westas. The other response options were possibly (8%) and probably not (5%).

*"It's easy to work with the contact persons."*

## IMPROVING IN SMALL STEPS

As in the previous survey, the participants were asked about Westas's performance in fourteen different areas, from the availability of a contact person to handling complaints and deliveries. On a scale of 1 to 5 (very poor – very good), Westas received a score of 4 or higher in as many as ten areas. Improvements were seen compared to three years ago in the operations of contact persons, in documentation related to deliveries and in the handling of problems and change situations. When all the areas were compared, the average score was 4.25, which is a small improvement from the previous survey (4.22).

*"Complaints and problems are at least handled well."*

As much as 92% of the respondents considered Westas's operations to be either at the same level or better than its competitors. Delivery reliability and quality were considered two of the company's greatest strengths. In the open-ended questions, reliability, service and flexibility, among other things, were mentioned. One third of the respondents saw either somewhat of an improvement or a clear improvement in Westas's operations as a whole, and one fourth felt that the quality of Westas's products has improved either somewhat or clearly in recent years. Westas's operations earned a total score of 4.2, showing a small positive development (4.1 in 2017).

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to give an estimate of their future outlook. Roughly half believed their need for sawn timber will grow this year, and half believed it would remain the same.

*"Good flexibility and independence. Very good working relationship and they are prompt to reply. Deliver a good quality product at a good rate. Our market is growing and we see a demand for the product."*

– It's great to see that the changes we made to our ways of operating based on the previous surveys have taken us in the right direction and that our customers trust us even during changing circumstances. Of course, there is always room for improvement, but I am happy with the results we achieved in the customer satisfaction survey, says Westas's Managing Director **Pekka Kopra**. ✕



Adjectives the respondents used to describe Westas in their native language.



# ONE STEP AT A TIME

*Keeping calm is an asset, both when renovating and in positions of trust.*

**Miika Sävel**, who works at the Westas Pihlava sawmill, knows this.

**M**iika Sävel was 25 and had just graduated as a sawmill industry technician when he got a job as a sawn timber sorter in the Pihlava sawmill in 1995. After a couple of years in that job he became a drying kiln operator before moving on to maintenance duties. That is where he has now worked for about twenty years.

The work is varied and consists of advance maintenance, renovation and repairing broken equipment. It is sometimes quieter, but sometimes he needs to be in at least two places at once.

– The sawmill equipment contains a lot of parts that get worn out, and you can't predict that wear and tear. When someone rings and shouts down the phone at you from the other side of the mill, you just have to weigh things up and prioritise what to do first.

Sävel admits that in situations like this he feels a little pressure, but on the other hand he says sawmill employees understand that the maintenance team works as best it can and as quickly as possible.

– Panicking doesn't help. My certainty and years of experience help me keep cool.

## PUTTING CREATIVITY INTO PLAY

The maintenance team at the Pihlava sawmill numbers about ten people. During shift handovers the employees fill each other in and pass on messages.

– We have a good mix of youth and experience – a bit of that old-fashioned apprentice spirit.

Changing working conditions sometimes make the work challenging. In temperatures of minus twenty degrees the employees might have to go straight to the sauna-like heat of the drying kiln, and in unexpected situations the right spare parts might not be available.

– In situations like that you need creativity and makeshift solutions, but sometimes you just have to wait patiently. Then again, this is the sweet thing about this job. No two days are the same and nothing is readily broken down into components. You get to use your own head, Sävel says.



*“My certainty and years of experience help me keep cool.”*

– Miika Sävel

He quickly recalls one such case in which he needed to mull over a solution.

– A half-metre iron rod had ended up in the grading plant chipper and the damage was so extensive that it took three hours to repair. When we restarted the chipper, it wasn't long before the same thing happened again. It was then we realised that the metal detector of the broken batten conveyor was defective and that two pieces of metal had become detached from the batten scrambler and ended up in the chipper. Repairs took a few hours after that again.

## NEW SITUATION IN POSITION OF TRUST

This year marks 20 years since Sävel began serving as the main shop steward at the Pihlava sawmill. He says that

although there is always a lot to improve, Westas has the basics right.

– We are paid on time and we have a functioning dialogue with our employer. There are areas for development in occupational safety that we bring forwards together – sometimes very fast, sometimes a little slower.

Last year, the forest industry employers announced they would cease to abide by collective bargaining agreements. The current agreement is in force until the end of this year, after which it is unclear who will negotiate with whom. Working conditions will be agreed at the company level. However, at Westas the situation looks calm.

– I've talked a little to Pekka Kopra about it and the idea has been that there's no need to change the current situation. We've already agreed on things at a company level, in some respects to a higher level than required, and the basis has been a good collective bargaining agreement.

