https://doi.org/10.17221/10/2026-JFS

Are Czechs interested in employment in forestry?

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Citation: Abramuszkinová Pavlíková E., Stachová J., Somerlíková K., Svobodová E., Šilhan Z., Holušová K. (2026): Are Czechs interested in employment in forestry? J. For. Sci., 72: 136–147.

Abstract: This study analyses the professional interests and motivations of people regarding forestry careers. An online survey (N = 162) was conducted in May 2025. The study identifies the profile of a typical forestry candidate as an individual from a rural area, regardless of gender, who prioritises job security and personal satisfaction over high financial reward. The findings confirm that while forestry students show the strongest interest, intrinsic motivation and a personal relationship with nature are the primary drivers across the board. The key results indicate that practical field experience and communication with professionals significantly bolster career interest. Furthermore, the emerging generation of foresters demonstrates an 'ecologically realistic' perspective, favouring sustainable management and biocentric values over traditional paradigms. The study suggests that to combat the declining workforce, forestry communication should leverage these intrinsic values and increase practical engagement during university studies. Respondents assigned the greatest importance to statements reflecting biocentric and ecocentric values, emphasising the intrinsic value of forests, ecosystem impact considerations, and their role in environmental balance and human well-being.

Keywords: attitude; career; motivation; values; well-being

Supported by the Technological Agency of the Czech Republic (Grant No. TQ01000532: 'Proposal possibilities for sustainable regional development of forestry from the bioeconomy point of view').

https://doi.org/10.17221/10/2026-JFS

The issue of human resources in forestry in the Czech Republic (hereinafter referred to as CZ) is an important topic that has so far been neglected in terms of deeper scientific research. According to Lidický (2014), the employment of graduates in forestry operations is influenced by many factors, including regional forest cover, the seasonality of forestry activities, and the variability of supplier–customer relations.

According to the Czech Statistical Office, work in the primary sector of the national economy is not very attractive to young people. A total of 13 139 people worked in forestry in the CZ according to data from 2024, and over the past 18 years, the number of workers has decreased by 17.4% (CSO 2011, 2025). The decrease in the number of workers in forestry is partly due to the aging of existing workers and their retirement. Given that this is a demanding and relatively poorly paid job that is not sufficiently appreciated by society (NLI 2025), the younger generation in the CZ is not interested in this type of work.

The number of employees in forestry activities has been decreasing significantly since 1989 (Fanta, Šišák 2014), reaching its lowest value in 2015, and it has been increasing gradually since that year. In 1990, we still recorded 57 700 people working in the forestry sector (MoA 1995). The average wage in forestry was higher than the average wage in the national economy in the years 1989–1992, and since 1993, the average wage in forestry has always been lower. The highest difference in average wages was recorded in 1996 and 1997, when the average wage in forestry was 20% lower than the average wage in the national economy (NLI 2025).

The implementation of the Bologna system (Remeš 2014) resulted in a significant increase in the number of students at universities in general and in forestry disciplines. However, the number of students enrolling in forestry programs is decreasing worldwide (Bal et al. 2020; Bullard et al. 2023).

To give an idea of the number of employees in forestry, EUROSTAT (2024) states that 3.6 million people work in forestry and related sectors in 2022. The share in forestry (NACE 02) is a total of 450 500 people for 2024. The average number of persons employed per 1 000 ha for EU countries in 2000 was 3.7 and in 2018 it was 3.8. Of which in the Czech Republic in 2018 it was 8 people per 1 000 ha of forest. And for example, in Slovakia it was 17 people and in Italy 3.8 people.

Given the changing demands on forestry professionals and the sector's role in sustainable resource management (Arévalo 2011; Owuor et al. 2023), there has been a shift in forestry education in recent decades from traditional forest science to interdisciplinary approaches incorporating ecology, social sciences, and bioeconomy concepts (Ameyaw 2018; Sharik et al. 2020). This development reflects broader societal and environmental challenges, including climate change and biodiversity conservation, which highlight the practical and theoretical importance of attracting and training a skilled forestry workforce (Nyland 2008; Rekola et al. 2024).

