

## THE CHANGE OF LAND USERS IN LITHUANIA DURING THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1920 AND 2014

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The paper presents the Lithuanian agricultural land users change analysis in almost a century period. The reasons leading to agricultural land users change trends were analysed. The main factors affecting the relationship of land use and the way of the land use are political changes in the country, economic and social aspects have less impact. Therefore, taking into account the political situation in Lithuania of this long analysed period, the agricultural land users change was analysed in three stages, which took place at the time of the conversion of reforms: land use between 1920 and 1940, land use during the Soviet period between 1940 and 1990, and land use after the restoration of Lithuania's independence between 1990 and 2014. After the analysis of the land use of these periods land use characteristics of appropriate epochs as well as the land users' change trends (of the entire period) and their causes are presented in the paper.

*Keywords: land users, land reform, poor and landless peasants, farmers, agricultural land.*

### INTRODUCTION

Lithuania has always been an agricultural country. In our days too the agricultural sector plays a very important economic, social, environmental and ethno-cultural function and is considered to be the country's priority sector of the economy. The restoration of the independent state of Lithuania (1918 02 16) made it possible to change the outdated procedure and create more advanced one. One of such sectors is the redevelopment of land management and land use relations. Lithuania has survived the feudal epoch formed land management and land use procedure – the three-field strip farming and street accommodation system.

In the wake of the First World War storms, Lithuanian agriculture was exhausted. The war mainly affected large farms – estates. In estates, the number of cattle and horse fell twice, many buildings were burnt, agricultural implements and machinery were taken away. 1.200 villages with 14.270 farms, 2000 households, 270 estates and 50 villages and towns were burned in Lithuania in total, except for the region of Vilnius.

Independent Lithuania's land reform during the period between 1919 and 1939 laid the foundations not only for the country's agriculture, but also for the entire nation-state, it was one of the most significant achievements of independence, a real agrarian revolution, which intensified land use.

In 1940, another land reform, called the Socialist, was launched. The main motive of this reform was the alignment of ethnic differences by subtracting the land from those who had it and distributing it to poor and landless peasants. During the Soviet era the "planned economy" model was installed in the entire territory of Lithuania, there was no real competence in agricultural activities.

After the restoration of Lithuania's independence (1990) market relations began to develop. Land tenure was changed, collectively (state) owned land (during the Soviet period) again found its owners. After the return of land (restitution) a number of private, often small areas of land, which owners were ready to develop agrarian activities in their lands, were formed.

According to the Law on Land land owners and other users had to use the land according to the main purpose of use, method of use, follow special land use conditions established for land parcels, keep to the requirements established in land-use planning documents (Lithuania..., 2004).

A. Aleknavičius and P. Aleknavičius analysed the change of the farming land area situated in agricultural land in Lithuanian cultivated areas during the period between 1990 and 2008. During the period of the land reform in

Lithuania, the farmland area decreased by 732 thousand ha (21.7 per cent), of which about 450 thousand ha (15.2 per cent) belonged to arable land (Aleknavičius, 2010).

D. Makutėnienė analysed changes in the size of farmers' farms and their land area impact on economic results. It was estimated how the land reform affected the establishment of farmers' farms as well as their structural changes, economic changes in the average land area in the country. Results of the study showed that small farmers' farm land is used much more intensively than in large farms (Makutėnienė, 2004).

P. Aleknavičius (2012) analysed agricultural land rearrangement works carried out in independent Lithuania. In order to create favourable conditions for agricultural land users he recommended to improve agricultural policies and laws, by providing support to households which purchased the perspective land within the boundaries of their land use and which started to use the abandoned land.

During the process of the land reform in independent Lithuania, only land parcels and not farms were designed since 1997, as land territorial units were required to be registered by law. Thus, land parcels became smaller and scattered. Since the formation of the farm land holdings were left to chance, the rearrangement of the layout of land parcels will be solved during the repeated land management works and during the preparation of land consolidation projects.

All agricultural development forecasts (carried out at Lithuania scale) are more optimistic and are associated with purposeful state regulated activities: "Agricultural land use plan is appropriate to the recommended farm specialization, corresponding to soil characteristics. Agricultural land area in Lithuania, after the adoption of a neglected agricultural land, can be increased to 3 million ha" (Aleknavičius, 2012).