The future of industrial relations is unclear, however. The large forestry companies will potentially negotiate for themselves, but company-level agreements concluded by smaller companies could result in varying practices in the field, which will create work for the trade unions. The future of the employee representative system looks unclear. Sävel says that he is facing something new in his role, but here too he trusts his calm personality.

– The situation requires me to learn new things, and there could be things to sort out. Here too you just have to go one step at a time. ✕



# A YEAR OF TWO HALVES

*In spite of the difficult beginning and surprising twists, Westas finished 2020 on a positive note. If its sawmills had operated evenly throughout the year, the result would have been even more positive.*

**//** – When we look at the start and the end of the year, the change was significant and the difference was large, Westas CEO **Pekka Kopra** says.

The year, which began with raw material problems caused by a bad winter, sawmills halted by strikes and markets frozen by COVID-19, ended in brisk trade and industrious sawmilling. Kopra thinks that a particular success of the organisation during the financial year was its ability to react to the situation at hand.

– After the initial shock caused by the pandemic in the spring we were able to read the change excellently, both in the wood procurement and sales departments, and we reached the autumn with a good raw material reserve.

## SMALL RISE ON MANY FRONTS

The Westas group's net sales in the 2020 financial year were EUR 117.2 million (2019: EUR 120.8 million). The group's result for the financial year was EUR 2 million and the balance sheet remained strong: in spite of the challenges at the start of the year it rose to EUR 56.9 million. The group's

equity ratio rose by over two per cent on the previous year and was 38.9%, with capital loans taken into account.

– The group's balance sheet grew by almost three million euros on last year, which is extremely positive, CEO Kopra says.

The parent company Westas Group Oy is responsible for the Group's sales and administration services, as well as for the procurement of the raw materials needed in the sawmilling and biofuels businesses. In 2020 the parent company's net sales (EUR 80.7 million) decreased on the previous year, but the result in that financial year improved.

– It feels good to be back in the black after a few weak years.

In spite of the uplift at the end of the year, the sawmills' total production volume of 404,000 m<sup>3</sup> was slightly below the previous year's level. Westas Raunio sawed 209,000 m<sup>3</sup> and Westas Pihlava sawed 195,000 m<sup>3</sup>.

