

Eastern Europe 2010 Big Farms Study Tour

It has been two decades since the collapse of the Soviet collective system has made way for a 'new' way of farming in Eastern Europe. In many cases, entrepreneurs and oligarchs have aggregated small holdings from the former Soviet collectives into farms of astounding size and scale and with improved productivity. We are planning a 2010 study tour to check-out this new wave of agriculture which is sweeping the magnificently fertile steppes of countries like Russia, Ukraine and Romania. And the best time to do this will be during the northern hemisphere winter crop harvest period (July–August).

There are privately operated farms in southern Russia in excess of one million hectares – and all of this area is being cropped. Farms of an enormous scale can also be found in the Dnipro Valley of Ukraine. This is a region with one of the world's most fertile soils. The steppes (plains) of central and southern Ukraine lay claim to around a third of the world's total area of humus-rich black soil (Chernozems). The soil is so good that in past conflicts, invading armies would return home with truck-loads of Ukraine's prized topsoil.

Romanian farmland is also very fertile enabling production of high-quality crops in a very favourable climatic area. Romania is a recent entrant to the European Union and farming is subject to considerable political (subsidy) attention. Together with the comparatively low wages and generally low production costs, this provides excellent opportunities for professional farm projects in Romania. One irrigation farm has been developed, literally on an island in the middle of the Danube River, and has 200,000 hectares of irrigated crops.

Our Eastern European Big Farms Tour will visit all of these areas plus other 'must see' sights including:

- Bucharest and the Danube Delta;
- Moscow and St Petersburg;
- Magnificent, medieval Transylvania – the home of Dracula.

Plus there are also some great add-on (or before the main tour) opportunities such as Gallipoli and Istanbul or the romantic charm of Vienna and a cruise on the Danube.

Over the past 16 years, Greenmount Travel has established excellent farming and agribusiness contacts around the world. This ensures our tours are well organised and are expertly guided by local trusted operators and our own experienced Greenmount Travel personnel. Passenger numbers are limited to a comfortable bus-full.

Itinerary and bookings

Our previous tours to Eastern Europe have given us the necessary experience to tackle the logistical and financial challenges involved with group travel to this part of the world. We know it is difficult, particularly with the erratic exchange rates, but the rewards of careful planning are great. The cost of this itinerary is \$AUD13,450.

If you would like to join the tour, please fill in the booking form with this itinerary. Alternatively, if you haven't made your mind up just yet, you can express your interest on the same form, and we will send you itinerary updates.

Hope to hear from you soon. Please don't hesitate to call (07 4659 3555) with any questions you might have.

Kind regards...