Since Lithuania is an agricultural country, so the relevance of the carried out research work is such that it is important to analyse the land use and the change of users in various political and social events of the country.

**Objective of the paper** – to exclude agricultural land use peculiarities in Lithuania during the period between 1920 and 2014.

In order to achieve the goal the following tasks have been raised:

1. To analyse land use peculiarities in Lithuania during the first period of independence (1920–1940 years).
2. To describe the land use changes in Lithuania during the Soviet period (1940–1990 years).
3. To analyse the use of the land in independent Lithuania after 1990.
4. To provide the main differences and peculiarities of the land use of the analysed period (1920–2014), after the analysis of the legal, historical documents and statistics.

## **METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH AND MATERIALS**

For the implementation of the above-objective scientific literature and legal documents, analysis and synthesis of statistical indicators and analysis of mathematical processing and comparative analysis were used. The study was carried out using the data obtained from the Department of Statistics, the National Land Service under the Ministry of Agriculture as well as from the Lithuanian Agricultural Information and Rural Business Centre for the years 1920 and 2014.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Land use during the period between 1920 and 1940.** In 1918, after Lithuania regained independence, one of the main tasks of the Government was to start land reform without delay. The main reasons for the implementation of the land reform: the lack of land for farming families, big farms' troubles and rural land use disorder. Taking into account the cause of land reform the following objectives were drawn: to provide poor and landless peasants with the land; to dispose of or reduce obsolete economical derivatives (land holdings belonging to mansions, banks, religious organizations); to unify farming conditions on the basis of the farmstead land tenure (i.e. completing the strip land use); to dispose of easements in estates' pastures and forests; to distribute land managed as joint ownership (mostly – common pastures villages).

In 1919, Lithuanian landlords owned about 1.384 thousand hectares of land, or 26.2 % of the national territory (Table 1).

Table 1. Land ownership in Lithuania in 1919 (Vaskela, 1998)

Land according to ownership forms	Landholding area ha	Landholding structure %
Landlords' land	1384000	26.2
Peasants land	2932200	55.51
Patrimony	17015	0.32
State and other land	949000	17.97
<b>State territory ha*</b>	<b>5282185</b>	<b>100</b>

*Lithuanian territory without Vilnius and Klaipėda Regions*

One estate owned on average 490 ha. There are no accurate land distribution data, but it is considered that in 1919 the peasant farms owned 2.932 thousand ha, or 55.5 % of the total land. Landless peasants accounted for about 21 % of the population working in agriculture at that time. Small and very small peasants landowners – about 25 %. The relative weight of landlords and their family members made up only 1.1 % of the rural population (Vaskela, 1998). So land imbalances were evident.

According to the survey of the Land Reform Commission conducted in 1919, 94.6 thousand of poor and landless peasants wanted to get 1.418 thousand tens (about 1.550 thousand ha) of land. A number of villages still had retained the ancient land relations – owned land by strip three-field farming. Until the First World War Lithuania (without Vilnius and Klaipeda regions) was dispersed into remote areas of about 910 thousand hectares of land (3886 villages). According to the statistics of the Department of Land Management, in 1919 there were 9604 villages in Lithuania still not divided into homesteads (about 180 thousand farms). The area of undivided villages and towns was 1.973.3 thousand ha (Land Management..., 2004). Thus, economic, social and political conditions were the reasons for the fulfilment of the land reform.

About 612 thousand ha of the land, which once belonged to landlords, Russian colonists, state estates or state-owned lands, were taken by the state land fund. For the most part, land was taken from the landlords – even 84 % of the expropriated land. According to the data of L. Truska, the total number of the land in the State Land Fund was 1.301.5 thousand ha (Table 2) (Vaskela, 1998).

Foreign citizens have been banned from owning and buying land in Lithuania. During the reform the land of the larger estates was expropriated, leaving the owners 80 ha of land rate. In 1929, the inalienable land area was increased to 150 ha. For land expropriated landowners were compensated according to the law.

The most intense land rearrangement works related to the State Land Fund and its distribution took part during the period between 1923 and 1930.

