

New opportunities in the forest sector

One particular study of the Future Forum on Forests focused on the new business opportunities evolving in the forest-based value chains. The study was found most essential due to the competitiveness of traditional forest sector production in Finland being under a threat of decline.

According to this study, novel forest-based business opportunities in Finland exist particularly in wood construction, packaging, tourism, heat production and biofuels. As an example, some of the major forest industry enterprises have already announced large-scale biofuel production starting in five to ten years' time.

Novel businesses are based on new thinking and evolutionary business concepts

The key to the new forest-based business opportunities is to generate concrete ideas on how to satisfy different customer based value chains with wood products or forest services. This requires new thinking and evolutionary business concepts that can be found in the interface of the forest and other business sectors.

Innovation workshop for new business ideas

The Future Forum on Forests organised an innovation workshop to find new concrete business ideas on timber construction and packaging. Forty entrepreneurs, academics, business developers and donors participated in the workshop with the result of over 800 business ideas and 44 project ideas generated. It is to be expected that quite a few of the innovative project ideas will lead into new business development in the forest sector.

FINNISH FOREST SECTOR IS PROACTIVE

The Finnish forest sector has learnt to utilise futures studies to support strategic decision making. Through futures works decision makers are able to justify even hard decisions which are necessary when the social or business environment is changing rapidly.

The results of the futures studies should not be considered predictions but analyses of the future alternatives. The role of the decision makers in foresight is to evaluate different alternatives and to implement the future desired.



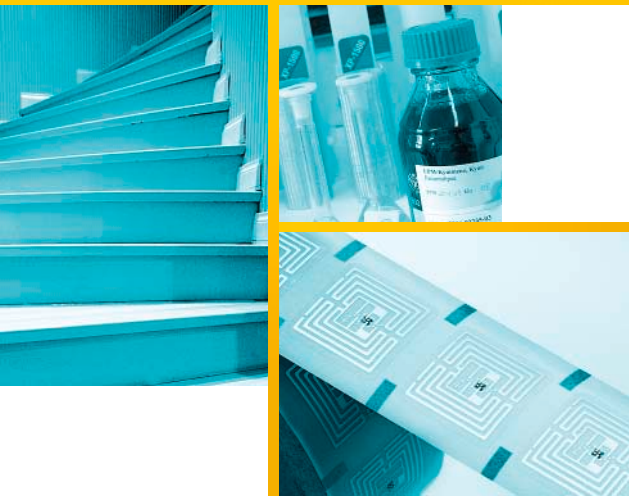
More information:

Director-General Aarne Reunala
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
tel. +358 9 160 53350
email: aarne.reunala@mmm.fi

Director Anssi Niskanen
Future Forum on Forests of Finland
University of Joensuu,
tel. +358 13 251 4001
email: anssi.niskanen@joensuu.fi

<http://www.metsafoorumi.fi>

Focus in the Future



Future in National Forest Programme

Finland has stepped into the future in National Forest Policy (NFP) planning. The Forestry Council of Finland has used futures studies in outlining a strategic background document for updating the current NFP until 2015. The aim of the document is to make forest-related policies more proactive and future oriented.

Interest in the futures analyses has grown rapidly in forest policies and forest organisations in Finland. With futures analyses the forest sector is preparing for structural changes facing the sector in the future.

Wide spectrum of topics and methods

The Future Forum on Forests has conducted fifteen futures studies, organised seven seminars and published ten reports with their focus on the forest sector's future.

The first part of the work in 2003–2005 included a futures analysis of important and internal parts of the forest sector (forest industry, forest technology, silviculture, environment, social sustainability and nature-based tourism). The policy means to support labour availability were also studied.

The second part of the work in 2005–2008 has focused more on the future trends external to but fundamentally important for the forest sector and its future. The multidisciplinary futures studies include the analyses of future development of globalisation, primary success factors of the Finnish forest sector in the future, and the future business opportunities in different forest-based value chains.

Modern foresight includes a wide spectrum of methods to analyse long-term changes and developments. The methods applied are scenario techniques, delphi-analysis, the analysis of weak signals, trend extrapolation, expert opinions and systems analysis.

FORESIGHT FOR THE FOREST SECTOR

Future Forum on Forests of Finland

The Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry established the Future Forum on Forests of Finland in 2003 to foresee long-term changes affecting forest-based livelihoods for the forthcoming decades. The aim is to support decision making in forest-related policies, forest sector organisations, enterprises and institutions.

Science-policy cooperation

The establishment of the Future Forum on Forests has been an important milestone in increasing the use of foresight in forest-related policy planning in Finland and it has strengthened science-policy cooperation.

The science-policy cooperation is based on the wide participation of more than 160 experts from administration, research, industries, corporations and business services. Intensive consultation of different stakeholders has improved the relevancy of the conducted futures analyses in decision-making.

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Multidisciplinary perspective

The Future Forum on Forests is a five-year project led by the University of Joensuu, Finland, and it has invited a multidisciplinary team from universities, research institutes and private organisations to conduct its work. Multidisciplinary perspective is important in understanding the external changes affecting the future of the forest-based livelihoods more thoroughly.

