Boost to Harvesting Research

Harvesting research has just received a boost in funding.

The Government will contribute up to $3.27 million over seven years, to be matched by the forest industry in a $6.5 million harvesting research programme that will produce estimated total net benefits of over $100 million by 2016.

“We see multiple benefits from this programme,” says Russell Dale, CEO of Future Forests Research. “It will enable us to build on existing work by developing new high-tech harvesting machines to increase productivity and reduce the cost of extracting trees on steep slopes, as well as reducing hazards to workers.

“That will enable the industry to contribute to a partnership with New Zealand manufacturers to develop better equipment for domestic use and export.”

“It is therefore vitally important that the forest industry steps up and not only supports this programme financially but commits to ongoing investment in longer term research. It is equally and critically important to have a strong and vibrant Crown Research Institute supporting our industry.

The New Zealand forestry industry needs world-class forest management if the country is to gain maximum benefits from the growing global demand for plantation-grown forest products, he says.

New methods of operation with special-purpose machines would remove workers from potential hazard areas in steep country.
Mr Dale, who was named Forester of the Year recently by the NZ Institute of Forestry, says feedback from a recent world forest and wood products conference in Tokyo indicates that world opinion and the balance of international supply and demand is swinging away from use of indigenous resources towards New Zealand-style plantation grown forests.

"While this is very encouraging, New Zealand stands to make even greater gains if we complement this growing demand with investment in R & D. Traditional forestry and forest products are now just one part of the positive opportunities opening up to the industry - there are exciting new markets for bio-energy, bio-materials, fuels and packaging, for example.

"Research investment now will pay dividends by enabling us to understand and manage our forest resource specifically to target these new markets. It will also enable us to manage our forests more efficiently and safely, while at the same time reducing our production costs.

"Good underpinning research will also support the ETS, for example by improving our knowledge as to which species are best suited to carbon farming on land unsuitable for pastoral farming, developing improved hill country harvesting techniques to improve the profitability of forestry on steep slopes, and developing modelling tools to predict wood yield and carbon yields, to name a few. There are so many good reasons to plant trees on marginal land and this knowledge will provide greater certainty and confidence to land owners looking to benefit from the ETS."

Steep country forests already make up more than 40 per cent of New Zealand’s log harvest, and this is forecast to rise to over 60 per cent in coming years. Present harvesting methods on this terrain, such as labour-intensive cable logging, have changed little in 50 years and are costly and hazardous to workers on the ground, who can be working out of sight of operators of cable hauling equipment. Mr Dale says new methods of operation with special-purpose machines would remove workers from potential hazard areas.

"New Zealand’s competitors are very active in applied research to reduce harvesting costs, yet New Zealand has done no research in this area over the past 10 years. For this reason the Government’s allocation of new Primary Growth Partnership funding to improve forest harvesting technology has huge potential to benefit the New Zealand economy and make logging safer for workers on the ground."

“We welcome the fact that the Government has recognised the importance of continued innovation in our primary industries in a tangible way through the Primary Growth Partnerships and by moving towards creating greater funding certainty for our crown research institutes.”