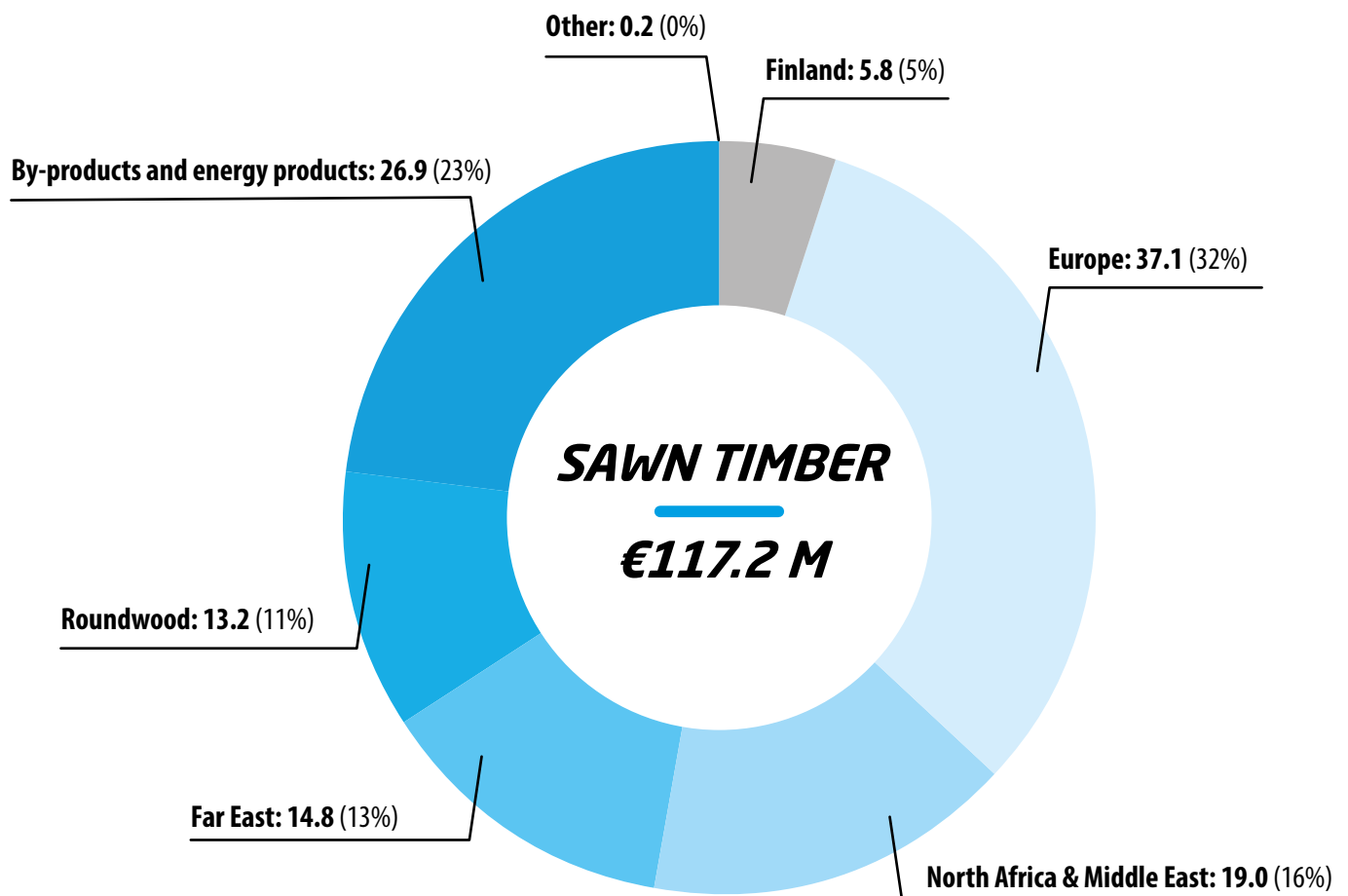
## SAWMILL OPERATIONS STABLE

The net sales of the Raunio sawmill in Koski, Westas Raunio Oy, remained approximately the same as the previous year, at EUR 50.3 million (2019: EUR 50.7 million). The Raunio sawmill used around 424,000 m<sup>3</sup> of raw materials, of which 66% was spruce and 34% pine. The increases in sawn timber prices at the end of the year slightly compensated the rise in raw material prices, meaning the year ended positively in financial terms. The result of Westas Raunio Oy for the financial year was EUR 1.2 million and 0.2% (2019: EUR 2.8 million; -0.1%).

The Pori sawmill of Westas Pihlava Oy, like the Raunio mill, saw its figures drop somewhat on the previous year. The Pihlava mill produced 195,000 m<sup>3</sup> of sawn timber (2019: 199,000 m<sup>3</sup>), of which 44% was pine and 56% spruce. Notwithstanding the drop in production, net sales rose slightly on the previous year to EUR 47 million (2019: EUR 45.3 million). At the end of the financial year, the result of Westas Pihlava Oy was EUR 1.8 million and the profit ratio was 3.9% (2019: EUR 0.8 million, -1.7%).



## DISTRIBUTION OF WESTAS GROUP'S NET SALES IN 2020



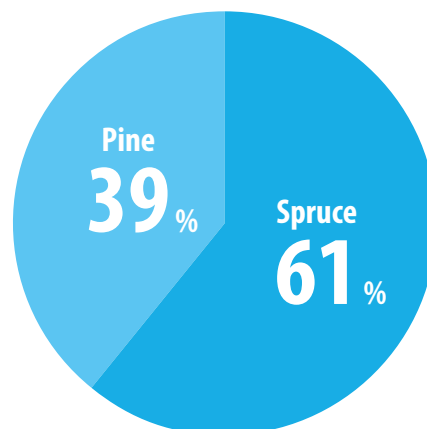
– Such a strong result at the Pihlava sawmill is fantastic. The development efforts made over the past few years are finally beginning to bear fruit, Kopra says.

Regardless of the mild conditions in early 2020 and the late winter, Westas Bioenergia Oy supplied its customers with a total of 650 GWh of biofuel during the operating year. Sales grew slightly and net sales rose to just above EUR 14 million.

– The bioenergy business appears to be continuing favourably. The abnormally cold winter has driven up demand for by-products this heating season. I also believe that the phasing out of peat as a heating fuel in Finland will have a positive effect on the demand for wood-based biofuels.

The group's investments during the financial year were circa EUR 3.2 million. The sawmill infeed was replaced at the Pihlava sawmill in the latter half of the year, and various rearrangements to the sawmill yard were made at Raunio. During the 2021 financial year, the total value of investments will reach up to EUR 4 million. During the summer, the Raunio sawmill will see extensive investments in production, in addition to which the sawmill's office will be renovated.

