

The President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who met with heads of local government and visited a number of companies during his tour today in Raplamaa, acknowledged the local people's initiative and their positive expectations for the future.

"The development of every county depends on the co-operation of local governments; apart from promoting one's home county, co-operation will also give you the leverage in relations with central government and in explaining your proposals in the capital," said the Head of State at his meeting with the heads of local governments in Raplamaa.

The Head of State paid a visit to the factory of a manufacturer of ready-to-eat foodstuffs, Saarioinen Eesti OÜ, which was opened in Kalevi village, Rapla rural municipality, last year.

"It is positive that despite the difficult economic situation, the owners still invested approximately 13 million euro into this venture, providing employment to 110 people, 80 of whom are from Raplamaa," President Ilves said. "It's also remarkable that you are committed to using clean raw materials. I also hope that as time goes by, you will have more Estonian ingredients at your disposal, which is dependent on the quality of local produce, steady supplies from suppliers, and product development efforts."

The Head of State visited the production facilities of Uniplast OÜ, established by the Kivi family from Rapla in 1993, which manufactures sports and hiking supplies and plastic products, and he also met with the members of NGO Ettevõtlikud Naised Raplamaal (Entrepreneuring Women in Raplamaa).

"Uniplast serves as a good example of flexibility being the key to the success of a small company, as this also helps a company to survive the credit crunch and even more – to develop," President Ilves told.

When visiting the blacksmith's workshop, run by Harri Riim and Lauri Laiapea in a restored Puraviku windmill in Valtu village, the Head of State praised the owners of the small company for maintaining the art of the blacksmith in Estonia and for the renovation of an old windmill, which has now become one of the sightseeing spots in the area.

At Kehtna Economy and Technology School, the plans for establishing a centre of excellence of heavy machinery were introduced to President Ilves; the co-operation partners of the project include several transport organisations as well as education and research establishments.

“As the only school to focus on heavy machinery, the Kehtna school needs to be developed; the creation of a contemporary learning base here is important for Estonia as a whole,” emphasised the Head of State.

President Ilves also paid a visit to Kehtna Mõisa OÜ, which has more than 500 dairy cows, a poultry farm, and a small meat processing company. Mr. Märt Riisenberg, who is one of the owners and who showed the President around, stressed the importance of co-operative activities in agriculture, which make agriculture stronger and more contemporary.

The President ended his tour of Raplamaa at the Animal Breeders' Association of Estonia in Keava, where he was joined by 1,300 members. The Association's Chairman of the Board, Mr. Taavi-Tanel Bulitko, gave an overview of the cattle breeding situation in Estonia.

“An innovative approach and co-operation in the sphere of cattle breeding have contributed to Estonian milk production being among the highest in Europe, and we must acknowledge our breeders and cattle farmers for that,” President Ilves told.

The Head of State was accompanied at his tour of Raplamaa by the County Governor, Mr. Tiit Leier.

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