

Using wood waste to generate carbon-sequestering biochar

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**
Capital Press

LYONS, Ore. — Tech giant Microsoft is investing in carbon credits generated by an Oregon wood products company to help reduce, and eventually erase, its carbon footprint.

The offsets come from biochar produced at Freres Engineered Wood, which manufactures plywood and veneer in the Santiam Canyon east of Salem.



Kyle Freres

Biochar is a carbon-rich material created when organic biomass, such as wood, is roasted at high temperatures in a low oxygen environment. It is essentially a finely grained charcoal, and can be used as a soil amendment to improve fertility.

Because it also sequesters carbon, biochar is marketed as a tool to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Biochar from Freres was certified last year by Puro.earth, a marketplace on which companies can

buy or trade carbon credits to offset their emissions from other sources. Microsoft has agreed to purchase these credits as part of a sweeping program to become carbon negative by 2030.

Carbon negative means Microsoft aims to sequester more carbon than it emits each year.

ACT Commodities, a financial institution that backs climate projects around the world, brokered the deal for Freres, a family-run business founded in 1922.

“As part of the path to our carbon-negative goal by 2030, we are glad to purchase biochar-based carbon removal credits via ACT from the Pacific Northwest-based supplier Freres,” said Elizabeth Wilmott, carbon program director for Microsoft.

Freres Engineered Wood — formerly Freres Lumber Co. — has long made biochar as a byproduct of its cogeneration plant in Lyons, said Kyle Freres, the company’s vice president.

Built in 2007, the plant runs around the clock burning ground up tree bark, limbs and other woody debris to create the steam that powers a massive turbine gen-



George Plaven/Capital Press

The cogeneration plant at Freres Engineered Wood in Lyons, Ore.

erator, creating enough electricity for about 5,000 homes.

Portland General Electric, a regional utility, buys the electricity. Meanwhile, what’s left over is a combination of ash and biochar that Freres previously sold to farmers. Not only is biochar more than 70% carbon, but its porous nature allows soil to retain more water, growing more robust crops.

In recent years, however, Freres said it has become increasingly difficult to manage such large volumes of biochar. “Farmers are seasonal, and our business isn’t,” he

explained.

The company opted to send the excess carbon-rich material to a landfill 45 miles away near Corvallis.

By selling carbon credits to Microsoft, Freres said the added revenue will offset their disposal costs in the short term while providing an incentive for them to research and develop new commercial products. He envisions marketing a proprietary blend of topsoil and biochar to farmers and home gardeners.

“I think the agricultural markets

could be a big opportunity for us,” Freres said.

The company is now experimenting with techniques to separate beneficial biochar from the non-combustible ash. Once that process is refined, Freres said they hope to start product development in the next year or two.

A portion of the feedstock used in the cogeneration plant comes from Freres’ timber operations, though a majority is collected from outside the company, including urban manufacturers in the Portland area.

All of the unsalable wood is mulched and fed into the plant, where it is burned at between 1,400 and 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit.

“These are materials that are really not useful for anything else,” Freres said. “We don’t let anything go to waste.”

Freres said he believes wood products play a key role in sequestering carbon and combating climate change.

“Frankly, we feel like our industry is one of the greenest on the planet,” Freres said. “It’s products like this that really burnish our environmental credentials.”

Longtime Idaho agriculture advocate heading to Montana

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Leah Clark, an Idaho agriculture advocate for more than 30 years, is headed to Billings, Mont., where she will take over as general manager of the Northern International Livestock Exposition.

She starts her new job June 6.

“I will miss a lot of people in Idaho, but this is kind of a return to my roots,” said Clark, a native of Chinook, Mont. She looks forward to meeting new friends in the area, where her mother and sister live.

“She will be really missed,” said Rick Waitley, who directs Food Producers of Idaho, Leadership Idaho Agriculture and the state’s Agriculture in the Classroom organization. “Leah



Leah Clark

is very talented and has many great connections all over the state.” Clark will leave board positions with the Ada County Farm Bureau, where she is promotion and education chair, and Idaho Ag in the Classroom. She is an LIA graduate and previously chaired the annual Idaho Ag Summit.

In Montana, she plans to explore opportunities to serve with Ag in the Classroom as well as Farm to School, which connects school meal programs with local producers.

Agriculture and particularly livestock are longtime passions and “in my blood,” Clark said. Both of her sets

of grandparents ranched. Her parents ranched in Montana’s Missouri River Breaks when she was young.

Her mother taught school in Arizona. Leah cemented her passion for agriculture as an FFA student and officer in Chandler, Ariz., returning to Montana during summers.

Clark earned a bachelor’s degree in agribusiness management at Arizona State University and a master’s degree in agriculture marketing and finance at Oklahoma State.

She became executive director of the Idaho Beef Council immediately following graduate school. She worked for the council for about 15 years, until the Idaho State Department of Agriculture in 2004 hired her to manage its Idaho Preferred program that promotes local food.

Beef exports set record, pork exports improve

Capital Press

U.S. beef exports soared to another new value record in March and lamb exports continued to gain momentum.

Pork exports, however, were well below the record totals posted in March 2021, according to the latest data from U.S. Meat Export Federation.

Beef exports totaled 126,285 metric tons in March, up 1% from a year ago and the third largest on record, while value climbed 33% to a record \$1.07 billion. First quarter exports were up 6% in volume and 41% in value.