– We have been able to agree on finance for the investments in the way we hoped, and it's nice to make investments when they are not funded by our income alone, Kopra says. ✕

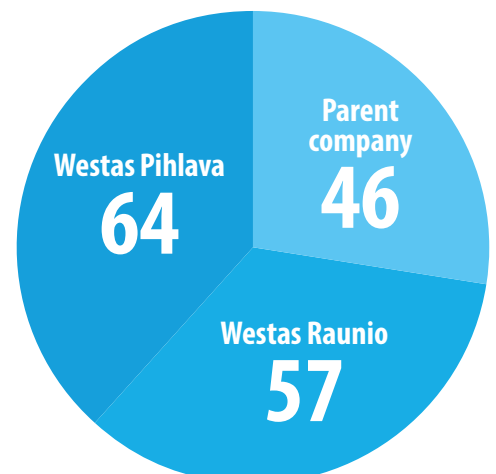


### TREE SPECIES/ SAWMILLS TOTAL

### PERSONNEL, AVERAGE:

### GROUP

**167**







Mikko Kerkelä, Director of Business Development at Trimble | Photo: Trimble Forestry

## GIANT DIGITAL LEAP

*Westas has for the past two years been involved in developing a modern tool for use by its forestry department. Upon completion, the Connected Forest system will change how work is done, planned and managed.*

**T**he new forest system project began in early 2019. The current software of about twenty years had been expanded and developed over the years, but its limitations were beginning to be felt. The need for a browser-based, mobile-accessible cloud service was finally answered by a joint project involving three companies: Westas, Versowood and Pölkky.

— It had been clear for a long time that the current system did not meet today's requirements. The data was not in real time, and there was no longer any point in integrating the system into other services used by the forestry department, says Westas Project Manager **Ville Järvinen**.

The project began with an exceptionally focused requirements specification in cooperation with various parties and Trimble, who was responsible for the system design and implementation.

– We compiled a 170-page specification which described what the system should and should not include. This amazingly precise requirements specification runs throughout the entire system delivery and ensures that the project flows smoothly in terms of content, says **Mikko Kerkelä**, Director of Business Development at Trimble.

Kerkelä says that the project, the finalisation stage of the implementation of which is in the spring, has also been a big one for Trimble. It has occupied several different product teams, and thirty people work on the daily development work.

– Even though we knew the project would be large and demanding, the volume of the work surprised both the companies involved and us. What's more, this was despite us not starting from scratch and the fact we know what we're doing.

## SAME DATA ON COMPUTER AND PHONE

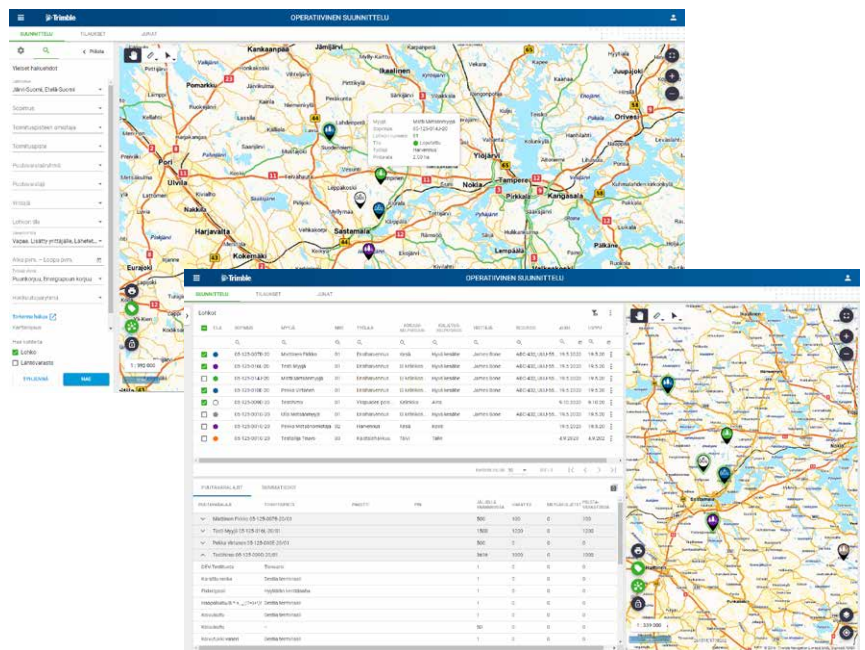
The most important premise in design has been good usability: that means clear visuals, easy transitions, removing overlaps and building the necessary functions and integrations.

– One of the system's most significant new features is the richness and usability of the maps. The map can now be used at all times in just the way the user wants, and location data is now a central part of harvesting and transport, Kerkelä says.

Modern systems are important for work flow and efficiency, but also for the image of the sector. The new system means forestry experts can use planning tools and the graphic report database and its data any time and anywhere. The system also includes new functions for forest resource data, purchasing, log reception and bioenergy use, as well as integrations with other solutions, such as metsään.fi.

