

PROFILE: REGIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR WOOD PRODUCTS MANUFACTURING

Sustainable Forest Futures

Sustainable Forest Futures (SFF) is developing, and expects to launch, in the spring of 2009, a wood products consortium designed to encourage and facilitate innovation in the wood products manufacturing industry in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Upstate New York. SFF is a non-profit subsidiary of the Northern Forest Center with its own Board of Directors. SFF is headquartered in Concord, New Hampshire.

The long-term objective of SFF is to promote an economic sector, based on the region's forests, forestry and forest products, that is environmentally sound, economically competitive, and serves community needs. Its areas of focus include community forestry, working forestland conservation, innovation in logging methods, and innovation in wood products manufacturing. SFF sees its programmatic initiatives as being interrelated with each other and seeks to create synergies over time.

The wood products industry has been an important part of the regional economy for a long time. This industry has been undergoing substantial stress from a variety of factors, especially foreign competition. If the industry is to evolve in a manner that enables it to remain vibrant and economically competitive, significant innovation and change is needed. Among the kinds of changes needed include identifying and taking advantage of market niches and business approaches to secure new competitive advantages, enhancing the efficiency of operations, and accessing new customers.

Many community-based forestry initiatives seek to promote local value-added manufacturing. The regional wood products consortium, if it is successful, would have a dramatic impact on the vibrancy of wood products manufacturing in its region. It would substantially change the context in which community-based forestry initiatives

can proceed and succeed.

In developing the consortium, SFF developed strong working relationships with industry trade associations and many individual wood products companies. The SFF Board of Directors is diverse. Among its members are industry leaders from the Maine Wood Products Association, the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association, the Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association, and the Empire State Forest Products Association. These four trade associations have, as their members, more than 350 wood products companies in the region.

Contemplated activities for the consortium include:

- Information accumulation and dissemination, focusing on innovation and change;
- Favorable publicity for companies implementing innovations, which in turn will encourage further innovations by other companies;
- Collaboration in market development and access, including, potentially, generic regional branding and influencing major institutional purchases of wood products; and,
- Networking.

The information dissemination aspects of the consortium will focus on topics such as new product development, adapting manufacturing improvement systems like Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma for small and medium-sized wood products companies, and energy efficiency. The consortium will also focus on new business models such as mass customization, potential for use of latest technologies, penetrating international markets, and the use of Forest Stewardship Council and Sustainable Forestry Initiative chain of custody certification as a tool to access markets.