

Certified forests growing worldwide

By Ron Grech

A North American-based forest management certification program is making a big push to raise customer and consumer awareness about certification standards.

The Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI) program, a non-profit program is also encouraging companies to label their products to show the fibre used to make them came from well-managed forests and legal sources.

“We’ve seen a big increase in product labeling and it’s really picking up,” said Kathy Abusow, SFI president and CEO. Working from her bases in Ottawa, Canada and Arlington, Virginia, Abusow was hired as president of SFI last year after running her own certification consulting business for 15 years.

“We feel a lot of hard work has been done by forestry companies to meet SFI standards. The marketplace needs to be aware of that success and reward by asking for certified forest products,” said Abusow.

Abusow said SFI is increasing its public profile to establish market recognition of its symbol on products so that it becomes as familiar to consumers as the recycling logo.

“We’ve got a big branding campaign going on right now, running ads in magazines and trade publications and billboards,” she said.

The prevailing message being promoted is that SFI products are “good for you, good for your forests” and that buyers have a “responsibility and an opportunity to use their buying power to purchase products made from well-managed forests,” said Abusow.

These aren’t labels just to go on lumber wrapping, she said. In fact, says it’s already being placed discreetly on a variety of end products such as airline magazines,

ticket folders and restaurant menus – “lots of places where paper is used.”

Abusow said the worldwide number of certified forests has “grown phenomenally” over the years and the drivers for this growth continue to be the purchasers of forest products.

“Certification is not a market niche. Customers are asking for forest products from well-managed forests and forest companies are working hard to meet that market demand or risk being left

out,” said Abusow who points to the growing trend the SFI program which began 2007 with 21 certificates at 48 locations, and ended it with 102 SFI chain-of-custody certifications at 408 certified locations, representing a 386 per cent increase in certificates and a 750 per cent increase in certified locations – and it appears the momentum is continuing in 2008.

She believes the benefits of becoming certified well outweigh the costs.

“In this day and age, there are ever increasing benefits to being certified because of increased awareness of environmental issues. Large corporations that buy forest products are trying to demonstrate that they are doing the right thing by selecting only from well-managed forests.

Canadian companies continue to lead the way. “Canada is a global leader in terms of hectares certified. Only 10 per cent of world’s forests are certified but

certification tends to happen on more productive lands.”

Forty per cent of the world’s certified forests are located in Canada.

As of March 2008, Canada had 139 million hectares of certified forest of which 40 million is under the SFI program.

In North America there are 182.9 million hectares of certified forest; of those 60.9 million are certified under the SFI program, 76.7 million are certified under the Canadian Standards Association and 36.9 hectares are certified under the Forest Stewardship Council.

In Ontario, there is a total of 26.3 million hectares of certified forest of which 7.8 million hectares are certified under the SFI standard.

Abusow said a key difference with SFI and other standards is that it has a unique fibre sourcing requirements whereby companies sourcing wood from uncertified lands to reach out and promote best management practices, awareness and training. As a result, she said, SFI certified companies influence standards on additional hectares of forest through the training of loggers and foresters in best management practices and the promotion of reforestation and conservation of critical wildlife habitat.

“With 90% of the world’s forests still uncertified, much of this forest is in jurisdictions where illegal logging is prevalent or strong forest laws are either lacking or not enforced, the market has responded by not getting caught up in the differences between the standards but rather deliberately seeking out products that come from certified forests,” said Abusow. “That’s a trend we expect to continue to grow and one that North American producers are well positioned to meet.”



Kathy Abusow



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