

PRESS RELEASE

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Youth-Led Startup Ideas Drive Change to Bridge Essential Service Gaps in Rural South Korea

Sejong, 24 June 2026 — On the afternoon of 12 June, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) hosted an event in Seongsu-dong, Seoul, where young advocates of rural social entrepreneurship shared the results of their activities. Three teams were awarded the Minister's Prize for their outstanding startup ideas.

Throughout May, sixty-two participants in the Ministry's rural social entrepreneurship initiative visited ten counties selected for an ongoing pilot basic income programme for farming and fishing communities. They engaged directly with local residents to identify gaps in essential services and develop region-specific business models capable of addressing these needs through creative and entrepreneurial approaches. This 12 June event provided an opportunity for the young advocates to present ten locally tailored business

models they had developed and share the results of their work.

** Yeoncheon (Gyeonggi), Jeongseon (Gangwon), Okcheon (North Chungcheong), Cheongyang (South Chungcheong), Sunchang and Jangsu (North Jeolla), Sinan and Gokseong (South Jeolla), Yeongyang (North Gyeongsang), and Namhae (South Gyeongsang).*

The 12 June programme began with presentations by these young innovators on their firsthand observations from fieldwork. They found that many rural communities lacked access to dining establishments, household goods retailers, and repair service providers, while cultural, leisure, and public transportation facilities were often inadequate.

In Jeongseon County, people frequently had to rely on neighbours for transportation, while those in Cheongyang County faced difficulties purchasing meat because no local butcher shop was in operation. Participants also noted that even where businesses accepting rural basic-income vouchers existed, information about them was often insufficient and opportunities to use them were limited. In Yeoncheon County, many found it difficult to obtain information on participating businesses, forcing some to shop outside the county. In Sinan County, voucher spending was found to occur more naturally when supported by local social networks and community gatherings.

A panel of experts evaluated the proposed business ideas with an eye toward their practical viability. Three projects ultimately received the Minister's Prize: a mobile agricultural supplies market ("Field Paradise," Jangsu, North Jeolla Province), a community-oriented multi-purpose bookstore ("Connecting and Filling," Jangsu, North Jeolla Province), and a mobile butcher truck ("Eurachacha," Cheongyang, South Chungcheong Province).

The “Eurachacha” team from Cheongyang sought to address difficulties in accessing perishable foods, particularly fresh meat, caused by limited transportation options. Their proposal involves operating a regularly scheduled mobile butcher truck in front of village halls, bringing meat freshly prepared on the day directly to local communities at designated times and locations.

The “Field Paradise” team from Jangsu focused on the burden small-scale farmers face when traveling individually to town centres to purchase agricultural supplies. Their proposed solution, a mobile agricultural market, combines collective delivery services organised at the township level with expert crop diagnostics and recommendations. The model is expected to reduce logistics costs for farmers while creating local employment opportunities and stable demand within the region.

The “Connecting and Filling” team from Jangsu sought to address the shortage of local businesses where young people could use their basic-income vouchers. Their proposal for a community-oriented multi-purpose bookstore would provide a comfortable space where youth can gather, study, socialize, and relax.

The Ministry plans to conduct a consultative meeting with experts on entrepreneurship for regional problem-solving later this month in an effort to refine the award-winning ideas into market-ready business models. The Ministry will then invite companies to participate in implementing these models in rural areas. Selected firms will receive support, in cooperation with local governments, including seed funding for commercialization and service deployment.