Research on interest in working in forestry and factors influencing their career choice has become a subject of interest for many foreign authors (Moreno et al. 2020; Owuor et al. 2023). These studies aim to identify intrinsic motivation factors (Bal et al. 2020; Owuor et al. 2023; Zibtseva 2023) and the influence of extrinsic motivation factors (Valinger 2009; Erol 2022), family and social factors (Moreno et al. 2020; Burmann et al. 2022), educational factors and curricula (Ameyaw et al. 2017, Masiero et al. 2020), demographic differences (Rouleau et al. 2017; Bal et al. 2020; Larasatie et al. 2020; Moreno et al. 2020; Arenas et al. 2022; Burmann et al. 2022; Bullard et al. 2023), and regional and cultural differences (Owuor et al. 2023). Satisfaction in the work environment is also one of the most important aspects regarding employment (Hartebrodt, Chtioui 2016).

According to O'Herrin et al. (2018), the pleasure of work was more important than financial reward and prestige of the profession when choosing a career. From their perspective, factors such as job satisfaction and prestige are less important. They consider salary to be the decisive factor for choosing the profession of forester (Zibtseva 2023), and Valinger (2009) agrees with these findings. Other external factors that may influence interest in forestry include job security (stability), satisfactory working conditions (Erol 2022), interesting and varied work (Valinger 2009), and career opportunities (Holmes 2019; Bal et al. 2020; Jong et al. 2021). Previous work experience is also considered a positive factor in interest in the field (Searle, Bryant 2009; Jarschel et al. 2010; Balcarczyk et al. 2016; O'Herrin et al. 2018). The above factors are more

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likely to be sources of hesitation or discouragement from studying and working in the field (Valinger 2009; Erol 2022; Hakamada et al. 2023). It has been shown that motivations can vary by gender, level of study, and even region (Searle, Bryant 2009; Bal et al. 2020; Burmann et al. 2022; Owuor et al. 2023, Zibtseva 2023).

Moreno et al. (2020) and Burmann et al. (2022) point to the influence of family and socialisation processes in shaping interest in forestry work. Balcarczyk et al. (2016) cite lack of family understanding of the field and parents wanting their children to select a different major among the main barriers to studying natural resources.

In Moreno et al. (2020), no differences were identified between interest in forestry work among people who grew up in urban and rural environments, but the authors point to differences in interest in natural sciences between genders. Women's greater interest in nature and job satisfaction is also confirmed by Bal et al. (2020). According to Clemente et al. (2014), Moreno et al. (2020) and Burmann et al. (2022), rural students have a stronger relationship with nature and are interested in natural resource issues earlier. Urban groups need more targeted support and an individual approach.

Sociological studies show existing trends in contemporary forestry dividing students into traditionalist and ecologically realistic experts. Previous sociological studies on Czech forestry (Stachová 2018, 2021) aimed to identify the preferences of today's students with regard to existing trends in the development of contemporary Czech forestry and their characteristics. For example, research in Canada (Mcfarlane, Boxall 2000) shows that most foresters have an anthropocentric approach to forests.

Research from the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague was carried out in 2017 (Krejčí et al. 2018) with the aim of identifying factors influencing students of the Forestry and Forest Engineering majors to work in the forestry sector after graduating from university. This study with 168 respondents showed, for example, that interest in studying this major is not conditioned by studying at a specialised secondary forestry school. The main reason why young people want to work in forestry is interest in the major (55%), followed by the connection of their professional future with work in a natural environment (38%).

The main objective of this study is to determine the potential interest in working in forestry and related fields after graduation on the example of students from Mendel University in Brno (hereinafter referred to as MENDELU). The questionnaire survey was intended for students of all faculties of the university, with the main attention being focused on the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology. The target group consisted of students of bachelor's and follow-up master's degree programs. The sub-objectives of the research are to determine the relationship of students with forestry, their motivation to work in the field, their perception of the labour market, and their attitudes toward forests. The questions we ask are the following: What factors influence students' interest in studying forestry issues within study programs, and, subsequently, what factors contribute to their application in the field of forestry?

A secondary objective was to determine how the interest in work among this sample of students is reflected in the conditions of the CZ in terms of employment in the field regarding the per cent of forest cover of individual regions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The empirical part of the study is based on primary data from a quantitative questionnaire survey, which was implemented via the online platform Google Forms.

The aim of the survey was to determine what factors influence students' interest in studying forestry issues and the potential interest of MENDELU students in working in forestry and related fields after graduation.

Data collection took place in May 2025. Distribution took place in the form of a QR code. Filling out the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire had a total of 22 questions, of which the majority were closed questions (with one or more options). Semi-open and open questions were also added to allow additional comments from respondents. After the collection was completed, the data were exported to .xlsx format and analysed in the statistical program Statistica (Version 14, 2020).