Table 2. The State Land Fund in Lithuania during the period between 1919 and 1940 (according to the data of L.Truska)

State Land Fund sources	Area ha	Structure per cent
Land of private land owners:	1247837	95.87
of which forests and water reservoirs	592127	45.59
State land	11173	0.86
Land belonging to churches and monasteries	2194	0.17
Land belonging to Land Bank	2687	0.21
Peasant land bank	26166	2.01
Other land	11487	0.88
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1301544</b>	<b>100</b>

The land was distributed to about 65 thousand families. For the received land peasants had to pay redemption fees. First of all, the biggest land parcels were given to former officers and soldiers, who were mobilized in the year the state was established, as well as to honoured personas of political parties of independent Lithuania. Landless peasants or those who owned no land at all received from 8 to 20 ha of land, labourers and rural estates craftsmen received from 1.5 to 2 ha of land.

Taken to the state land fund the land was distributed in the following way: to poor and landless peasants – 453 thousand ha; to state-owned enterprises and forest farms – 35 thousand ha; to city municipalities and individual buildings – 9 thousand ha; rented to representative and cultural farms – 9 thousand ha; for other purposes (easements liquidation, sales, etc.) – 46.5 thousand ha.

Totally, during the period between 1919 and 1940 1.443 estates were parcelled, easements were eliminated in the area of 100 thousand ha. Totally, parcelling affected 720.282.1 hectares that made up 81.837 parcels of land. The parcelling of estates in Lithuania covered about 25 % of the territory of the State (Land Management ..., 2004).

Estates have been expropriated the most intensively during the period between 1923 and 1926, and in 1924 the volume of work has reached the maximum level, more than 136 thousand hectares of land were parcelled. During the period between 1923 and 1926, 58.6 % of the total work carried out during the land reform was executed (Šalčius, 1998).

New settlers, i.e. those who had no land until the land reform, were given 362.084 ha to the ownership and 90.629 ha were added to poor people (Table 3). The new settlers' group was divided into two categories: those who have received up to two hectares of land, and those who received over 2 hectares of land. Up to 2 hectares received a total number of 4690 people and they received 8007 ha of land, an average of 1.71 ha each (Vaskela, 1998).

Table 3. Distribution of the State Land Fund in Lithuania during the period between 1919 and 1940 (L.Truska)

Land given	Parcels	Area	
		ha	%
To new settlers:	38747	362084	27.8
up to two hectares of land to rural workers and craftsmen	4690	8007	0.61
2–20 ha parcels to the landless	33504	339371	26.06
more than 20 hectares of land to the landless	553	14706	1.13
To people having not much land	26367	90629	6.96
To rural workers' gardens	7918	3287	0.25
To peasants for easements	-	28214	2.17
Left to landlords	1734	186621	14.33
To public institutions, municipalities, governmental organizations, etc.	5234	50409	3.87
State forestry and water enterprises	-	557894	42.84
Sold and allocated to other uses	-	18109	1.39
Left undistributed	-	5145	0.4
<b>Total:</b>	-	<b>1302392</b>	<b>100</b>

All the independent Lithuanian land reform is divided into two stages: the period between 1919 and 1930, when parcelled estates and villages were divided into households, and the period between 1931 and 1939, when the distribution only of the villages predominated. The average managed rural area was 237 ha, and the average household area – 10.4 hectares. However, the Lithuanian villages' distribution to households hasn't been completed.

During the 20 years of the then reform the rural land management works have been intense and wide-ranging. Lithuania then became a real households region. Small parcels dominated in agricultural lands.

There were 159 360 medium According to the data of agricultural census carried out in 1930 there were 287.380 households (4.327.500 ha) in Lithuania. The average farm had per 15 ha of land. The largest farms were within the 8 to 9 ha. Farms from 1 to 12 ha accounted for 90.93 % of the total number of farms. There were 99.345 farms having not much land (1–8 ha) across Lithuania, which accounted for about 35 % of the total number of farms. They accounted for 10.4 % of the total farm area.

There were 159 360 medium-sized farms (8–30 ha), or 55.5 % of the total number of farms. They occupied 55.8% of the total farm area. There were 1602 estates (100 ha and more) or only 0.6 % of the total number of farms. They took 6.3% of the total land area of the farm. Meanwhile, before the First World War alone in Kaunas province 46.5% of the land belonged to farms with more than 100 tens (Šalčius, 1998).

During the existence of the two decades of an independent state (during the period between 1919 and 1940) public and peasant land areas had increased. Actually, landlords' landholdings disappeared, although formally landowners of landlords' origin saved remnants of former areas. Landlords' holdings in Lithuania decreased by 15 times during the period between 1919 and 1940. The relative weight of estates land in the state area has declined from 26 % to 1.5 %, the state land areas increased from 2.2 to 2.5 times (Table 4).