– The kind of equipment that an employer gives its employees to complete the job is of great significant for how meaningful, and thus effective, the work is.

Kerkelä believes that employees will provide ideas for further development as soon as the system is finalised and up and running.



*Forestry experts can use planning tools and the graphic report database and its data any time and anywhere.*

– We want to create an environment that serves as the next generation's raw material management system and provides tools for business development.

## NEW DIMENSIONS FOR WORK

Westas Group will deploy the new system by year-end, and it will be tested by the three customer companies. Project Manager Järvinen believes that by the autumn valuable user experience will be obtained and any teething problems corrected. He says that the companies' cooperation has provided a lot, both in terms of available resources and the final result.

– When professionals from different organisations have sat round the same table, it's provided a perspective

on the features required of the system and on whether we can do things differently in the organisation.

In addition to forestry experts, the new system offers tools for the forestry department's management to monitor and manage work. The purpose of the system is to make daily work easier, but Järvinen hopes that it will also transform it.

– Functional, modern tools are important for work but also for stakeholders, such as potential job applicants and customers. As the competition for raw materials gets keener, it's important for systems to support client-focused operations and enable a more active approach to serving forest owners, Järvinen says. ✕





# MASSIVE MID-SUMMER PROJECT

*This summer's holiday shutdown at the Raunio Sawmill will see several new developments take place, all of which are aimed at ramping up speed and efficiency and, in turn, production volumes.*

**//** – The yard improvements and the dry-batten canopy of last year were just the opening act. They kind of set the stage for what's to come, says Westas's Production Manager **Sakari Virtanen**, referring to the investments planned for this year at the sawmill.

Major work lies ahead, as come autumn, three new Valutech chamber kilns will stand in Raunio Sawmill's yard, heat recovery will have been built into two existing progressive kilns, the automation in all of the drying kilns and the sawmill's edging line will have been renewed, the resaw's servo technology will have been updated and the sawline streamlined.

– The reasons relate in part to opening up bottlenecks and in part to replacement investments that are necessary to enable growth, says Virtanen.

One of the bottlenecks Virtanen is referring to is the sawmill's edging line, whose feed conveyors and scrambler will be renewed and a considerably more precise new-generation meter, including modern user interfaces, will be installed for edging. Drying capacity will be increased with three chambers, and once the new heat recovery equipment

is installed, the heat obtained from it will be recycled back into the process. The sawline's cant kicker will be replaced with a flipper and at the same time, the cant's side transfer and conveyors will be renewed.

– This will allow more controlled flipping of pieces of any size, and throughput will speed up as the line is streamlined, explains Virtanen.

The smallest but just as important renewal is the conversion of the resaw's servo technology from analog to digital.

– The upgrade is necessary, as spare parts are no longer available for old servos. The eight servos now being dismantled will stay in storage as spare parts for the remaining ones until they are renewed too, says Mill Manager **Lassi Vatka**.

## **NO ROOM FOR SURPRISES IN THE SCHEDULE**

The preliminary work will start up in spring with the casting of the concrete slab for the chamber kilns. Installing the new equipment in the sawline will require demolishing

and transporting the sawmill's roof and old equipment. Westas is responsible for building the foundations for the chamber kilns, demolishing the roof and dismantling the old equipment. Westas will also install the edging line under the supplier's supervision. Vatka admits that the schedule is tight.

– The demolition work will begin on Friday, the 16th of July at 10 pm, and the areas will have to be ready for the new installations by 8 am Monday morning. We will start dismantling the roof already during the week, so hopefully it won't rain at the weekend, he says.

Three weeks have been set aside for the installations, and the sawmill will be started up again at 10 pm on the 8th of August. The mill manager believes that the sawmill's efficiency and lead times will improve significantly come autumn.

– Along with consistency, the sawline will gain speed and drying capacity, and the edging line upgrade will improve yields and bring automation. Until now, the sawline operator has also taken care of edging, but in the future he will be able to focus more on sawing, Vatka sums up. ✕



## LOOKING EXPECTANTLY TOWARDS THE SPRING

*In a world tested by COVID-19, sawn timber may not have been an outright winner, but it has been a success story. Lockdowns have seen people turn to DIY projects, and the release of pent-up demand, the timber construction trend and fiscal stimulation have simultaneously been reflected in the operations of Westas.*

**T**he start of 2020 was meagre. The mild winter made acquiring raw materials difficult and labour disputes in mechanical timber processing hit sawmills' output hard at the very start of the year. Sawmills operated for just one shift a day or stood still, which led to lower annual production than budgeted, despite the successes made later on.

