

Leadership for Sustainability

Interview:

Lars Rebien Sørensen, Chair of the Danish Novo Nordisk Foundation, speaks at IUFRO World Congress [Session S5.7 Leadership for Sustainability – Overcoming Challenges in Forest Research](#) on Tuesday, 25 June, 02:30 - 03:30 PM, Room A2+A3



“Forests play a key role in re-establishing a better balance in the utilization of land.”

How do you see the role of forests for human health and the pharmaceutical sector?

Forests are the pinnacle of development of biologic systems. In their pure form they are composed of a variety of species giving rise to a very diverse ecosystem of plants, animals, insects, fungi and microorganisms. This abundant diversity forms everything we call LIFE.

Forests protect our environment against the climate and the sun and are the origins of diverse ecosystems such as marshlands, semi-arid bushlands – and even our deserts.

Forests have always been a source of raw materials, foodstuffs and energy for humans, upon which we have built our civilization.

The early pharmaceutical industries were based on the use of natural products and extracts. The evolution of the chemical industry enabled pharmaceutical companies to evolve from extracting active chemical compounds from biologic materials to today’s advanced biologic solutions based on an understanding of the building block of life – our DNA.

What is the role for sustainable leadership in addressing climate change and other societal challenges?

“Sustainable leadership” is just a modern term for the relationship our ancestors had with nature. They realized that we humans are only here for an infinitely short span of time in the existence of the universe. Or at least this is the romantic view we have of ancestors. The world and its resources are ours – on loan from future generations.

The real definition of sustainability came from a UN report in 1987, in which the UN defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Climate change, challenging as it may seem, might not be our biggest challenge. We know what to do – and we can measure the impact of various interventions.

The growing realization that biodiversity is under threat is a far bigger challenge to understand and to counteract. And I believe that forests play a key role in re-establishing a better balance in the utilization of land.

What do you expect from the Congress? What outcomes are you looking for?

The opportunity to re-connect with my former academic Alma Mater and learn how the sector views its role in the transformation from being largely seen as an exploitation industry – to being recognised as key to creating a sustainable future.

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Lars Rebien Sørensen holds the position of Chair of Danish Novo Nordisk Foundation since July 2018. He has over 35 years of general management experience in the pharmaceutical industry including global positions across the Middle East and the United States. In 1994, he was appointed a member of the corporate management team and assumed responsibility for the Novozymes A/S Healthcare Business. In November 2000, he became President and CEO of Novo Nordisk A/S, a position he held until December 2016.

The Novo Nordisk Foundation is a 100-year-old enterprise foundation created by the founders of two Danish pharmaceutical companies (Nordisk and Novo). The main mission of the Foundation is to support the long-term development of the principal operating companies, and to give grants to academic research within a broad field of the natural sciences as well as for humanitarian and social purposes. The assets of the Foundation are managed through Novo Holdings, a fully owned holding company that has ownership stakes in 170 life science companies.

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