Table 4. Lithuanian landholding percentage change during the period between 1919 and 1940 (Vaskela, 1998)

Land owners	1919	1940	Change
State	9.23	18.5–20.5	+9.22 -10.99
Peasants and other farmers	55.51	70.66	+15.15
Landlords	26.2	1.53	-24.38
Church	0.32	0.35	+0.03
Other lands	8.73	6.96–8.72	-1.77–0.01
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	-

State land area has increased due to the fact that private forests and larger bodies of water were nationalized. 506.030 hectares of forests and 51.864 hectares of water bodies were expropriated from private owners until 1940 (Vaskela, 1998). Churches land changed only slightly, such lands were extremely rare, so this fact did not have a significant impact on the structure of land tenure.

However, land reform flaw was that the newly created private farms were too small so irrational for practical use. Although the land reform law provided for farm size from 8 to 20 ha, as sufficient for one family to feed. Fear that the settlers will not be able and will not use the obtained land did not materialize. A sharp drop in the number of poor and landless was noticed, what over time would have positively impacted the rise of agricultural production, if there would not have precluded ensuing Soviet land reform.

**Land use in the Soviet era during the period between 1940 and 1990.** Land management works fundamentally changed during the period between 1940 and 1989 due to the difficult political situation in the country and the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union. In 1940, after carrying the resolution of "People's Seimas", Lithuania was declared as the Soviet Socialist Republic. The same year on 22 July the Seimas adopted the Declaration on the taking of land to state ownership.

Thus, in 1940, was launched yet another land reform, called the Socialist. The main motive of this reform – the adjustment of wealth gap, by subtracting land from the people, who have too much of the land, and by distributing it to poor and landless peasants, i.e. to rural proletariat. Lists of estates and farms that had more than 30 ha were compiled, accountings were provided, statements for passing the land were accepted.

It was decided to take into the state land fund: directly not used state and municipality lands; lands belonging to landlords (with farmsteads and inventory); lands belonging to religious institutions and organizations; the land of people who lived in cities and their families did not cultivate that land; large farmers' lands, with more than 30 hectares of agricultural land.

Part of the land was left to the church: to the parishes – up to 3 ha, and to priests as private owners – peasant land rate (up to 30 ha). Until the end of 1940, 607.6 thousand hectares of land was taken to the state land fund, of which even 435. 2 thousand hectares of land belonged to large farmers, and up to 1944–1947 the land fund has increased to 1.6 million ha, e.g. accounted for one third of all agricultural land. Almost half of the fund (47.6 %) consisted of land, located in the central counties (Kedainiai, Panevezys, Siauliai, Telsiai, Raseiniai, Ukmerge, Vilnius and Zarasai). They are counties, which were dominated by large-scale land ownership (Žemėtvarka..., 2004).

All poor peasants who had not more than 8 ha, cottars who lived in villages, rural artisans and other landless people could get land from the State land fund. Not more than 10 hectares could be given to peasants and two to three hectares could be given to rural artisans. Part of the land area on demand was available for the state farms, urban development, other state and public needs. 51 state farms (the total area of these farms – 47.0 thousand ha) were created in Expropriated estates in 1941.

There were 201.722 of those who filled applications to get land. But not all of these requests were granted. According to social groups it can be identified that the largest land areas were distributed (up to 1940) to state forest farms (1110.0 thousand ha), landless peasants (149.5 thousand ha), poor peasants (167.3 thousand ha) (Table 5). At the beginning of 1941 new settlers' farms accounted for 8 % of all farms.

After completion of the reform the landless peasants were given an average of 7.53 ha, and rural artisans – 2.4 hectares of land. Before the reform poor peasants had an average of 3.35 hectares of land, after the reform – 7.34 hectares of land. In 1940, there were 531 cottars, 14.4 thousand landless and 20.4 thousand peasants still not provided with land.

Both, during the pre-reform and post-reform there were mainly farms, with an area ranging from 10 to 20 ha, the smallest share amounted to 3 hectare farms (Land Management..., 2004).