– At the same time, the export prices for sawn timber had fallen to their lowest level in ten years, nor could we afford to put off customer shipments, as our competitors in Sweden were making big efforts to clear out their oversized stocks, Westas CEO **Pekka Kopra** says.

No sooner had the strikes been dealt with than it felt like coronavirus paralysed the whole world. Customers put deliveries on ice, and for a moment the situation seemed bleak. After that initial disarray, goods started to move again and the acceleration of construction, particularly in the US, was quickly reflected in sawn timber demand. In Europe, economic stimulus was seen as increased confidence, and even though it first seemed that the growth would be led by the spruce market, the positive

wind of recovery also reached the pine market.

– The demand for timber products is not tied to new building alone. It would appear that people have been spending money they would have spent on travel on all kinds of building and renovation projects, Kopra says.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MARKET REGIONS

The strong growth and powerful recovery of the US economy were seen as increased exports from Sweden and Germany in particular, which, in turn, opened up major European markets to Finnish sawmills. Indeed, exports have been performing well since the summer, and the post-Brexit UK has increasingly emerged as one of the top export destinations, along with the more traditional countries.

– Brexit has not hindered trade in any way; on the contrary, our volumes have grown. Trade has also been supported by the Finnish west coast's naturally good logistical connections with the UK, Kopra says.

In Asia, the rise has been more moderate than in major European markets. In spite of fluctuating container

prices, trade has continued evenly, but the quantitative value of both Japan and China for sawmills has decreased slightly.

– The market share of Finnish sawmills, particularly in China, has decreased a lot in the past couple of years. Competing with the Russian price level has proved impossible, and we've sought other destinations for our products, CEO Kopra explains.

COVID-19 has not affected the North African market in the same way as elsewhere in the world. Steadier oil and gas prices have brought economic stability to the region – particularly to Algeria, where over 97% of export revenues comes from energy – and at the same time the scarcity of sawn timber has pushed up demand.

– As the global market has been stimulated, Swedish, Russian and indeed Finnish sawn timber flows have been redirected elsewhere, and the goods are less available in North Africa than before. Because of these developments, prices, too, have strengthened slightly, partly offsetting the rise in raw timber prices.

Developments on the home market have been favourable: Finland has become Westas' largest single market. In the past twelve months, volumes rose up to 20% on last year's, and prices now approach export levels. Strong demand has led to a shortage of some products, such as square-edged spruce boards and terrace boards.

– Our industrial customers and timber retailers are doing well, and we're genuinely delighted for our customers. After difficult times and enduring pain, this is probably an important year for many.

### IN THE RIGHT NICHE

The year 2021 began under exceptionally even demand for that time of year, and during the entire early spring season customers' confidence has remained stable. The situation would appear set to continue well, at least until the autumn.

– Market rises have always been followed by slumps, but it's not yet clear whether the next slump is close at hand or far off. Now, however, an exceptionally good period is under way and we're trying to enjoy the fact that we have enough work on our hands and that quality Finnish sawn timber is in demand worldwide, CEO Kopra says.

Notwithstanding the upswing, Westas has held onto its principles and good customer service. Even though its customer base has expanded, it still serves its old customers fully. Kopra says that Westas' strengths in the midst of unusual events and market twists are that very service and its clear identity as a raw material supplier.

– We supply tailored raw material solutions and do not so much as intend to enter the further processing business. I believe we're a supplier of just the right size, because with this concept we can serve both large and small customers individually. ✕



# WORKING IN HARMONY

*When the seller and customer have agreed on a sale, a lot of things happen before the sawn timber leaves the sawmill yard. There are many other work stages in the mill in addition to sawing, all of which ensure that the sale is completed as agreed.*

**T**he sawmill is the workplace of many professionals whose efforts the customer does not see, but which are nonetheless essential for the success of the process. All of these stages and the people who do them have a shared goal: giving the customer the right type of sawn timber it needs and delivered at the right time.

## **A BASIS IN CUSTOMER NEEDS**

Production Planner **Eemeli Laaksonen** engages in active dialogue with many people daily. Once he has gone over the customer's required amounts and schedule with the sales team, he writes bucking instructions to achieve the raw materials for the order. In addition to this, Laaksonen draws up instructions for sawing and drying and discusses logistics with **Arto Kuusiniemi**.

– The salespeople put the orders on the computer and Arto orders transport based on where the order is in the process. If we need to order transport before production begins or if we need a bigger ship batch by a certain date, we talk about how we can make that happen.

In an optimal situation, between one and two weeks pass between order and delivery.

