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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

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

Dear Mr. Fedrizzi:

Forest owners and managers in Arkansas have strong and deep commitments to environmental sustainability, which they demonstrate through the management of millions of acres of private and public forests in our state. Our state is also very proud of its forests and its forest products industry, which directly employs almost 30,000 people.

I appreciate the efforts of the U.S. Green Building Council to promote energy efficiency and environmental conservation in building design and construction. I have been disappointed to learn, however, that the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system discriminates against wood products produced in our own backyard and prohibits the two largest sustainable forest certification programs in the U.S. – the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) – from gaining credit by recognizing only Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood. Most of the certified wood products produced in the U.S. is certified under the SFI and ATFS. In Arkansas, SFI's certified acreage is over five times the amount of FSC acreage, while almost 2,500 Arkansas families managed more than 1.1 million acres of forests under the ATFS. In addition, our State has two National Forests which cover almost 3 million acres. Yet wood products produced from National Forest timber would also appear to be ineligible for green credits under the LEED standards. It makes neither environmental nor economic sense to disadvantage products from these local, well managed forests in favor of imported wood products. I recently visited the Ouachita National Forest and would urge you to do the same. The restoration forestry they are implementing there should be a model for public forest management, and should certainly create lumber which meets the LEED standards.

Furthermore, since the USGBC does not require other building products, such as steel and concrete, to have third-party environmental certification to achieve a credit, USGBC is discriminating against a product that is entirely renewable, energy efficient, and provides numerous public benefits, including carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection.

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

I urge you and your organization to re-evaluate your approach to forest management certification systems as quickly as possible, and to accept all credible forest management certification systems as qualifying under the LEED standards. Doing so will help ensure strong markets for domestic lumber producers and our forest landowners, which is vital to the future of our forests and our forest industry workers.

Sincerely,


Blanche L. Lincoln