A total of 162 responses were included in the detailed statistical analysis. Respondents came from various faculties of the university, with the highest representation being students of the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology.

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Subsequently, a basic descriptive analysis was performed; it included the calculation of absolute and relative frequencies, arithmetic means, standard deviations, and other characteristics of the data distribution. Graphical outputs and visualisation of the results were processed in Microsoft Excel (Version 2024, 2024).

Pearson's chi-square test of independence was applied at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to identify the relationships between the selected categorical variables. Contingency tables and additional graphic visualisations were created for pairs of variables for which a statistically significant dependence was demonstrated.

Arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). These values were then compared between individual faculties and between groups of study fields, which were combined according to their professional focus.

For a deeper analysis of the latent structure of the attitude items, a factor analysis was performed using principal component analysis (PCA). The selection of the number of factors was based on the eigenvalues (Kaiser criterion, $\lambda > 1$) and the proportion of explained variance. Based on criteria, five factors were extracted, representing the main dimensions of the examined attitudes, see Table S1 in the Electronic Supplementary Material (ESM).

A set of statements about the situation in forestry was developed specifically for this study to distinguish between ideal types of traditional and ecologically realistic forestry thinking. The aim was to ascertain the extent to which the attitudes of forestry students align with current trends toward greater openness and sustainability. The occupational motivation statements were based on the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale, which is used to determine occupational motivation and distinguish between internal and external motivations according to the theory of self-determination (Deci, Ryan 1985; Ryan, Deci 2000). The environmental ethical questions, which relate to students' relationship with forests, are based on studies of relationships with nature and the environment through the lenses of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism (Thompson, Barton 1994).

Battery A (Question, hereinafter referred to as Q: What do you personally think is important for contemporary forestry?) was based on the results of previous findings of sociological studies on Czech forestry (Stachová 2018, 2021). It aimed to identify the preferences of today's students with regard to existing trends in the development of contemporary Czech forestry and their characteristics.

Battery B (Q: What is your attitude towards forests?) was created as a variation on the scales of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism and was adapted to the subject of research on forests. Biocentric ethics are based on the principle of protecting life for life itself, followed by the nature-informed principle of ecocentrism, in which the ecosystem has the highest value (Binka 2008; Jebari, Sandberg 2022; Washington et al. 2017). The anthropocentric approach, in which the human is the centre of everything, has been described as the originator of nature-ignoring of the current ecological and climate crisis (Binka 2008; Hála 2013).

Battery C (Q: What is your motivation for working in forestry?) originated as a variation on a classic set of motivational questions distinguishing between internal and external aspects of motivation.

From the data obtained from positive responses on willingness to work in forestry and related fields, the responses were divided into place of origin of respondents in a breakdown by region, in terms of NUTS 3 units according to European Commission (2007). This finding was supplemented with data available based on the latest census by the Czech Statistical Office from 2021 (CSO 2021) about quantitative ration in % of employees in forestry and forest-wood based sector and interpolated by forest cover of individual regions (MoA 2025).

The following hypotheses (hereinafter referred to as *H*) were formulated:

– H_1: Interest in working in forestry is not limited to students of the Faculty of Forestry.
– H_2: Interest in working in forestry is not related to the type of secondary school.
– H_3: Interest in working in forestry is related to the size of the settlement according to the number of inhabitants where the student lives.
– H_4: Students who have had work experience are more interested in working in forestry.
– H_5: Intrinsic motivation prevails among those interested in working in forestry.
– H_6: Students are inclined toward a sustainable direction.
– H_7: Students are mainly concerned with ecocentric ethics.
– H_8: Relationship between the forest cover of a region and interest in working in forestry.

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RESULTS

Of the total number of responses received from students (respondents), the highest number of students was from the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology (hereinafter referred to as FFWT) – 121 (75%), followed by 37 students (23%) from the Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies (referred as FRDIS) and 2 students each from the Faculty of Horticulture (referred to as FH) (1%) and the Faculty of Agronomy (referred to as FA) (1%). The majority of students were bachelor's degree students (77%), followed by master's students (22%) and two PhD students. In the total sample, 86 participants were female (53%), and 75 were male (47%). There was a slight predominance of male students at the FFWT compared with other faculties, where women were predominant [C (contingency coefficient) = 0.23; P = 0.003]. The average age was 23 years.