– Of course, this is if we have suitable logs in the log yard. If the customer's ordered something more

specialised, something we need to go into the forest to look for the right raw materials for, the process can easily take a couple of months. We don't know what kind of stands our harvesters are working in and what kind of logs are available there.

It is precisely the availability and properties of raw materials that cause the biggest delivery time challenges. Generally, as soon as the logs begin to be cut, the process moves forward in a controlled fashion under its own steam. Nevertheless, in sawmilling the raw material determines the end products, and there is no certainty about the result before final sorting at the grading plant.

– We work with a living raw material that we saw and dry per customers' orders. No matter how precisely

we plan, the logs become sawn timber pieces of many sizes and qualities, and not all of them meet the customer's specifications. Not every piece of sawn timber reaches the customer directly – obviously, something ends up in the warehouse.

All of this notwithstanding, Laaksonen says Westas' strength is precision. From the production planner's perspective, the sawmill's most important goal is to get the raw material on hand sawn into as much and as valuable product as possible.

– We're actually really good at that – making lots of different kind of products efficiently. »

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*"Westas' strengths are  
precision and efficiency."*

– Eemeli Laaksonen







### THE FINAL TOUCH

The production planner's role takes in work stages from sawing all the way to drying. The packaging stage also takes responsibility for drying, and this is where the areas of both Laaksonen and post-processing supervisor **Juuso Kankaanpää** meet. From the kiln, the dried batten load is moved either to the dry batten storage area or directly to the grading plant elevator, from where it is directed via sorting to pockets and then for packaging.

– Everything that's sawn goes straight to packaging after drying, if it can be. Sometimes we have to prioritise the order because of transport though. We try to get all the sawn timber packaged as efficiently and rationally as possible though, and at the same time we have to ensure that the dry batten storage area is not overfilled, Kankaanpää says.

Every piece of sawn timber is stamped by quality, and at the same time a final visual inspection is performed. Pieces of the wrong size or even other dimensions sometimes end up in the packaging bundle because of a pocket error, however, in which case the incorrect pieces need to be removed. Depending on the situation, it may be easier to stack the bundle for repackaging and put back on the grading plant elevator for resorting.

– Something in the kiln or raw material properties might make for an uneven drying result and some of the timber might be moister than it should. In that case camera sorting marks the pieces as worse quality and we end up with less sawn timber than expected. If there isn't enough replacement product in the warehouse to complete the load, we might not be able to dispatch the full amount.

Finally, the bundle is wrapped in plastic hoops and a protective cover. The customer's packaging preferences are included in the sawing instructions, which the packaging team consults during its inspection. Almost all customers want their products wrapped in plastic, and only about ten per cent do not choose it.

– We use quite a lot of packaging material: the Raunio sawmill alone uses around 90 tonnes of protective wrapping and 15 tonnes of plastic hoops a year, Kankaanpää says.

The packaged product is moved on to await transport: either in an enclosed warehouse or on designated spots in the packaging field. Sometimes bundles can be loaded directly into a waiting lorry.

– I talk to both the dispatch centre and Arto all the time about when certain orders need to be ready to go. We then adjust our own work in accordance with the deadlines the customer has been promised. »

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*“The Raunio sawmill alone uses around 90 tonnes of protective wrapping a year.”*

– Juuso Kankaanpää

### **DAILY RALLY OF TWENTY LORRIES**

Logistics Supervisor **Arto Kuusiniemi**'s work begins with a customer's order, naturally.

– Sometimes the sales team tells us when the products may be delivered to the customer by and, if we have the product in the warehouse, we arrange transport for the delivery. On the other hand, if the products are sawn following a specific purchase, we first have to reserve the transport capacity, I have to talk to Eemeli about production schedules and on that basis order a lorry.

Kuusiniemi enters the dispatch dates for goods into an electronic schedule. The dispatch centre follows this schedule and takes the necessary steps to ensure the orders are dispatched on the right day, in the right lorry and in the right order.

– The dispatch centre plans how the goods will be loaded and orders transport within Finland for products that are to be dispatched immediately. My duties include ordering

export transport and monitoring the flow of work in accordance with customer orders.

The work also includes tendering freight and developing partnerships. Kuusiniemi points out that it is not always a question of price but also of service and cooperation.

– It's about keeping to schedules and achieving the right transport capacity.

There are thus a lot of balls to juggle. In the forklift field, the forklifts circulate non-stop, but stress is inevitable. Despite the frenetic pace, the packages are kept in order and they do not need to be searched for. There is sometimes excitement for other reasons.

– Sometimes a logistics company is late, and sometimes there is a hitch in our internal communication. I think that if we could manage our information chain even better, we could improve our efficiency even further.