Table 5. Results of land reform works in November of 1940 (Land Management..., 2004)

Description of the persons who received land	Number of parcels, thousand ha	Area thousand ha
Landless peasants	41.9	167.3
Poor peasants with large families	7.2	54.5
Landless peasants – land tenants	7.3	57.9
The former estate workers, cottars	7.1	56.8
Rural artisans	3.2	7.6
Other landless	5.8	37.1
Peasants for land and forest, taken from them for the benefit of their country	2.9	12.6
State forest enterprises	7.7	1110.0
State farms	0.357	45.1
Other state enterprises and organizations	2.4	15.5
Cooperatives and other public organizations, cities	3.7	12.1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>89.1</b>	<b>576.5</b>

After the conversion of land use a significant number of holdings remained, which were up to 1 ha. The average size of these farms was 0.43 ha. Such plots were used by urban residents, craftsmen, to whom agriculture was an additional occupation. After the reform, more than 18 thousand families using 7880 ha of land had such kind of farms.

Land nationalization became a new basis for land relationship in Lithuania. Following the nationalization of the land landlords and other large landowners were exiled outside the country. The total number of families of farmers repatriated to Germany and shipped to Russia in 1940 was not less than 12.5 thousand.

After the completion of the land reform about 31 thousand hectares of land area remained uncommitted, of which about 10 thousand ha of land made up lands unsuitable for agriculture, and the rest of the area – 900 estates centres. The reserve land fund constantly changed and gradually increased. In the spring of 1941 5063 repatriated Germans left their farms, which had a total area of 64.2 thousand ha. The total reserve fund in those years was 96.4 thousand hectares of land.

The war in Lithuanian territory ended in 1945. During the war years, big losses were made to agriculture of the country – about 24.9 thousand farms were left without owners, farmers have lost 15 thousand residential houses and 25 thousand outbuildings. Arable land situated in agricultural land decreased by 230 thousand ha (7.5 %), in addition, another 280 thousand ha of it were occupied by unbroken soils. Crop areas fell by 490 thousand ha or 20 % (Land Management ..., 2004).

During the post-war years, peasant farms' land-use regulation, which started in 1940, was continued.

Much more land area was taken into the state land fund than in 1940. Because the large farmers were left even less than 30 ha: according to the type and location of the land, this rate could be reduced by up to 20 ha, and individuals who have supported German occupiers – up to 5 ha. In addition, large areas were occupied by land remaining without households (Land Management ..., 2004).

1194.6 thousand ha were allocated from the state land fund: 48.0 thousand persons were granted 489.8 thousand ha of land for the establishment of new farms, 138.3 thousand of poor peasants received 198.7 thousand ha, 160.6 thousand ha were transferred for the setting up of Soviet farms, 10.2 thousand ha were transferred to collective farms, 68.3 thousand ha were transferred to auxiliary farms, 156.0 thousand ha – to forestry farms, and to other holdings (organizations) – 111.0 thousand ha.

Since 1948 Lithuania entered a new redevelopment of land relations and land use – forced collectivization. A number of regulations governing the adjustment process were prepared. Continuous collectivization in Lithuania lasted from 1949 up to 1950 (by January 1, 1951 kolkhozes occupied 71.9 % of peasant farms) and was essentially completed at the beginning of 1952 (Aleknavičius, 2004). Deep social transformations occurred in rural areas during the collectivization, and basically changed the composition of the land users. Individual peasant farms disappeared, and their place was taken by collective farms and state farms, which were the main land users. Land areas owned by collective farms increased by 1955 and decreased thereafter, as part of the collective farms were reorganized into state farms (Figure 1).

With the increase of collective farms and state farms by land area, individual peasant farms declined respectively, until they completely disappeared. Till the distribution to the state land fund fell lands taken from the large landowners and peasants (kulaks), as well as lands once owned by monasteries, churches and the rest of the land without masters. These land areas increased until 1950 and accounted for 6.8% of the country's land area, and later

declined, as during the transformation of land use the majority of these lands were transferred to the Soviet collective farms and farms (Lietuvos ..., 1970).

