Pre-industrial Norwegian agriculture was to a great extent dependent on out-bye land (where fodder resources from hay meadows, pastures, pollarded trees etc. were harvested), and summer farming (involving transhumance) has been of utmost importance for thousands of years. Summer farming in the Norwegian mountains has a long history and can be traced back to the Iron Age, or even to the Bronze Age, enabling fodder resources far from the farm to be utilised. The golden period of summer farming was in the 19th century. At that time there were probably more than 70,000 summer farms in use; however, agricultural improvements and land use changes led to abandonment, and today fewer than 2,000 farms use their out-bye land, which is now characterised by extensive colonisation of scrub and forest, and reduced biodiversity.

Summer farming shaped the landscape and created several semi-natural, often species-rich vegetation types, especially in areas with a high soil pH level. Furthermore, these semi-natural mountain vegetation types made it possible for the lowland flora and the alpine plant species to meet.

Characteristic summer farming landscapes were created especially in the mountain areas in south Norway. Most of the summer diary farms in use today are situated in the central part of this area. They represent an important part of the Norwegian natural and cultural heritage but also a considerable potential for sustainable agricultural and rural development.