Lloyd and Catherine O'Connell, Dave Dowling



Eastern Europe Big Farms Tour 2010

FIRST DRAFT ITINERARY

DATE	ACTIVITY	OVERNIGHT
Day 1 (meals on plane) Wednesday, July 28	Flight departs Australia for Moscow via Asia or Europe (depending on our final selection of international air carrier). Option to leave earlier and spend time in Asia or Europe before the main group arrives.	On plane
Day 2 - (meals on plane, then Dinner) Thursday, July 29	Flight arrives in St Petersburg. Met at the airport by our guide and transferred to our downtown hotel with an introduction to the city on the way. Time to freshen up before a guided city tour of this beautiful and historic city dubbed the 'Venice of the North' because of its palace-lined waterways. Miraculously, St Petersburg escaped the Stalinist architectural incursions (and perversions), and stands majestically on the Gulf of Finland and Neva River. Sights visited over the next few days will include the magnificent State Hermitage buildings and the Hidden Treasures (includes priceless artworks captured by the Red Army), Peter and Paul Fortress and Nevsky Prospekt. We can also arrange a visit to Catherine the Great's Summer Palace and the magnificent Amber Room.	St Petersburg
Day 3 - (B, L) Friday, July 30	Today we will visit the Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry – home of the world's first seed bank. Nikolai Vavilov, a Russian biologist, botanist and geneticist, scoured five continents in the 1920s and 1930s for wild and cultivated seeds of food crops. He was the foremost plant geographer of his time and took part in over 100 collecting missions to 64 countries. He is perhaps best known for having identified the 'centres of origin' of cultivated plants. He devoted his life to the study and improvement of wheat, corn, and other cereal crops that sustain the global population. Under Stalin, the Institute suffered repression since genetics was seen as a science that supports "inborn class differences". One of Stalin's victims was Vavilov himself and he was arrested in 1940. One year later, Hitler's army blockaded Leningrad (now St Petersburg). While guarding the collection, some Vavilov Institute scientists starved to death rather than eat the precious seed collections. Free evening.	St Petersburg
Day 4 - (B, L) Saturday, July 31	More guided sightseeing of St Petersburg and then free time this afternoon and this evening.	St Petersburg
Day 5 - (B, D) lunch on train Sunday, August 1	Transfer to the train station to enjoy a 5 hour express train journey through magnificent forests, farmlands and small villages, to Moscow (all in daylight). Brief city tour on arrival to get our bearings before checking into our downtown hotel. There are some famous sights to visit while in Moscow including Red Square, Lenin's Tomb, the Kremlin, the Armory, the famous domes of St Basil, Moscow River boat cruise and so on. A ride on the architecturally magnificent metro system is a must while the Military museum is also highly recommended	Moscow
Day 6 - (B, L) Monday, August 2	More guided touring of the city before a lunchtime meeting with Austrade for an introduction to Russian agriculture and trading links with Australia. Free time for your own exploration of Moscow this afternoon. This evening is free for various options including an evening at the Bolshoi Ballet. The Bolshoi Theatre is very near to our downtown hotel.	Moscow
Day 7 - (B, L, D) Tuesday, August 3	This morning we have a direct flight to Volgograd, southern Russia. Volgograd is at the convergence of the Don and Volga Rivers and was established to defend the unstable southern border of Tsarist Russia. It soon became the nucleus of a vast agricultural and trading settlement as well as the scene of some of history's most significant battles. The city was the scene of heavy fighting during the Russian Civil War but perhaps the biggest battle ever known to mankind took place here in WWII when the city was called Stalingrad. The Battle of Stalingrad began in July 1942 between the German and Russian armies. This epic, see-sawing struggle ended 7 months later with around 2 million lives lost and immeasurable destruction of land and property. Stalingrad was the longest, deadliest and most decisive battle of WWII. This defeat of the Nazi forces by Stalin's Red Army is widely considered the turning point of the war and for the Russians, this was one of their most triumphant yet tragic events in history. In 1952 the Volga-Don Canal was completed which linked the Arctic to the Mediterranean – an event which even more deeply cemented Volgograd's strategic importance to the Russian nation. We visit Mamay Mound and the Museum of the Defence of Stalingrad before meeting with agricultural officials for our introduction to southern Russian farming.	Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad)