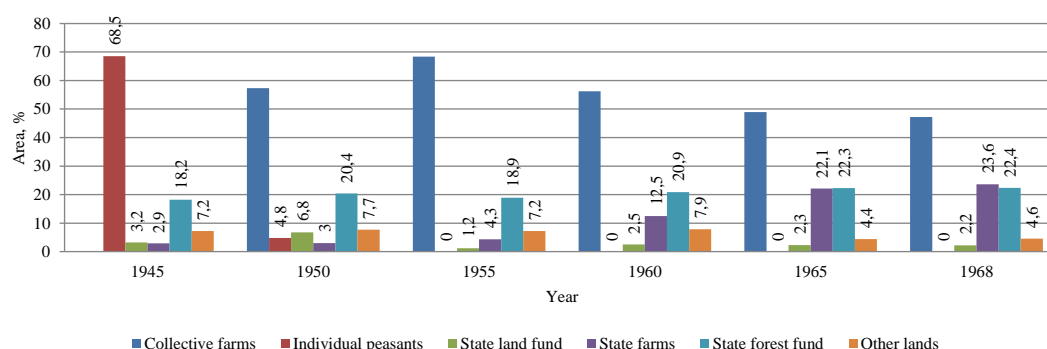


Figure 1. Land area distribution by users in Lithuania during the period between 1945 and 1968, percentage (Lietuvos...,1970)

Collective farms were usually created within the range of one or several villages, so later they had to be enlarged: till 1952 instead of 6285 young kolkhozes remained only 2923 collective farms connecting 343.2 thousand peasant farms. In Lithuania, in 1953 – 1954 there were a total of 1.816 collective farms (average size – 2480 ha) and 73 state farms (average size – 3130 ha).

Since the beginning of the Soviet stage, particularly after the collectivization (in 1951), quite large agrarian land use and landscape (in general) transformations began. A summary of the reasons for the change of this process can be described by the following factors: the change of ownership of the land - farmers were not owners of the land; radically changed rural demographic situation: rural population decreased; of them especially the working-age population has been decreasing, the number of this kind of population decreased in subsequent decades of Soviet rule as well; rural accommodation system evolved; cropping systems, agricultural machines and technologies changed as well; cultural technical works were greatly developed (drainage land reclamation); following works have been given a "sweeping" character (Milius, 2008).

Only 831 collective farms remained in 1989, they used 3.272.5 thousand hectares of land, 429 state farms had 1.285.3 thousand ha, 44 state forestry enterprises – 1447.1 thousand ha, 5343 industrial, transport and other companies and institutions – 239.9 thousand ha, 118 cities and urban-type settlements – 141.0 thousand hectares of land. State reserve land amounted to 3.7 thousand ha, the state water fund land – 137.4 thousand ha.

A peasant farm law was adopted on July 4, 1989, which even more expanded works carried out by land management organizations. For Lithuanian citizens, who wanted to set up a farm, the land was given free of charge from the state reserve, forest fund, state farms, collective farms and other businesses and organizations. The peasant farm size was not less than 10 hectares and not more than 50 hectares of agricultural land. The farm was considered to be established by the issue of state land ownership act. The peasant farm size was from 10 to 50 ha. Specialized farms could be smaller. 5138 peasant farms were established till the autumn of 1991. 86.4 thousand hectares of land belonged to these farms (Land Management..., 2000).

**Land use in Lithuania after it regained independence during the period between 1990 and 2014.** The nature of land relations and its use has fundamentally changed after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The adopted Provisional Basic Law of the Republic of Lithuania establishes that the economic system in Lithuania is based on private ownership. After half a century of occupation a natural human right to private property was restored in Lithuania. There was an assumption for the new, free market-led land reform, which was launched in 1991. Lithuanian land fund composition till restitution land reform was analysed in Table 6.

Table 6. Lithuanian land fund distribution according to the data of January 1.1990 ha (Lietuvos..., 1990)

Land fund	Total area	Agricultural land	Percentage of total area
Land belonging to collective farms, state farms, peasants	4557133.1	3107986.3	69.79
State reserve land	5444.2	2882.3	0.08
Land belonging to the state forests companies	1448180.9	39282.1	22.18
Land belonging to urban and urban-type settlements	141272.6	11945.4	2.16
Industry, transport and other non-agricultural land	240717.4	34472.1	3.69
Land belonging to state water fund	137353.5	70.4	2.10
<b>Total:</b>	<b>6530101.7</b>	<b>3196638.6</b>	<b>100</b>

While examining the Lithuanian Land Fund of 1990, one can distinguish agricultural land used by collective farms, Soviet and other state farms and peasant farms. It covers 69.79 per cent of the total area of the country. These land users cultivated over 3107986 hectares of agricultural land. In this period, there were 877 collective farms, 204 state farms and 2.283 peasant farms. State forest land used by the companies made up 22.18 per cent.