Figure 1 shows a highly significant difference in the responses of students from the FFWT and other faculties, with the majority of respondents from the FFWT being willing to work in forestry and related fields in the CZ [V (Cramer's coefficient) = 0.43; P =0.0000]. The willingness to work in forestry was logically most pronounced for fields related to forestry and subsequently woodworking, while the lowest willingness to work in forestry and related fields was recorded among students from the FRDIS (C = 0.49; P = 0.0000). Nevertheless, it is evident that women were predominant at the FRDIS and FA, while the FFWT had the most balanced proportion of students of both sexes.

A statistically significant influence of the secondary school attended on the willingness to work in forestry was evident for most secondary schools [especially grammar schools (35%), forestry schools (20%), and technical schools (5%)] where a positive answer for working in forestry prevailed (C = 0.47; P = 0.020).

Students who completed professional practice, part-time work, or full-time work in a forestry enterprise during their studies were significantly more willing to work in forestry (V = 0.35; P = 0.000) (Figure 2).

In terms of permanent residence, respondents from the Brno-city district were the most represented in the 162 responses (20 people, 12.4%), followed by Brno-countryside (12; approx. 7.4%), Olomouc (7; 4.3%), Jihlava (6; 3.7%), and Žďár nad Sázavou (6; 3.7%). Other districts appeared in lower frequencies and together were mentioned by 93 respondents (57.4%).

The Q 'What do you think the starting salary in forestry should be?' was answered by 139 respondents (85.8%). A total of 23 (14.2%) respondents did not answer the Q, or their answer was unclear. Most often, respondents expected a starting salary between CZK 30 000 and 40 000 gross (96 respondents; 69.1% of respondents who answered the question). Note: CZK 30 000–40 000 gross is a gross salary of EUR 1 240–1 658.

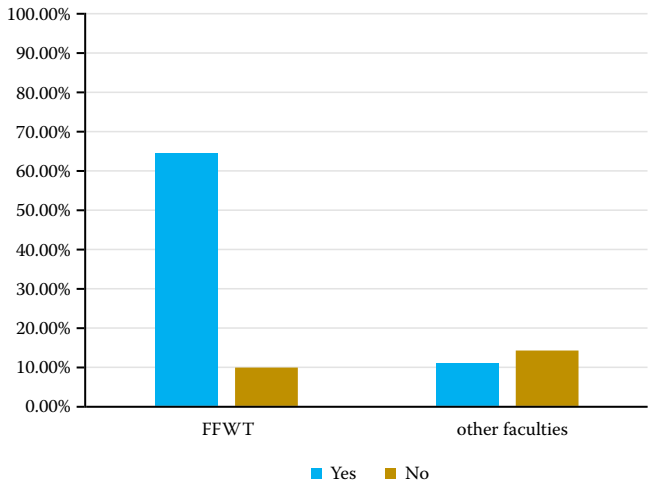

Figure 1. Willingness to work in forestry depending on the faculty studied (Q: Would you be willing to work in forestry and related fields in the CZ after graduating from university?)

FFWT – Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology

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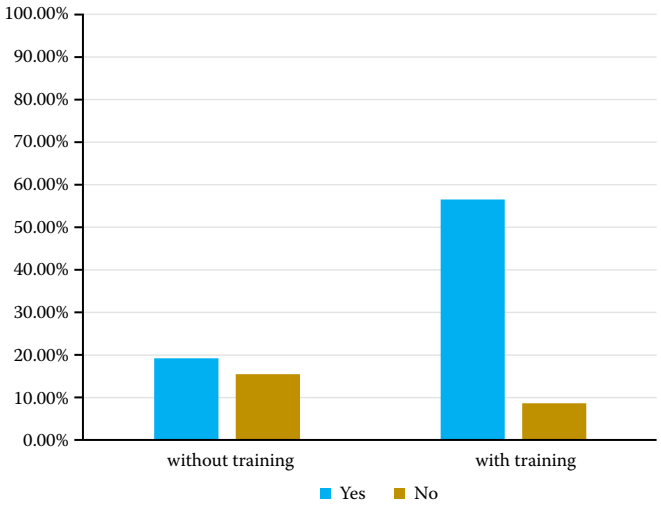

Figure 2. Willingness to work in forestry depends on completed professional experience (Q: Would you be willing to work in forestry and related fields in the Czech Republic after graduating from university? Did you complete professional practice, part-time work, or full-time work in a forestry enterprise or in your field of study during your studies?)

