I am a member of the Forestry Advisory Committee at Alvirne High School. While being on the Farm Advisory Committee might seem like a better fit, the meeting times didn’t work for me. I am thankful that the Forestry teacher saw the value of having me as a member of the committee. Even though this department’s direct involvement in forestry is limited, we are responsible for the grading of native lumber.

While Alvirne’s forestry team is top notch, the number of students interested in the field has been declining. I think that part of the problem, is that too many students think of forestry as simply cutting down trees in the woods. No industry is ever as simple as we might think. This is certainly true of the forestry industry, especially when we look at all the jobs that exist from the forest to shipping a finished product.

Ben Marshall, the forestry teacher, does an excellent job of exposing his students to all aspects of the industry, but that occurs after they have signed up for classes. The challenge we face is how to educate them and get them interested to start with. Ben decided that part of the solution was to educate the Career Technical Education Center Director and the Advisory Committee about the many job opportunities that exist in the field. I don’t think that he could have chosen a better place to make that happen then at HHP Inc. in Henniker. The name HHP originally stood for Henniker Hardwood Pallets. They still produce up to 500,000 pallets a year, but the company has grown well beyond the manufacturing of pallets. While the family-owned company is much larger than its footprint in Henniker, I will stay focused on our tour.

We were met by a team of two employees, who provided us with a deep dive into the operations at the 44-acre facility. This is definitely not your grandfather’s sawmill. It is as high-tech as they come, and it is well planned to provide optimum efficiency of movement of the logs from start to finish. The end result is an annual production of about thirteen million board feet of both green and kiln dried lumber.

All the trucks coming onto the facility enter the scale and proceed to the yard for offloading. You won’t find any mud in the spring here as everything is either covered in pavement or cement. Once the logs have been off-loaded, they are graded and then stacked accordingly.

I don’t have the space to go into all the details that I would like to, but suffice it to say, that there are no waste products from this mill. They produce bark for mulch and the finer “waste” is processed and bagged at another NH facility (owed by HHP) where it is bagged for a national company and sold throughout the region and beyond.

They also produce 100,000 tons of chips for use in paper production, biomass fuel, and in the manufacturing of particleboard. The saw dust produced is sold for pellet production. Almost every tractor trailer that comes in for a load of chips or sawdust is loaded by the driver, allowing for increased efficiency, and for loading anytime day or night.

The mill itself is a site to behold. The infrastructure is all steel, including the building. Walkways allow access to every part of the facility without getting in the way, or putting people in harm’s way. Every part of the facility uses high-tech, whether it be in the form of laser guided sawing or scanning technology. Once the lumber is finished, it goes on to a conveyor system that is easily two stories high where the scanning technology allows each piece to go into one of sixty racks which slowly descend as the order is filled. When the order is filled, the
rack then releases the lumber onto another conveyor which sends it along to be bundled together. Lumber going
to one of the kilns is then brought by forklift to air dry for a short period of time. If memory serves me correctly,
there are seven high tech kilns in two all metal buildings, the newest and largest of which increased the kiln
capacity by 3.6 million board feet per year.
As I stated earlier, there is much more to tell, but the important thing that we got out of this is that the
jobs in forestry are not just about being in the woods with a saw. At this mill, there are good paying jobs for
people with skills in a variety of areas and opportunity for growth. There are around 80 full time jobs at the
Henniker facility, but company-wide, they employ more than 500 people in the US and Canada. In order to keep
the mill humming, nearly everyone is able to do multiple jobs.
So how do we get this information to students? The plan is to use eye glass recording technology that
Alvirne has, and do a similar tour of the mill, record it, and show it to students who have no idea what opportunities
exist in today’s forestry industry. I know that what they see will make more than a few of them take an interest in
learning more about an industry that in NH contributes about $10 billion a year to our economy.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner