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Seung-ho Choi, Foreign Press Spokesperson

TEL: 82-44-201-1120

E-mail: csh9731@korea.kr

S. Korea Tackles Rural Depopulation with Rural Housing Revitalisation and Basic Income

Minister Song Miryung inspects the rural housing regeneration scheme in Yeongyang County, where monthly cash handouts have driven a 5.2% population increase. Derelict and vacant houses have been transformed into a traditional “hanok” cafe and cultural hubs to attract some 25,000 visitors annually. A new landmark Special Act was cleared by the National Assembly in May, establishing a legal framework for systematic rural property regeneration.

Sejong, 23 June 2026 — On 15 June, Minister Song Miryung of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) visited Yeondang-ri in Ipam-myeon, Yeongyang County, North Gyeongsang Province. The visit aimed to inspect the outcomes of the rural vacant and derelict housing regeneration

scheme and to discuss future policy directions.

Yeondang-ri has become a prime example of this scheme. Nine vacant and derelict houses have been repurposed as cultural and experiential venues, including a café, a local library, and a traditional Korean guesthouse, which now attract some 25,000 visitors annually. At the heart of these efforts is the Yeondangrim café, established by a young entrepreneur who relocated to the countryside and remodeled a traditional Korean residence (*hanok*). She has developed menu items that take advantage of local ingredients and organises community concerts at her business, generating approximately KRW 150 million in sales in 2024 alone.

Minister Song Miryung toured the rural community where abandoned houses have been given new life as housing for returning rural residents, accommodation for foreign workers, a *hanok* guesthouse, and a *hanok* café. Minister Song then shared key elements of the government's vacant housing regeneration policy and the Special Act on the Maintenance and Management of Vacant and Derelict Houses in Rural and Fishing Communities (the "Rural Vacant Houses Special Act"), and held discussions with experts, local government officials, and residents, regarding the current state and future direction of the policy.

The Ministry tailors its refurbishment efforts to the potential reuse value of each individual property. Demolition costs are subsidized for abandoned houses with limited redevelopment potential, while viable properties are matched with prospective buyers in the private sector through the Rural Vacant Houses Bank. In areas with clusters of abandoned houses, the Ministry is also implementing a large-scale revitalization scheme that transforms these assets into startup and

business facilities, housing, and community-use spaces.

In addition, the Rural Vacant Houses Special Act is awaiting official promulgation following its passage by the National Assembly on 7 May and approval by the Cabinet on 9 June. The Act clarifies the respective roles of the central and local governments as well as the vacant property owners, while introducing institutional improvements, special provisions, and support mechanisms to promote more systematic and efficient management of these residences. This law is scheduled to take effect one year after its publication. In the meantime, the Ministry plans to gather input from stakeholders in the field and incorporate their feedback into regeneration policies that deliver tangible benefits for local communities.

The community meeting on 15 June also included discussions on the outcomes of the rural basic income programme and its future direction. Yeongyang County has been providing a monthly rural basic income of KRW 200,000* (USD 129.84, as of 23 June 2026) since earlier this year. The county has shown encouraging signs of renewed vitality, with the population increasing by 5.2 per cent and new business formation rising by 10.3 per cent. The Ministry plans to provide full administrative and financial support to ensure that the rural basic income pilot programme takes root successfully in the County and serves as a model for addressing depopulation and revitalising local economies and communities.

** The monthly payment consists of KRW 150,000 funded through government support and local resources, plus an additional KRW 50,000 financed by the county.*

Minister Song Miryung emphasized: “Population decline and the growing

number of vacant, derelict houses in rural areas represent urgent challenges that can no longer be postponed, as they are directly tied to the survival of local communities. Rural policies such as the Rural Vacant Houses Special Act and the rural basic income programme are expected to serve as catalysts for bringing new vitality to Yeongyang County and other communities facing depopulation.”