Respondents considered wages that are too low to be unattractive and, at the same time, had a realistic idea of the level of wages.

The following scale Qs (Figure 3) determined the importance of the items. The average answers to the individual Qs were calculated depending on the sorting question. The most important item for all students was to have a job that they enjoyed. Differences in the answers of the respondents were noted for different fields of study, where FA students mostly preferred a job that they would enjoy and one in which they could work independently and help other people, and salary is least significant to them. Salary mattered most to woodworking students, but they did not require work that others would appreciate. Job security and an enjoyable nature of work played an important role for forestry students, even at the cost of lower income and all other items that were less important.

The most important aspects for both groups of students (answering yes and no) were enjoyable work and then job security. All other items were less important, as shown in Figure 4.

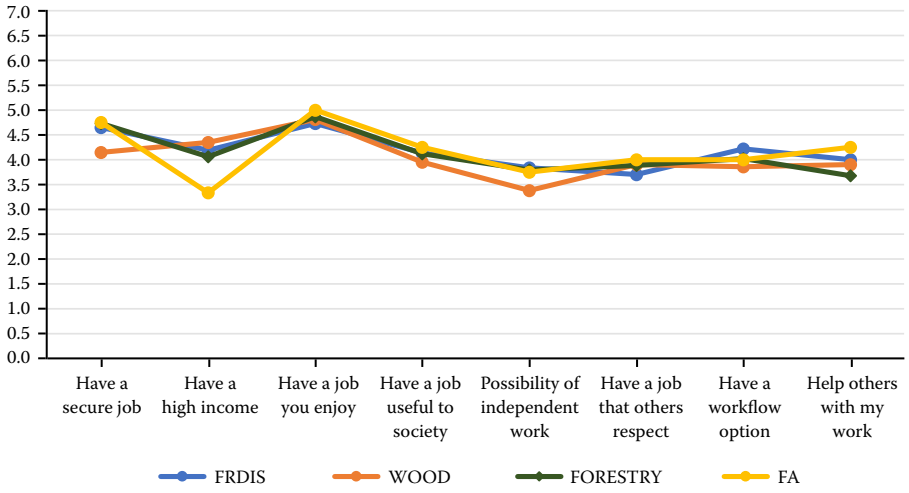

Figure 3. Motivation and the importance of statements for job selection (Q: Would you be willing to work in forestry and related fields in the CZ after graduating from university?)

FRDIS – Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies; WOOD – Wood Engineering study program; FORESTRY – Forestry Engineering study program; FA – Faculty of Agronomy

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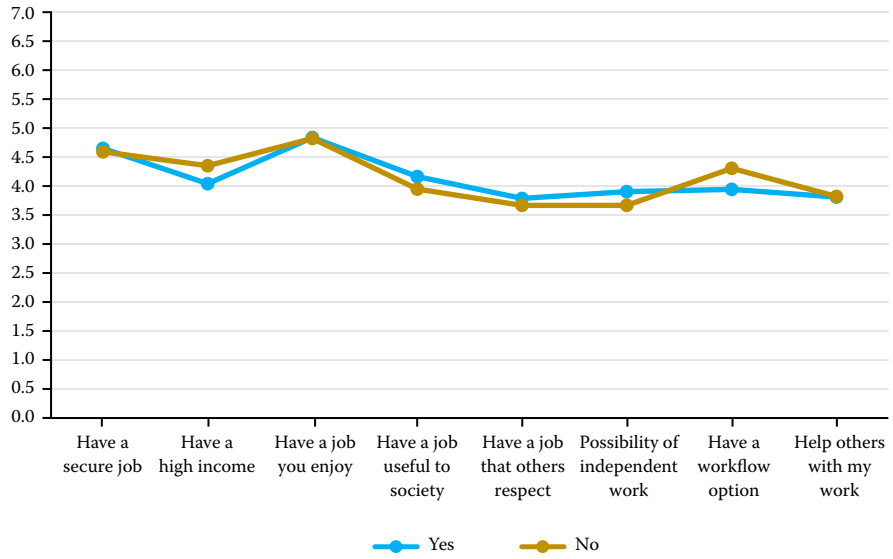

Figure 4. Willingness to work in forestry and reason for motivation

When we divided the students by field of study, it became evident that FA students placed the highest importance on almost all issues, especially on adherence to traditional forestry practices. On the contrary, woodworkers attached the lowest importance to all of the issues. Interestingly, adherence to traditional forestry practices was of the lowest importance to forestry students (Figure 5).

