

MIKE ROSS
FOURTH DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS



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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 22, 2010

Mr. Rick Fedrizzi, President and CEO
US Green Building Council
2101 L Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mr. Fedrizzi:

Arkansas has a strong and deep commitment to environmental sustainability and appreciates the efforts of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) to promote energy efficiency and environmental conservation. However, I was disappointed to learn that the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system discriminates against many wood products produced domestically, favoring the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification while prohibiting the crediting of two of the most widely used forest certification programs in the US, specifically the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS).

Our state is very proud of its forests and its forest products industry which directly employs almost 30,000 people. If left unmodified, the USGBC's certification policies will adversely affect many families and communities in Arkansas, a majority of which use SFI and ATFS certifications. In fact, the SFI certifies five times more acreage in Arkansas than the FSC. Additionally the ATFS certifies 1.1 million acres of forest land that is managed by close to 2,500 local families.

This discrimination is not only potentially harmful to local families and companies who need additional business now more than ever, but it is not consistent with the USGBC's major goals and implementation. The USGBC and its LEED rating system follow contradictory standards when it comes to approving building products, not requiring products like steel and concrete to have third-party environmental certification while placing an exclusive crediting program on a product like timber that is entirely renewable, energy efficient, and provides numerous public benefits, including carbon sequestration, wildlife habitats, and water quality protection.

While I understand the USGBC has developed draft benchmarks to evaluate forest certification programs, many in the domestic lumber industry and forestry sectors have raised concerns about these benchmarks, saying that the process has largely ignored the need to address its exclusive recognition of FSC certified wood as products from SFI and ATFS certified forests continue to be ineligible for the LEED forest certification credit.

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This bias, if left unchanged, will turn away many reputable third-party SFI and ATFS certified wood grown locally, forcing many companies to accept FSC certified wood, the vast majority of which comes from countries whose standards do not measure up to those of the US.

As a representative for the thousands of Arkansans employed in the forestry sector, I urge you to move towards acceptance of all forest management certification systems and to end discrimination against domestically produced wood building products. Doing so will help ensure strong markets for our domestic lumber producers and our forest landowners which are vital to the future of this essential American industry.

Sincerely,



Mike Ross