

The Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) at Auburn University - 2006

Forest landowners need viable markets for forest products from their forest lands. RREA programs help to grow and maintain a healthy forest products manufacturing industry in Alabama, creating both employment opportunities and new markets for the state's abundant forest resources. RREA funds have been a crucial base of support for the Forest Products Development Center (FPDC) at Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. The FPDC has leveraged these funds with state and private funds at greater than a 2:1 ratio, to work cooperatively with Alabama's economic development community to successfully expand the state's forest industry. In recent years, RREA funds utilized by the FPDC have been instrumental in delivering the following results:

- The FPDC has played a key role in attracting new industry to Alabama, often being the first point of contact for industry managers planning new manufacturing operations. The FPDC conducts resource studies and industrial site analyses that help companies find the optimal location within the state for their new business opportunities. This work is crucial to the decision-making process for new manufacturing projects, and has yielded substantial results. Since 2000, the FPDC has been instrumental in locating ten manufacturing facilities in Alabama, accounting for over \$900 million in fixed capital investment, expanding wood fiber demand from Alabama's landowners by an estimated 3.5 million tons, and creating 1,100 new direct manufacturing jobs. These projects have included manufacturing operations for sawn lumber, oriented strandboard, medium and high density fiberboard, laminate flooring, plastic/wood composite lumber, and wood pellets. The FPDC continues developmental work on other promising manufacturing projects, which have very significant further economic potential.

- In addition to its work in developing traditional forest products manufacturing opportunities, the FPDC is actively engaged in evaluating and facilitating the development of a biomass energy industry in Alabama. The FPDC has determined that there are in excess of 10 million tons annually of forestry and manufacturing wood residues that could be utilized for energy purposes, and is actively working on projects to convert these renewable resources to thermal, electrical, and chemical energy products. One such project currently underway involves a cooperative effort with the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Alabama Power Company, and others, to determine the technical and economic feasibility of co-firing biomass fuel from forest residues at coal-fired generating plants. The FPDC was also instrumental in locating a wood fuel pellet manufacturing operation to the Black Belt region of Alabama. The operation will begin production of environmentally-friendly wood fuel pellets in 2007, utilizing residues from existing manufacturing operations. The development of a biomass energy industry in Alabama has the potential to create significant new markets for Alabama landowners, while decreasing the nation's dependence on imported fossil fuels.

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