Those who wanted to work in forestry tended to have internal motivation.

As for the willingness to work in forestry in the CZ after finishing university in relation to Statement B, the answers of both groups (yes or no) were similar for all fields of study in our research, as shown in Figure 6.

Finally, we analysed the relationship between the forest cover of a region and interest in working in forestry. The results of expressing a positive interest in willingness to work in forestry in combination with the forest cover of the region and interpolating it with the outputs of actual employment in forestry is shown in Figure 7.

In the factor analysis, all scale questions were divided into five factors and named according to the

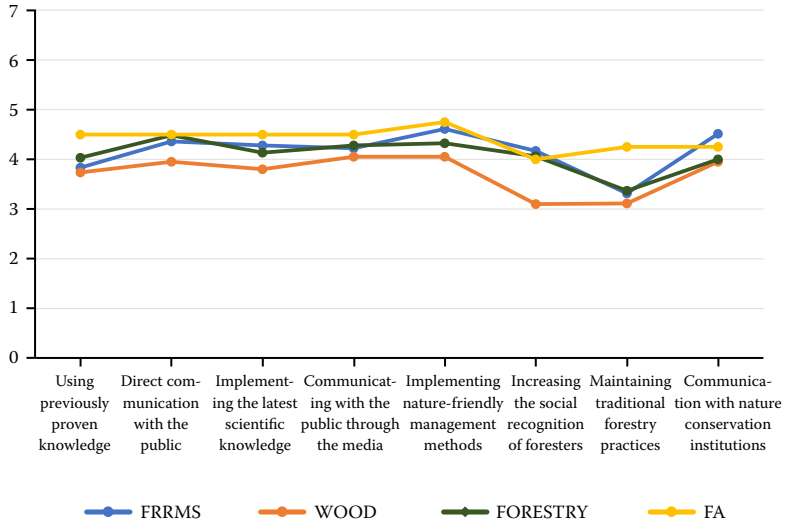

Figure 5. Field of study and Statement A

FRDIS – Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies; WOOD – Wood Engineering study program; FORESTRY – Forestry Engineering study program; FA – Faculty of Agronomy

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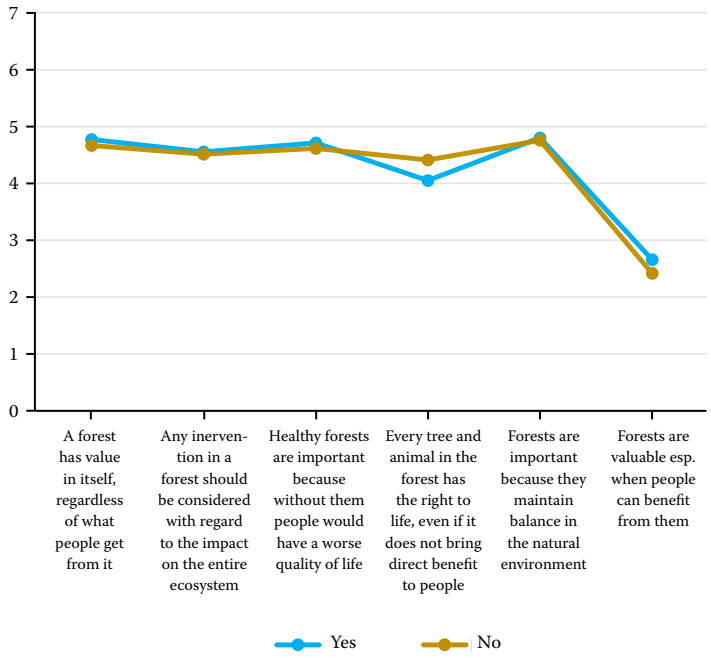

Figure 6. Willingness to work in forestry (Statement B)

