



Ecologist Ferdinand Grigoryan to Take Home Know-How for Vanadzor Nursery  
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WATERTOWN, MA—Massachusetts' forests, farms, nurseries and arboretums have proved a fertile research laboratory for Armenian ecologist Ferdinand Grigoryan, who is in the US for seven weeks, to learn and collect information for Tsiatsan (Rainbow), the environmental NGO which he founded in 1997.

Now working in partnership with the Armenia Tree Project (ATP), Grigoryan has visited Levon Kachadoorian's Everlast Nursery in Leicester, Concord's Walden Pond, Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, Mahoney's Rocky Ledge Nursery in Winchester, various supply stores and talked to a local Armenian-American farmer, Krikor Soujian, about his corn crop. Each visit has been an opportunity to study planting and cultivation techniques, or to learn about how small retail nurseries work.

What he has absorbed he will take back to Armenia where Tsiatsan's main project will be to develop a 15-acre reforestation nursery in Vanadzor, in the Lori district, which by 2006, is hoped to have the capacity to produce one million trees a year. The goal is to plant trees that are indigenous to Armenia such as maple, oak, linden, walnut and beech.

"Mainly, I am learning about how people care for the environment here," said Grigoryan in an interview at ATP's headquarters. "The idea of protecting the environment is still new in Armenia. There is a lot that needs to be grasped, not just about protecting the environment, but new growth techniques that can be applied in agriculture."

Grigoryan will be taking seeds home for testing as well as books and some specific implements such as sprinkler heads, which will be used in the irrigation system at Vanadzor. But, it is education that will ensure the long-term success of environmental and reforestation projects, he said.

"Trees were being cut down at a great rate in the early '90s, due to the energy crisis. But people have learned that deforestation leads to degradation of the soil and to erosion. We now have a program in the Lori schools about environmental protection. We want to educate the students to become stewards of the land," he said.

To reach people who live in rural areas outside of Yerevan, Grigoryan plans to produce a series of television programs on the environment to air twice a month on community stations free of charge.

"We especially need to train people who are dependent on the land. If they cut down a tree, we are teaching them to plant a tree to replace it," said Grigoryan. "In this way, we can change people's psychology. Someone who has planted a tree is much less likely to cut it down."

## Armenia Tree Project



There are signs that Armenia is beginning to pay more attention to its environment, said Grigoryan. “Some legislation has been passed, and the Armenia Forestry Agency has been transferred from the Ministry of Environmental Protection to the Ministry of Agriculture. All of these ministries have a limited budget. But, as an NGO, Tsiatsan can have access to the top professionals in Armenia, in topography and many other fields.”

Also, Yerevan State University and more importantly, community colleges are beginning to teach courses on ecology and protection of the environment. And the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) is encouraging their members to help with environmental education in the schools.

He added, “The Armenia Tree Project has done a tremendous job in Armenia. They are a great partner for us. There is no organization like it.”

Grigoryan said he had a special appreciation for what has been accomplished at Walden Pond.

“I wanted to learn how natural forests are being protected,” he said. “There is no cutting of trees there and when erosion occurs, the problem is addressed immediately. I admire the way the area has been conserved, and there is a relationship there between the animals and people that I haven’t seen before.”

While he was here, Grigoryan visited St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School and invited the students to come to Armenia, meet students there and work on the Vanadzor planting project.

Beyond planting trees, Grigoryan said, care and maintenance are extremely important. He cited a recent case of the fir trees planted at Echmiadzin in honor of all previous catholicoses. The trees died soon after as a result of neglect.

“The NGO involved in the planting should have been responsible for the maintenance. The trees were not watered properly. Yes, people should have been educated to take care of them, but there should be accountability,” he said.

Grigoryan concluded, “Each tree I plant is for the future and for future generations. And each generation can do this. It’s very important. This is the most important work of my life.”