“Global demand for U.S. beef has eclipsed anything I have seen in many years in the meat business,” Dan Halstrom, USMEF president and CEO, said in a press release accompanying the data.

“While this momentum is fueled by mainstay markets such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, demand is also very strong in China/Hong Kong and key Latin American markets, while exports to the Middle East have rebounded impressively,” he said.

He did, however, caution that first-quarter results don’t fully reflect the impact of recent COVID-19 lockdowns in China that have slowed product movement and forced many



Ahn Young-joon/Associated Press File

South Korean shoppers buy beef at a grocery store. U.S. beef exports set a value record in March.

restaurants to suspend or limit service. These obstacles are likely to have a greater impact on April and May export data.

He also noted that while beef demand has been resilient, inflation represents a potential headwind.

“Consumers throughout the world have shown how much they value the quality of U.S. beef, but disposable income is under increasing pressure as they pay more for energy and other daily needs,” he said.

March beef exports represented \$472.73 per head of U.S. fed cattle slaughtered and 14.7% of total beef production.

On the pork side, March exports were 222,581 metric tons, the largest since November but nearly 25% below the

record volume achieved a year ago. Export value was \$615.3 million, also the highest since November but down 23% year-over-year.

Pork exports to Mexico and the Dominican Republic raced to a record pace in the first quarter and South Korea posted a strong increase in export value, but shipments to most destinations were below last year.

“While pork exports were down significantly from last year’s record, we saw some encouraging trends in the March results,” he said.

“U.S. pork commanded a higher price per pound than a year ago, with outstanding demand from Mexico and value growth in key markets such as South Korea and the Dominican Republic, he said.

AGCO ransomware attack disrupts its production of farm equipment

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

U.S. agricultural equipment giant AGCO was the victim of a ransomware attack last week that has impacted production.

The Georgia-based company said in a statement May 6 it expects its business operations will be “adversely affected for several days and potentially longer” depending on how quickly the company is able to repair its systems.

The production slowdown comes during a crucial planting season for agriculture and at a time when the pandemic and supply chain problems have already created a massive backlog in production of agricultural equipment.

Although AGCO said the attack “has impacted some of its production facilities,” it did not specify how many production facilities or what percentage of total production volume was affected. Whatever the scale of the attack, it was targeted at a big company.

AGCO has 42 manufacturing locations worldwide and 1,810 dealerships in North America. The company sells tractors, foragers, combines, smart farming technologies and other equipment. Several major brands are in AGCO’s brand portfolio, including Massey Ferguson. In 2021,

the company had net sales of \$11.1 billion.

AGCO has not yet named a suspect in the attack or disclosed whether any data was stolen, but the company said it is investigating.

“AGCO is still investigating the extent of the attack,” said Greg Peterson, vice president of investor relations for the company.

Peterson told the Capital Press he doesn’t have any further detail to share at this time.

“We will give updates when we have new information,” Peterson wrote in an email.

This isn’t the first time a major agricultural business has been the target of a ransomware attack. cyber attacks on ag-related businesses have increased in recent years, according to officials. Last year alone, JBS USA, a subsidiary of the world’s largest meat processor, was hit by an organized cyber attack, followed by ransomware attacks on at least three Midwest grain handlers along with other farming-related companies.

After the JBS hack, USDA Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack acknowledged that disruptive cyber attacks are likely a “new reality” for the food system.

USDA isn’t the only agency that has noticed the uptick in

ag-targeted cyber crimes.

The FBI last month issued a statement warning that ransomware attacks on agricultural businesses such as cooperatives have intensified and may be more likely during planting and harvest seasons, when cyber actors can strategically cause the most financial loss and negatively impact the food supply chain.

AGCO is still investigating the extent of the attack,” said Greg Peterson, vice president of investor relations for the company.

AGCO has not yet named a suspect in the attack or disclosed whether any data was stolen, but the company said it is investigating.

AGCO is still investigating the extent of the attack,” said Greg Peterson, vice president of investor relations for the company.

AGCO is still investigating the extent of the attack,” said Greg Peterson, vice president of investor relations for the company.

IrrigationKing.com

NEW

PREMIUM DRIP TAPE

PERFORMANCE • CLOG RESISTANT

MADE IN ITALY

- ✓ Anti-reflux 90° Emitter
- ✓ Large Section Labyrinth
- ✓ Turbulent Flow
- ✓ Inert Filter

Save over \$60 per roll over the leading tape brand without sacrificing quality.

This high-quality drip tape is made in Italy to the highest standards.

\$199/Roll

Ships for Free!

Sprinklers • Rain Guns • Dripline
Filters • Poly & Lay Flat Hose
Micro • Valves • Air Vents
Fertilizer Injectors
...and much more!

Fast & Free Shipping from Oregon

1-844-259-0640

www.irrigationking.com

JEWETT CAMERON SEED

WHOLESALE PRICES TO THE PUBLIC!

GRASS SEED ANIMAL FEED
GRAIN SEED CLOVER SEED

We are your local North Valley seed dealer!

Open Monday to Friday 7AM to 3:30PM

503-647-2293

WWW.JEWETTCAMERONSEED.COM

31345 NW Beach Rd. Hillsboro, OR. 97124