

Zimbabwe tobacco under threat

By [Livingstone Marufu](#)

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Zimbabwe's largest foreign currency earner is under threat after main international buyers resolved not to accept tobacco cured using coal, citing environmental concerns.



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Recently, the Global Tobacco Cigarette Companies produced guidelines on the sustainable manner tobacco should be produced, which prohibits them to buy the commodity cured using coal due to the unsustainable environmental impact of the fossil fuel.

Zimbabwean farmers - particularly small-scale - use wood to cure tobacco. But as a result of wood poaching and massive deforestation in most farming communities, there had been a campaign to encourage farmers to use coal as an alternative source of energy. More than 100,000 farmers registered to grow the crop this season from about 80,000 last season.

The Sustainable Tobacco Programme state that from 2020, Global Cigarette companies will not buy tobacco produced in an unsustainable manner, including that cured using coal. Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board public relations manager Isheunesu Moyo, told The Herald Business in an interview that the regulatory board had since intensified the reforestation programme through developing woodlots of fast-growing trees.

Zimbabwe to adopt aggressive afforestation programmes

"Confronted with this situation, it is imperative for the tobacco industry in Zimbabwe to adopt aggressive afforestation programmes in order to remain competitive and relevant to the global cigarette industry," said Moyo. "TIMB has mobilised \$2m from its own resources for the planting of trees for curing tobacco. From this resource envelope, the industry is targeting about 2,000 hectares."

Zimbabwe has since introduced an afforestation levy aimed at funding energy woodlots and more than \$3m has been collected since 2015. However, TIMB said it has not utilised the funds because it has not obtained an approval from the parliament.

"We haven't started utilising the afforestation fund as we await administrative processes so that we can scale up our activities and plant at least 20,000 hectares of woodlots per year for the next five years. This will be enough to cure an average 100,000 hectares of tobacco, which we produce per year and that will enable us to meet the requirements of the Global Tobacco Cigarette Companies," added Moyo

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