March 30, 2023

The Honorable Chairwomen Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

The signatories below urge you to include language and funding in the 2023 Farm Bill that directs the Secretary of Agriculture to create a grant program to establish immersive pathway training programs focused on the workforce development needs of the forestry industry.¹

The sustainability and competitive viability of the forest products industry relies on an intact, healthy wood supply chain, including labor. Industry-wide labor shortages are limiting modernization and growth investments in existing and new forest product manufacturing facilities. For example, the existing labor pool in the logging sector is aging rapidly. Less than 25 percent of logging business owners are under 40 years old. Fifty-five is the average age of owners/operators, and approximately 30 percent of owners/operators are planning to leave the business within five years.

Regional forest industry training hubs would allow participants to stay in or near their communities, which reduces the cost to participate and affords program developers increased flexibility in adapting training curricula to meet regional needs through ties to local forest product employers. The forest products industry struggles to find a trained and skilled workforce at all levels, with an estimated 40-60 percent of young adults leaving rural forest-based economies for employment opportunities elsewhere.

Key components of a forestry workforce pathway program include education opportunities to expand high school forestry curriculum, workforce diversification that provides increased awareness of career pathways in the forest products industry, and training programs that offer residential short duration (240 hours) in forest operations and wood product industries.

Forest product industry manufacturing facilities are in regions where they are the primary economic base for rural forest-based economies. They serve as a key employers and provide good-paying direct and indirect jobs. The forest products industry, including loggers and haulers, primary and secondary manufacturers, pulp and paper mills, sawmills, and engineered wood

¹ A Forest in the Farm Bill Coalition Recommendation
products, is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in the U.S., sustaining nearly 930,000 families and contributing $353 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

We respectfully request that you include language in the Rural Development Title of the 2023 Farm Bill that directs the Sec. of Agriculture to create a grant program to establish immersive pathway training programs focused on the workforce development needs of the forestry industry.

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Signatories:
- Alabama Forestry Association
- American Forest Foundation
- American Forest Resource Council
- Arkansas Timber Producers Association
- Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho
- Association of Consulting Foresters
- Black Hills Forest Resource Association
- California Forestry Association
- Colorado Timber Industry Association
- Composite Panel Association
- Decorative Hardwoods Association
- Empire State Forest Products Association
- Federal Forest Resource Coalition
- Forest Resources Association
- Forestry Association of South Carolina
- Forest Workforce Training Institute
- Georgia Forestry Association
- Great Lakes Timber Producers Association
- Hardwood Federation
- Intermountain Forest Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
Louisiana Logging Council
Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association
Maryland Forests Association
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
Minnesota Forest Industries
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
Mississippi Forestry Association
Missouri Forest Products Association
National Association of State Foresters
National Hardwood Lumber Association
National Wood Flooring Association
Northeastern Loggers’ Association
Oregon Women in Timber
Ohio Forestry Association
Pennsylvania Forestry Association
South Carolina Timber Producers Association
Southern Loggers Cooperative
Tennessee Forestry Association
Texas Forestry Association
Treated Wood Council
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
West Virginia Forestry Association