

## Industrial Wood Pellets Help Keep US Forests Working By Seth Ginther July 16, 2013

Industrial wood pellets, sustainably sourced and supplied from the U.S., are proving to be a clean alternative to coal for European utilities.

▫Biomass combusts like coal but is much cleaner. In fact, according to the U.K Environment Agency, switching to biomass from coal reduces carbon emissions between 74 and 90 percent. Biomass also emits significantly lower levels of ash, nitrogen, sulfur, mercury and other heavy metals that are harmful to the environment. Through their use of woody biomass, European utilities are using less coal and other fossil fuels. That is unquestionably good for the environment.

▫Sustainable, working forests have yielded many products that serve a multitude of varying industries. The U.S. industrial wood pellet industry relies heavily on low-grade wood fiber raw materials that others in the traditional forest products industries leave behind. This includes sawdust and chips from sawmills, tree tops and limbs as well as precommercial and commercial thinnings. Within that category of byproducts is pulpwood, which, in most instances, the industry uses where there is no other competitive market for the material in the region.

▫The sheer economics of forestry favors growing large trees that yield the highest-value products, like lumber for homes or furniture. Energy production is one of the lowest-value uses of forestland. Simply put, the industrial wood pellet industry cannot compete for higher-priced fiber as a feedstock for industrial wood pellets. Accordingly, the industrial wood pellet industry can only afford to use byproducts. Sourced responsibly, the use of these byproducts will always be sustainable. This is evidenced by a recent study of U.S. wood bioenergy markets by Forisk Consulting, which concludes that the likely marginal increase in wood demand from bioenergy projects compared to the overall forest industry in 2023 will be between 4 to 9 percent of the total wood use of the forestry sector. The study further concludes that the vast majority of wood use in the U.S. will still be from the traditional forest products sector, and that, relating to bioenergy, there are no viable scenarios generating wood demand levels at the regional or national level that affect net forest growth or sustainability.

▫All of this is backed up by the fact that the U.S. leads the world in sustainable forest practices, and relies on a comprehensive framework of federal, state, local and private sector laws, regulations, programs and practices developed over decades and adapted to local conditions and needs. Owners of working forests in the U.S. work within a framework designed to produce needed source material and reduce potential environmental risk. Federal laws, such as the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Coastal Zone Management Act, govern forestry in woodlands and swamps. Similar protections exist at the state level through water quality and best management practices, enforced by state forestry and regulatory agencies.

▫Finally, biomass for energy actually helps conserve forestland. Markets beget more forests. When existing markets for forest owners' products are strong, or when new markets like biomass emerge, they provide forest owners with the means to keep their land forested. That, indeed, is very good for the environment.▫Author: Seth Ginther▫Executive Director▫U.S. Industrial Pellet Association▫804-771-9540▫[sginther@hf-law.com](mailto:sginther@hf-law.com)