The nature of the work means that issues cannot conclusively be dealt with at once; they sometimes have to be returned to after a very long interval. Kuusiniemi has developed a system for himself, involving many email folders, reminders and colour codes which ensure the process flows and that the sawn timber client is satisfied.

– In this business, you don't often get praise, but when you do, it's a sign that the year has gone well and that we've succeeded in delivering orders. When you do your work tactfully and thoroughly, the thanks always feels good. ✕





# A YEAR IN FRONT

*The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed how companies communicate and trade with each other. The initial uncertainty has passed and video meetings have become a normal part of global business. However, they are not always a substitute.*



# OF A SCREEN

**T**he Israeli company Ashdod Timber, founded in the late 1970s, is one of the country's leading building supplies importers. The company is led by second-generation business owner **Nir Golan**, who says his company invests in quality and efficiency above all else. The company has warehouses in Ashdod and Haifa, as well as proprietary processing operations. It imports sawn timber and other quality timber industry products from Europe and has cooperated with Westas for several years.

## FROM PARALYSIS TO FULL SPEED

News of a dangerous new virus started to emerge from China in February 2020, and it was soon detected in the West. The first cases in Israel were reported in March.

– The media's reporting went apocalyptic. The atmosphere was hysterical, and the Israeli government announced a lockdown to fight the virus. I sat on my sofa and watched the TV in disbelief, Ashdod Timber CEO Nir Golan recalls.

Business halved in March and April, and the company laid off a third of its workforce for three weeks.

– Everyone was on edge, and no one knew what the future would bring. Both consumers and companies adopted a waiting position and wanted to see how the situation would develop.

Nevertheless, the employees returned to work at the end of April, and May saw the start of a fierce market demand which has continued to this day. Golan says that in spite of the unusual start, the past twelve months have been the company's best ever in terms of both volumes and profits.

– Even though COVID-19 has left around 800,000 Israelis unemployed, there are still four million people in work in the country. The lockdown kept people at home, and they've been spending money they would have spent on travel and going out on home renovations and refurbishments.

## FROM INITIAL SHOCK TO ROUTINE

Golan says that the initial change in his work was dramatic. He had been used to travelling constantly, but now he remained in Israel, set up a home office and downloaded the programs he needed on his computer.

– I love meeting and talking to people and I'm used to travelling. Before, I had only made video calls to my friends, but now my whole job suddenly went onto Zoom or Teams.

Golan says that he is still not totally comfortable with remote meetings, nor does he consider them natural. However, needs must. He says that the atmosphere in meetings with the Westas representatives he knows, **Pekka Kopra** and **Jari Rajakallio**, is pleasant and safe, but that poor connections and the different nature of the meeting sometimes hinder his work.

– It's difficult to maintain a conversation and interest by a computer in the same way as in live meetings, which can go on for several hours if they include lunch. There's no small talk and everyone's patience runs out after an hour. And you can't read people's gestures and expressions on a screen the same way.

Above all, Golan says that he misses interpersonal interaction.

– Business without travel and the people, conversations, and sensing new cities and places isn't fun and it's not enough for me.

## BACK ON THE ROAD

In spite of everything, business itself has gone well. At present, demand outstrips supply and the availability of the goods creates challenges.

– Logistical challenges are common, it's difficult to get lorries, and containers are sometimes unavailable. And because demand in both Europe and the US is strong, prices are rising and some timber qualities are even in short supply. And the summer season is just about to begin, Golan says.

He describes Israel as the world's largest laboratory at present. By the end of March five million people had received the COVID-19 vaccine, around 800,000 had recovered from the disease and the weekly number of cases is falling. The lockdown ended in February and society has gradually reopened. For example, restaurants are open, but only to guests who can show a "green card" proving they have been vaccinated or already had the disease. CEO Golan thinks society will be back to near-normality by April.

– A coronavirus normality. We'll keep wearing masks and what not.

Golan believes that remote meetings are here to stay and says that achieving results is also possible without leaving the office. Regardless of that, however, he will start travelling as soon as possible once the situation in Europe eases.

– If everyone were to continue in that way, the game would be fair and balanced. But of course they won't. The best results happen on location and acquiring information in that way is totally different to shouting at a screen. What's more, when you meet in person you enjoy the fun side of work, he says with a smile. ✕

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*"In spite of the unusual start, the past twelve months have been the company's best ever in terms of both volumes and profits."*

– Nir Golan



# WESTAS

An aerial photograph of a dense forest. In the lower right, a yellow logging machine is visible, surrounded by cut logs. The sky is clear and blue.

***YOU HAVE A FOREST.  
WE HAVE A SAW.***

***THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR CO-OPERATION.***

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