Land reform legislation provided that, under certain conditions, the land held by the right of ownership may be returned to former owners of the land, and after their death – to their spouse and children (in 1992, this circle of contenders was expanded by adding grandchildren, if they were citizens of Lithuania). The return of the land could be in kind and in equivalent kind, i.e. in equivalent area in another location. Furthermore, the possibility to get compensation for non-refundable land was foreseen. The maximum area of land in which the rights of ownership could be restored increased from 80 hectares to 150 hectares (including its forests and water).

Agricultural companies and farms of other forms of legal entities, established under the new laws of the Republic of Lithuania, were the ones which mainly preserved the property of former agricultural enterprises (Aleknavičius et al., 2012)

According to the land fund accounting data of January 1, 2000 from a total of 6.530.0 thousand ha area of the Republic of Lithuania agricultural land covered 3.945.7 thousand ha (60.4 per cent.). Private agricultural land occupied 1.697.2 thousand ha (26.0 per cent), and the state land – 2248.5 thousand ha (34.4 percent). In the course of ongoing land reform the increase of private agricultural land was notable. 273.632 private landowners used 1.684.301.71 hectares of land, number of parcels – 330.883. Farmers were the main users of private land. The average farm size amounted to 7.65 ha. Mainly natural persons rented state agricultural land (114.013), the total used land area covered 618.354.71 hectares. 939 agricultural enterprises rented 216.448.07 hectares.

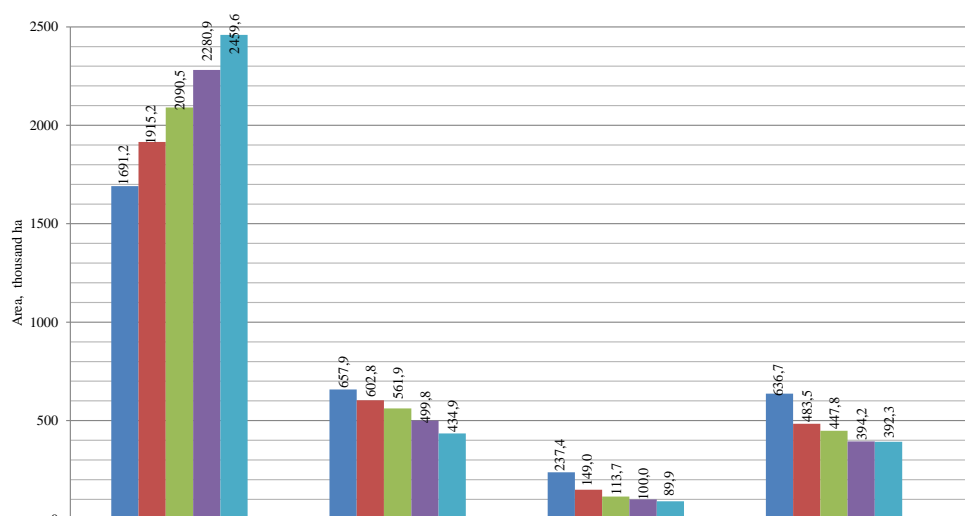


Figure 2. Agricultural land use change over the years 1999 and 2003 in thousand ha

The course of the land reform in particular has led to agricultural land changes in the structure according to the users. The number of farmers increase and the number of agricultural companies and other agricultural companies as well as land areas managed by them declines as part of the enterprises eliminate and new ones do not develop (Figure 2). The number of the personal farms users decrease as well, as after persons have retrieved or bought land they are included into a group individuals using agricultural land. However, this land reform, the same as the interwar land reform conducted during the period between 1919 and 1939, resulted in small farms.

On average over the period between 2003 and 2009 1 ha of agricultural land for crop gross production value in farms amounted to 1.130 Lt, and in agricultural companies – almost 1.4 times more, i.e. 1540 Lt. In addition, crop production growth in farmers' farms is slower. In farmers farms the crop gross production value of 1 ha of agricultural land from 2003 to 2009 increased by 6.5 per cent per year, and in agricultural companies – by 30.5 per cent.

