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Chicago Tribune

## Forestry industry must be revived, made attractive to younger workers

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The following editorial appears in Wednesday's Yomiuri Shimbun:

Rich forests can foster water sources while also preventing landslides and floods. They also provide us with many other benefits, most notably absorbing greenhouse gases.

The forestry industry plays an important role in maintaining valuable timber resources by planting trees and cutting them at an appropriate time.

With Greenery Day, which falls on Wednesday, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize once again how important it is to revitalize the forestry industry.

The government will compile a revised Forest and Forestry Basic Plan by the end of this month, which will work as guidelines for its forestry policies over the next decade.

In the revised plan, the government will outline policies to improve the forestry industry's productivity by making management scales larger, among other measures, to facilitate the expansion of the industry.

The government will also set a numerical target of increasing domestic timber production to about 170 percent of the 2014 level by 2025. We hope that the government will steadfastly implement these policies.

Forests account for two-thirds of the nation's land. There is huge room for us to make effective use of these rich resources.

However, the forestry industry faces a harsh reality. Domestic production value of timber has fallen to about 20 percent of the 1980 level, and there are now only about 50,000 workers - or just one-third of the workforce back then.

And prices for domestic timber have plunged in the face of inexpensive imported timber, significantly hurting the industry's profitability. This in turn has caused the forestry industry to suffer a labor shortage, leaving man-made forests whose timber should be thinned to go wild and eventually putting forests in further decline. Many experts warn the industry is in a worsening negative circle.

### Profitability essential

In one bright sign, the forestry industry gets about 3,000 new workers every year, including younger ones. To attract more younger workers, it is most crucial that the industry revives itself to a profitable one.

In terms of prices, domestic timber has become fairly competitive against imported timber in recent years. However, domestically produced timber is still not fully used.



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Residual products from forest thinning have a limited use, but new demand for them has been generating, for such applications as fuel for wood biomass power generation. The forestry industry is urged to develop a distribution network connecting producers and consumers to ensure a stable supply of timber.

Beginning this fiscal year, the government has allowed highly quake- and fire-resistant laminated lumber to be used as material for medium-rise buildings.

We hope that the government and private sector will work together on technical development and deregulation so as to come up with more ideas to produce value-added wood products.

There has been an increasing number of cases in which timber in forests with multiple owners cannot be harvested because it is unclear who else owns the forests.

A bill to revise the forestry law is under deliberation in the current ordinary Diet session to allow timber to be harvested without obtaining approval from all owners concerned. The bill should be passed as soon as possible to prevent forests from falling into ruin.

It is believed that demand for domestic timber has stagnated partly because 10 percent of imported cheap products come from illegal logging, mainly in other parts of Asia. The government should also speed up its efforts to implement regulations on imports of illegal logging from the viewpoint of protecting the environment by stopping destructive logging.

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