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Development of the forest sector's businesses set as a goal

The Forest Foresight Unit launched at the University of Joensuu will continue the work of the Future Forum on Forests, which operated in 2003–2008. The goals and mission of the Forest Foresight Unit are based on the most important conclusion made by the Future Forum on Forests: The forest sector will need to diversify its economic structure. The futures studies carried out by the Forest Foresight Unit will focus on forecasting consumer behaviour and social change. The planning and implementation of the futures studies will involve a large number of experts representing different fields of industry and society.

Forest Foresight Unit

The most important goal of the Forest Foresight Unit is to promote the establishment of new businesses exploiting forests and wood, and to support the renewal processes in the existing ones. To reach this goal, the Forest Foresight Unit produces and mediates information on the future change factors for enterprises, innovation actors, R&D and educational organisations, officials preparing policy programmes, and regional development authorities.

The Forest Foresight Unit concurrently carries out several projects pertaining to the forest sector's future. The unit partners with, e.g., the Joensuu Science Park Ltd., and its financiers include the Region of Eastern Finland of the ESF Programme for Continental Finland, the City of Joensuu, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

The foundations of the Forest Foresight Unit rest on futures studies seeking to analyse the future development and the various development alternatives, and to make recommendations on how to promote the wood- and forest-based businesses. For the time being, the studies focus on the scarcely-reported aspects addressing consumer behaviour and social change, which bear great significance for the development of business enterprises' production and services.

The planning of the futures studies involves representatives from the unit's steering, implementation and support groups, which comprise a total of almost 50 persons representing different branches of industry and society. This extensive participation seeks to ensure that the themes under investigation

and the need for information meet one another. In addition to the three permanent groups, each futures study will also involve invited experts who specialise in the themes under investigation.

Proposed futures studies themes

Collaborative brainstorming methods have been used at the Forest Foresight Unit to find the most topical and suitable themes for the unit's futures studies.

Two futures studies projects are already going through extensive preparations. One of the studies investigates how business operations can be enhanced by increasing cross-sectoral business collaboration. The study focuses on the interface between energy production and wood products industry. The other study seeks to find methods for promoting the business opportunities of forestry-related expert services.

The Forest Foresight Unit also considers the launch of yet two additional futures studies projects. The studies will foresee the change in international energy, climate and natural resources policies and environmental attitudes. Moreover, the studies will investigate the effects of these changes on the forest sector services, demand for wood products, their acceptability and competitiveness.

Besides these studies, the brainstorming uncovered another two themes which are important for the development of the forest sector's business operations, but which the Forest Foresight Unit will not investigate on its own. These themes include the evaluation of the life span and environmental footprint of wood-based products and competing

The Forest Foresight Unit carries out externally financed commissions, which utilise the unit's expertise in research, foresight work, forestry know-how, and extensive networking. The unit's tailor-made foresight projects seek to support the decisions and strategies of its customers representing a variety of different branches. For more information on the services provided by the Forest Foresight Unit, please contact the head of the unit, Mr Anssi Niskanen at: anssi.niskanen@joensuu.fi.

materials; and the evaluation of the change in forest owners' goals and values. The Forest Foresight Unit aims to support the utilisation of the results obtained by other units addressing these themes.

Innovation workshops and seminars

An innovation workshop resting on the principles of open innovation activities and focusing on the ways of finding new business ideas to utilise forests and wood will be organised once a year. The innovation workshop seeks to find new product, service and operating ideas and to further refine them into projects and business operations.

The Forest Foresight Unit will organise a half day futures seminar in Helsinki on 10 February 2009. The seminar will address the customer-oriented development of the forest sector. Newsletter subscribers will get further information on the seminar later this year.

The report of the working group on forest sector's operating conditions now finished

The chair of the Prime Minister's Office working group addressing the improvement of operating conditions of forest industries and the forest sector, President of the Finnish Innovation Fund Mr Esko Aho, submitted the final report to Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen on 30 September 2008.

The recommendations given in the report are divided into three categories. The first category of recommendations involves measures to increase the forest reserves and

to enhance their financial exploitation, as laid down in the National Forest Programme 2015. These involve suggestions on, e.g., how to increase wood production, how to improve the traffic infrastructure, and how to increase the size of forest holdings. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is proposed to launch a programme to address the development of forest service entrepreneurship.

The second category of recommendations seeks to increase the value of current and future wood products. The suggestions include, e.g., to strengthen the R&D collaboration between the state and industry and to improve the foresight coordination of future livelihoods and business opportunities. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is proposed to draw up a plan for using capital investors to turn the innovations created within the forest cluster into new business operations.

The third category of recommendations seeks to improve the forest sector's operating environment. The positive role of the forest sector should be emphasised when negotiating on climate and energy issues and the functionality of the domestic wood market should be improved. Moreover, an independent review of the functionality of the forest sector administration should be made.

The working group suggests strict policy measures to implement the general recommendations: The Government should launch a policy programme for the forest sector, and the Cabinet Committee on Economic Policy should monitor the working group recommendations and use them as a basis for decision-making.

Forest Foresight Unit Newsletter

The work and results of the Forest Foresight Unit can be followed in this newsletter and online at www.metsaennakointi.fi. The Forest Foresight Unit Newsletter is sent to all Future Forum on Forests Newsletter subscribers. If you wish to join or leave the mailing list, please send an email to saija.miina@joensuu.fi.

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