

After 2009: Land Options for Altai People

We see basically four possible outcomes, which engender different responses:

- 1) **Outcome:** The new Federal law allowing private ownership of agricultural lands is interpreted or altered to extend the time allowed for surveying and registration under current conditions.

AMU Response: Time extension of current requirements would still make land registration prohibitively expensive for the Altai people. AMU would probably continue our current efforts, as well as inquire about the interest of Altai people in pursuing other options.

- 2) **Outcome:** Through some mechanism, either the registration requirement is waived, or a government program underwrites the costs.

AMU Response: Simply taking the culturally onerous registration requirement off the shoulders of the Altai people is the most just solution, especially if some governmental agency ensures that the traditional lands DO get registered. In this case, AMU would gladly proceed with our cultural/educational work.

- 3) **Outcome:** The new law allows the sale of traditional lands out from under villagers, and the Altai people seek recourse in international court under the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

AMU Response: AMU is in a position to facilitate an appeal to the UN by the Altai people, and would direct funding efforts toward laying the groundwork for such an appeal. However, the will and leadership to follow this course must come from the Altai people, and legal recourse within Russia must be fully explored first.

- 4) **Outcome:** The new law allows the sale of traditional lands out from under villagers, but the villagers adapt their culture to the new economic realities.

AMU Response: Adaptation is a valuable response in any event. Svetlana Katinova proposes that complementary “village industries” (such as wool, meat, dairy, honey, herbs) could market and/or export products/services cooperatively. Even if prime lands are sold off immediately, adequate land can still be rented, and group profits could be invested in eventual land purchases. This could be done with modest seed money (perhaps microlending) but considerable organizational and informational effort. Conceivably, local government grants could be available for this.