Table 7. Agricultural land users and land area change between 2000 and 2014 (Lietuvos..., 2000-2014)

Land users	In 2000	In 2014	The change in 2000 with 2014 per cent
Private land, of which:	1697364.88	3388490.60	+50.1
natural persons	1684301.71	3167946.56	+53.2
legal persons	-	205968.84	-
gardeners community members	13063.17	14575.26	+11.6
State land, of which:	2248283.44	553197.93	-406.4
for personal use of residents	657835.03	47577.87	-1382.6
leased by natural persons	618354.71	193704.13	-319.2
belong to state enterprises	20970.00	11567.10	-55.2
belong to agricultural communities and companies			
belong to legal persons	216448.07	41417.46	-522.6
belong to gardeners communities	18269.41	-	-
land in the vacancy	8389.21	6138.55	-36.7
	708017.01	252792.82	-280.1
<b>Total agricultural land</b>	<b>3945648.32</b>	<b>3941801.54</b>	<b>+0.1</b>

Comparing the research data carried out on January 1 of 2000 and 2014 the growth of private agricultural land area was observed, this change makes up 50 per cent. Strongly shows up the trend of state agricultural land declining more than four times. If in 2005 the private agricultural land area used by legal entities amounted to 46.748 hectares, in 2013 this area has increased to 205.969 ha. The number of agricultural companies and communities varied from 939 to 507 as well as. Since 2010, a more rapid agricultural land purchase is observed in the country, which suggests that the decrease of individual farmlands and non-leased land areas was influenced by this factor.

Carrying out the finishing touches of the land reform as well as preparing land consolidation projects and state land purchase works the changes in the level of the farmers' farms size are noticeable. According to the data of 1995, the average size of a farm was 9.18 ha and in 2014 – 20.09 hectares. During the study period the country was dominated by farms from 3 to 10 hectares in size. Recently, the decline in the number of farmers and the increase in the farm area is noticeable. According to the data of 2000 figures were as follows: 220.251 farmers, in 2014 – 117.457 farmers.

In addition to the fundamental economic reasons causing the worse agricultural land use, one should mention the lack of work for rural population, as well as the lack of infrastructure. Therefore, with the further development of Lithuanian agricultural and rural development strategy and its implementation measures, it is advisable to follow the guidelines set in the European Charter for Rural Areas. This paper suggests tools that can prevent the decrease of the number of rural population and restore agrarian land use, to support young farmers, promote business, craft and rural tourism, construction of residential buildings, the development of modern transport and communication system, to form the cultural landscape of rural and conservation-friendly economic activities (Aleknavičius, 2012)

Often, sustainable agriculture and sustainable development are treated within individual elements, such as organic farming, food quality and safety, sustainable use of natural resources. The European Union's common agricultural policy is being increasingly oriented towards organic farming, which provides both environmental and socio-economic benefits, which correspond to the components of the sustainable development discussed above (Čiegis, 2009).

Agricultural land use in farmers' farms is getting better every year. Agricultural land area owned by these farms as well as the average size of the farm household are increasing, the use of land resources is improving, the cultivation of farmlands is increasing, agricultural crop structure is being improved, intensification of production is going on (Kazakevičius, 2011).

The special significance of land for crop and livestock production should be mentioned. In order to ensure a successful crop production development, it is necessary to conserve and rationally use soil fertility potential, by continuously improving the agricultural crop structure and land quality for the purposes of crop production. Plant products are necessary not only for human nutrition industry, but also for the development of animal husbandry (Andrijauskienė, 1995).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. During the analysed period (between 1920 and 2014) three land readjustment reforms took place in Lithuania, which influenced the change and differences of land use and users.
2. During the period between 1920 and 1940 the land was used by landlords, peasants, churches and monasteries as well as by various governmental organizations.
3. Between the years 1940 and 1990, during the Soviet period, the major users of land were collective farms, state farms and other farms, which used 69.79 per cent of the total area of land.
4. Since 1991, after the beginning of the restitutional conversion reform, the rapid change in agricultural land user groups was observed: categories of public land users decreased and private agricultural land areas used by farmers and natural and legal persons increased.
5. According to the farmers holding register data, farmers, who use the land covering from 3 to 10 ha, predominate. Over 500 hectares of the used land have 268 farmers. Over the past five years a decline in the number of farms is being witnessed, but the area of the used land is increasing. The average size of the farm household is over 20 hectares. In order to successfully compete in agriculture, it is necessary to consolidate and increase the size of land parcels, promoting small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas.

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