DATE	ACTIVITY	OVERNIGHT
Day 8 - (B, L, D) Wednesday, August 4	This morning we board our charter boat and cruise west along the mighty Don River. Met by our charter coach at Volgodonsk. We visit a farm on our way to Rostov on Don for overnight.	Rostov on Don
Day 9 - (B, L) Thursday, August 5	City tour this morning before visiting local machinery dealers. The mouth of the Don River has been of great commercial and cultural importance since ancient times. The Don is a major shipping lane connecting southwestern Russia with regions to the north. With its strategic location and wealth, Rostov on Don was a bone of contention between the Whites and the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War and it was again thrown back in time by the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in recent years, this city of more than 1 million inhabitants, has experienced considerable economic growth to be transformed into a modern, industrial and technology-rich hub. Free evening.	Rostov on Don
Day 10 - (B, L, D) Friday, August 6	Continue south today by charter coach with some farm visits before reaching Krasnodar in the early afternoon. With the highest quality soils and a favourable climate, the Krasnodar region has always been the principal 'breadbasket' of the Russian Federation. The soils of the plains are mainly chernozems (black earths), and mountain-forest and mountain-meadow soils predominate in the hillier areas. The region produces 10% of all grain, 30% of fruit, 60% of oilseed, and 90% of rice grown in Russia. The agricultural significance of the region has been underlined with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the loss of large agricultural belts of Ukraine and Kazakhstan. This afternoon we visit the Class combine factory. The factory, opened in 2005, is designed to handle a capacity of 1000 machines a year. We enjoy a tour of the plant as well as a presentation on farming, on an enormous scale, in southern Russia. Overnight Krasnodar.	Krasnodar
Day 11 - (B, L) Saturday, August 7	Krasnodar is a city of about 800,000 people, and is situated on the River Kuban. The city was founded by the Cossacks in 1793 to protect the southern borders of Russia. Krasnodar is a major industrial, agricultural, and cultural centre in the fastest growing region in Russia outside of Moscow. The Krasnodar territory is unique in its diverse natural resources. There are also huge deposits of construction and road-building materials. The fuel and energy complex accounts for more than 20% of the territory's industrial output. Oil has been produced here since 1864. This morning we have a brief tour of Krasnodar before heading west for a farm visit before our ferry crossing of the Kerch Strait (separating the Sea of Asov and the Black Sea) and into Ukraine. We are now on the famous Crimean Peninsula. Overnight Kerch, just inside the Ukrainian border.	Kerch
Day 12 - (B, L, D) Sunday, August 8	Kerch is one of Ukraine's oldest and most historically significant cities. As the ancient Greek colony of Panticapaeum, it was capital of the Bosporan Kingdom from the 6th to 7th centuries BC. So it contains some interesting sights, although much of its gold treasures have ended up in St Petersburg's Hermitage Museum. Leisurely day as we tour through the spectacular Crimea and onto Dzankoj in the Peninsula's north east.	Dzankoj
Day 13 - (B, L, D) Monday, August 9	This morning we board our coach and travel north into the heart of Ukraine's vast agricultural region. Over 60% (42 million hectares) of Ukraine's total land area is considered arable. Many consider the steppe of this area as some of the most fertile soils in the world. The famous humus-rich black soil of southern Ukraine accounts for one-third of the world's total black soil reserves. Winter wheat, spring barley, and corn are the country's main grain crops. Sunflowers and sugar beets are the main industrial crops. National winter wheat yields are erratic and average around 3 tonnes per hectare. Over the next few days we will visit large farms in this area. We travel onto the Kakhovka Reservoir on the mighty Dnieper River. It covers a total surface area of 2155 sq km in the territories of the Kherson, Zaporizhia, and the Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts. The reservoir was created in 1956 when the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant was built. The reservoir and hydro plant services a vast agricultural and industrial area of southern Ukraine.	Kakhovka Reservoir region
Day 14 - (B, L, D) Tuesday, August 10	Today we continue onto Odessa, through the Dnepropetrovsk Oblast (region), with farm visits on the way. Agriculture in Ukraine has been evolving since it achieved independence in 1991, following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Farm property was divided among the farm workers – most of whom leased their land back to newly-formed private agricultural associations. The sudden loss of State agricultural subsidies had an enormous effect on every aspect of Ukrainian agriculture. In some cases, grain production fell by 50% and livestock numbers plummeted. Farms were forced to cope with fleets of aging, inefficient machinery because no funds were available for capital investment. Difficulty in obtaining credit, especially large, long-term loans, remains a significant problem for many farms. This has also caused a run-down in the fertility of some soils with fertiliser cut-backs. We will meet with Ukrainian farm managers and consultants battling these challenges. Overnight at the historic Black Sea port of Odessa.	Odessa
Day 15 - (B) Wednesday August 11	Referred to as the 'Pearl of the Black Sea', Odessa is the largest city along the Black Sea, and the most important city of Ukraine for trade. Built by order of Catherine the Great with the vision of creating a St Petersburg of the south, its architecture owes much to French influence. The old centre of the city is about 215 years old, built to a grid plan. It includes many tree-lined, cobbled boulevards, ornate facades and fountains which add an air of intimacy to the city centre. Odessa's mild climate, warm waters and sunlit beaches attract thousands of people year round. We enjoy a morning guided tour to get your bearings before free time to do your own exploration of the city.	Odessa
Day 16 - (B, L, D) Thursday, August 12	Today we continue on with our charter coach overland and into Romania, a half day journey. Our destination is the historic Danube River port town of Braila. During the 19th century the town became the home of wealthy investors making their fortune from shipping. Elegant villas and business houses were built during this period, a number of which are now fully restored. Nearby is a large privately-run irrigation farm situated on an island in the middle of the Danube River, the border between Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. The 'island' farm grows a variety of crops, grown across thousands of hectares. Dinner tonight with local farmers.	Braila

