Forestry Contractors Research Needs - Contractor survey results lead to research demands for improving health and performance in forest operations

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As more and more forest operations are outsourced from directly employed workforce to forestry contractors, contractors play an increasingly important role in the forest wood chain, thus offering services to forest owners and securing wood supply for forest based industries. However, they are confronted with various changes such as ongoing mechanisation or long working hours.

As a result, the occupational health problems in forestry work and economic pressure on entrepreneurs are increasing. Current ergonomic research provides answers for healthier working practices which also improve performance. However, putting science into practice is difficult for these businesses who face practical and financial barriers to change their way of working and are not in a position to undertake research and development themselves.

The objective of COMFOR is to transform science into practice by researching and developing methodologies which will encourage small businesses working in forest operations to adopt ergonomically sound working practices. COMFOR will train the Entrepreneur Associations in methods of knowledge transfer, to spread the results of the research to a wide body of European forest operations SMEs.

To identify research demands of forestry contractors, case studies of 10 Core SMEs from three broad European regions of North, West Central and East Central Europe were carried out to establish the research demands of the forest operations industry.

The recent case studies with 10 SMEs in 10 countries show that there is research demand. However, the contractors involved do not directly point out specific research questions to be solved. They are highly oriented on actual problems than on questions taking up long term considerations such as safety and health. Raising awareness is one of the most crucial tasks for further research on knowledge transfer to spread scientific results to forestry contractors. Working together with the ten core SMEs showed that coaching could one of the most appropriate ways to reach the target group. Knowledge transfer channels need to be shaped in a way that communication is face-to-face and not time consuming for contractors.
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