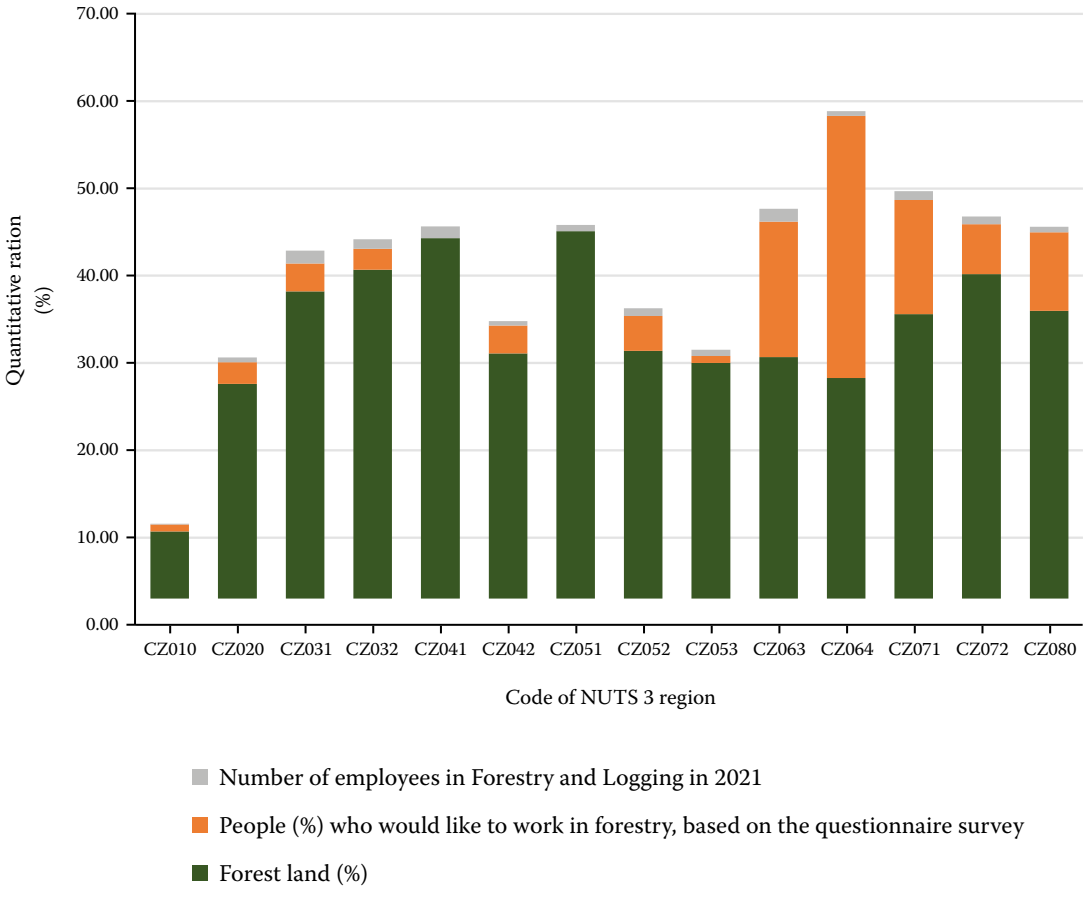

Figure 7. Relationship between the forest cover of a region and interest in working in forestry

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common denominator of the given terms – Forest as an important part of life, Communication and management, Traditional forestry, Sustainability and forestry and Material benefits.

The students assigned the greatest importance to the following statements regarding factor Forest as an important part of life:

(*i*) The forest has value in itself, regardless of what a person gets from it.

(*ii*) Every intervention in the forest should be considered with regard to the impact on the entire ecosystem.

(*iii*) Healthy forests are important because, without them, people would have a worse quality of life.

(*iv*) Every tree and animal in the forest has the right to life, even if it does not bring direct benefit to people.

(*v*) Forests are important because they maintain balance in the natural environment.

As a part of life, forests take precedence over material motivation, as shown by the items with the lowest preference:

(*i*) I am motivated by career opportunities in forestry.

(*ii*) Salary and benefits are the main reason why I want to work in the forestry sector.

(*iii*) I am motivated by the job security that a job in forestry provides.

(*iv*) Forests are valuable especially when a person can benefit from them.

(*v*) Having a secure job.

(*vi*) Having a high income.

A detailed evaluation can be found in Table S1 in the ESM.

DISCUSSION

Interest in forestry and the formation of the necessary skills can be increased through communication with professional foresters and through practical work experience in the field of forest management, whether through the involvement of experts from practice in teaching, or the implementation of professional practice in a given area. Our results confirm the conclusions of the study by Krejčí et al. (2018), who reported that forestry students are mostly from rural areas.

Based on the present results, it is not possible to confirm the greater interest in nature and environmental issues among women identified by Owuor et al. (2023) or the identification of this interest in women at an earlier age than among men (Moreno 2020).