DATE	ACTIVITY	OVERNIGHT
Day 17 - (B, L) Friday, August 13	Later this morning we travel southwest and into the fertile farmlands of the Dobrogea region. This is in the Danube Delta. Romania's agricultural sector accounts for a substantial part of Romania's national economy. There are 15 million arable hectares of generally very fertile soils with a favourable climate. Dobrogea has some of the highest dryland grain yields in Romania and it is where many larger corporate farms are concentrated. We continue our short journey through magnificent farmlands and onto Romania's capital, Bucharest for overnight.	Bucharest
Day 18 - (B, L) Saturday, August 14	This morning we enjoy a guided tour to take in the magnificent architecture of one of Europe's most enchanting cities. Informal meeting with Austrade officials and a chance for a 'debrief' of Eastern European agriculture. Free afternoon and evening.	Bucharest
Day 19 - (B, L) Sunday, August 15	This morning we travel by charter coach north to the magnificent city of Brasov. Fringed by the peaks of the Southern Carpathian Mountains and resplendent with Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance architecture, as well as a wealth of historical attractions, Brasov is one of the most visited places in Romania. As one of the medieval Saxon's seven walled citadels built in the 12th century – and its location at the intersection of the trade routes linking the Ottoman Empire and western Europe – Brasov has obviously been a popular destination throughout the ages. Guided tour of Brasov on arrival and then a free evening.	Brasov
Day 20 - (B, L) Monday, August 16	This morning we continue into the heart of the Transylvanian region – Sighisoara. Transylvania is the geographic centre of Romania and is surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains. Transylvania (literally meaning 'land over the forests') is home for a diversity of people including Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Armenians and Jews. The resulting architecture in this region is a mosaic of Byzantine, Romanian, Renaissance, Barocco, Gothic and Neo-Gothic styles. Sighisoara is also where Vlad Tepes (Dracula) called home, and it's one of the most beautiful towns in Europe. On arrival, we enjoy a tour of this World Heritage site. After lunch we continue onto nearby Sibiu. This beautiful medieval town was the largest and wealthiest of the seven walled citadels built in the 12th century by German settlers known as Transylvanian Saxons. The riches amassed by the guilds of Sibiu paid for the construction of the impressive buildings and the fortifications required to protect them. Sibiu's Old Town retains the grandeur of its earlier days. Free time this evening before boarding our overnight train for Vienna, one of Europe's most beautiful and romantic cities.	Overnight on the train in first class sleeper cabins
Day 21 - (B, L, D) Tuesday, August 17	We arrive into the central Vienna train station at 9.00 am. We are met by our local guides and enjoy the sights and sounds of this magical city with a city tour before checking into our downtown hotel. Free time this afternoon before a farewell dinner this evening.	Vienna
Day 22 - (B) Wednesday, August 18	Free time for last minute souvenir shopping before catching our flight to Asia and home. Option to extend your stay in Vienna (Austria) or maybe stopover in Turkey (tour to Gallipoli) or other European or Asian destinations. We can make sure any options – before or after the main tour – mesh in well with this itinerary.	On plane



Some inquisitive Australian farmers from a previous Farm Study Tour into Eastern Europe.