

Researcher examines biochar use in forests

Use of waste wood could be beneficial

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Research is underway that could lead to more uses for waste wood, a U.S. Forest Service researcher says.

Instead of thinning stands to boost productivity and burning the resulting slash-piles, researchers believe turning it into biochar — a supplement made of charred biological matter — would be better for long-term carbon storage and boosting soil’s nutrient- and moisture-holding capacities.

“We’re hoping we can make a change in forest management,” said Deborah Page-Dumroese, research soil scientist with the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station in Moscow, Idaho. “Instead of making slashpiles, we can actually use that waste wood for a benefit.”

Textured soils with little organic matter content re-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Rockford, Wash., farmer David Gady holds biochar made from bluegrass screenings January 2014 on his farm. Researchers are looking at the use of biochar in forests.

sponded better than soils with higher organic content. Agricultural soils typically show

better response to biochar because they’re lower in organic matter, Page-Dumroese said.

Biochar is applied differently on forest soils. It is added to the surface instead of

being incorporated into farmland. It takes several years for biochar to move into forest soils.

As more areas experience drought, an increase in water-holding capacity extends the growing season, Page-Dumroese said. Organic matter also acts as a sponge during flooding, retaining more moisture.

Page-Dumroese plans to continue her research. The biggest benefit of biochar is carbon sequestration, she said.

Researchers primarily focus on matching biochar to the proper site. Some forest sites do show an increase in the growth of overstory trees.

“We see small changes, but we still see above-ground growth changes,” Page-Dumroese said.

The sites most likely to require biochar include mine land sites, overgrazed areas and highly compacted forest sites with organic matter removed due to fire.

Page-Dumroese said some mine sites are showing

an increase in plant survival.

She uses a mixed conifer feedstock or a mix of pinyon pine and juniper for biochar.

Page-Dumroese said roughly 30 percent of materials used to make biochar on an acre should be returned to that particular acre, but the rest could be sold for use on gardens or farms. She advised potential customers to consider the source of the biochar and its pH levels.

Howard Boyte, CEO of Walking Point Farms, a veteran-owned agritech business in Tigard, Ore., said the forest service approached him several years about commercializing biochar. The company plans to market a commercial product.

Page-Dumroese’s lab is the lead on researching the project with Oregon State University, Boyte said.

Biochar is expensive right now, Boyte said. The government would need to require biochar use for food it purchases for prisons, military and USDA food programs for it to gain traction with farmers, he said.



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FFA members get a close-up view of the Oregon Legislature



Courtesy of Oregon Farm Bureau
FFA members, advisers, and staff take a full tour of the Oregon Capitol Building, Jan. 21. Oregon Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee organized the FFA Legislative Day for high school students at the start of the 2016 Legislative Session.

SALEM — To connect with and inspire the next generation of advocates for Oregon agriculture, the Oregon Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee organized an FFA Legislative Day for high school students at the Oregon State Capitol during the 2016 legislative session.

Introducing FFA members, educating them about public policy issues impacting farmers and ranchers and explaining the legislative process are all critical to the future of Oregon agriculture, said Kathy Hadley, past chair of the YF&R Committee.

“This group was comprised of top-notch FFA leaders — kids that will potentially have an office in this building someday,” said Hadley. “YF&R is glad to educate them about the agriculture issues we face every day as farmers and ranchers, and the dual role Farm Bureau members play in advocating for our industry at the Capitol.”

Bryson Price of the Sutherlin FFA Chapter attended “to gain experience in working other ag organizations, networking and learning how progress can be made when farmers of all ages work together.”

The event was attended by 17 FFA members from around the state, including the entire current state FFA officer team, two FFA advisers and state FFA staff.

The group learned about lobbying as a career and got issue updates from OFB

Director of Public Policy Jenny Dresler and OFB Public Policy Counsel Mary Anne Nash.

Beth Reiley and Beth Patrino, legislative committee staff, gave the group tips on how to follow bills with the online Oregon Legislative

Information System (OLIS) and how to testify before committees in person and in writing.

Oregon Department of Agriculture Deputy Director Lisa Hanson talked about various agriculture issues and fielded questions from the students.

The afternoon included visits from two legislators. A former FFA officer, Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, enjoyed the opportunity to share his experience and insight with students. Rep. Susan McLain, D-Hillsboro, emphasized the importance of bringing people together to talk through issues and find solutions. The workshop concluded with a tour of the Capitol.

North Clackamas FFA Adviser Kathy Mayfield took her entire chapter’s officer team to the Legislative Day.

“The students loved learning about agriculture’s hot topics and walked away feeling like their opinions mattered, even if they’re teenagers,” Mayfield said. “They really felt like they had a stake in what’s going on in our state. Our group valued the contacts made with Farm Bureau members and talked about it for several days afterward. In fact at the next meeting, North Clackamas FFA proposed that the chapter pay for all officers to attend this event every year.”

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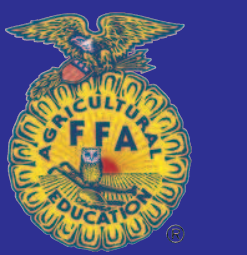
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