The view of Searle and Bryant (2009), that students of forestry programs reject forestry as a profession due to negative public perception, was not strongly supported either. Rather, the view of O'Herrin et al. (2018), that work satisfaction plays a more important role than financial reward, was supported. In the discussion regarding the importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivational factors, we tend to lean toward the view of Erol (2022), Hartebrodt and Chtioui (2016), and Owuor et al. (2023) about the predominance of intrinsic motives, such as the desire to perform useful work and expected job satisfaction when students choose their field of study and future career direction. Financial reward was not ranked among the main factors in choosing a job among respondents. In this area, we therefore reach different conclusions from those of Moreno et al. (2020) and Zibtseva (2023).

Many interesting results were found in this study, although, to a certain extent, they were expected and confirmed research from other countries. In the emerging generation of foresters, it is possible to observe a certain openness, flexibility, internal motivation, and inclination toward an ecocentric or biocentric vision of forests with ecologically realistic expertise.

Relationship between the per cent of forest cover of a region and interest in working in forestry, we can interpret by Figure 7:

– The highest employment in forestry in % of the total share of employees in 2021 (more recent data for the whole republic are not available) is in the regions CZ0031 (South Bohemia, 1.47%), CZ063 (Vysočina, 1.46%), CZ041 Karlovarský, 1.35%) and CZ032 (Plzeňský);
– The highest expressed willingness to work in forestry from the questionnaire results is recorded in the regions CZ071 (South Moravian, 30%), CZ063 (Vysočina, 15.5%), CZ071 (Olomoucký, 13.1%) and CZ080 (Moravian-Silesian, 9%);
– The connection between the high forest cover of the region and employment is only evident in the regions CZ041 (Karlovarský) and CZ063 (Vysočina).

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the forest cover of the CZ041 region (Vysočina) is a motivation for willingness to work in forestry. This region is also the region with the highest share

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of private ownership in the Czech Republic. Likewise, there is the highest share of people working in forestry. Likewise, in the CZ031 region (South Bohemia) there is the highest share of private ownership of forests, and here too the largest share of people working in forestry.

In 2019, Toth et al. (2019) analysed the development and forecast of employment in forestry. They compared the data on the number of employees from 1930 to the development until 2022 in detail. Their results show a statistically significant reduction in forestry employment. However, the conclusions of the work show that there has been a decrease in employment and simultaneously an increase in labour productivity. This is due to an increasingly high use of technological equipment. Development forecasts show that the Czech Republic does not differ from the overall surveyed trends in other selected countries. The proposed forecast assumed that almost 22 thousand people would work in forestry in 2020. This development has been realised. Although wood harvesting increased significantly between 2019 and 2024 (MoA 2025), the number of employees in forestry did not increase. This points to increasing work efficiency. After all, these authors also predicted that investments in forestry would increase and thus interest in working in forestry would increase. This also came not true. In addition, there was a general expectation of an increase in the number of employees in forestry in connection with the restitution of church property. This also had no effect.

From these data and after the analysis performed in this study, it can be concluded that the interest of Czechs in working in forestry has been stable in the long term (over the last decade and, unfortunately, is not influenced by anything for the time being). In total, 0.6% of people (13 600 people) work in forestry in the Czech Republic. This trend is stable in the long term and appears to be unchanging.

CONCLUSION

A greater interest in working in forestry was identified among students of the FFWT, which is understandable given the closer relationship with this issue. H_1 was partly confirmed. H_2 and H_3 were confirmed. H_4 was confirmed. In this area, our findings are also confirmed by the results of previous research (Searle, Bryant 2009; Jarschel et al. 2010; Balcarczyk et al. 2016; Ameyaw et al. 2017; O'Herrin et al. 2018; Sohail et al. 2024). H_5 is confirmed here as well. H_5, H_6 and H_7 are confirmed for the topics that are consistently pointed out by Stachová (2018, 2021). Related to H_8, it can be said that the willingness to work in forestry can be significantly related to the per cent of forest cover in a given area, which can also be caused by the presence of potential employers.

A typical person interested in working in forestry therefore has the following characteristics: they can be either a man or a woman and are likely to come from a smaller village. Their motives for working in forestry are mainly internal and driven by their personal relationship with nature. The basic employment motivation factors include job security and performing work that they enjoy.

Data availability statement. The data will be available in the MENDELU repository at https://repozitar.mendelu.cz.

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Received: January 24, 2026
Accepted: March 2, 2026
Published online: March 27, 2026