

MARKETING SUSTAINABLE TIMBER

As you scan the aisles in nearly every grocery store you see a growing share of organic groceries and “buy local” marketing. According to a 2016 report by USDA, the organic food market grew by 300 percent between 2002 and 2015 and continues to show sustained double-digit growth.

Ben Deumling of Zena Forest Products says the wood market isn't as direct or developed as the organic food market, but the latter is a good model for wood producers in Oregon. He sees similar opportunities to grow a wood-product industry built on a sustainable relationship with the land and consumer's desire to buy local.

Deumling, who's in his mid-thirties, spoke to *EW* at the family mill with his infant son cradled against his chest. With a big smile, short dark hair and a wiry build, Ben Deumling runs the mill and his mother, Sarah Deumling, manages timber harvests on more than 1,000 acres in the Eola Hills outside Salem. The Deumlings employ four full-time mill workers and crews of around a dozen seasonal workers. With three generations living on the property, maintaining a healthy forest for the future and making a living now are of equal importance.

“We try to just tell a different story and tap into a different market,” Ben Deumling says.

Telling their story and inviting people to tour their forest has resonated with customers who are concerned about how their wood is produced, he says. It's also important, he says, that Zena can add value to its products by milling the timber onsite before they go to market.

While Zena has been successful in marketing their hardwood products, which often become furniture and flooring, the market for Douglas-fir lumber and other softwood products offers fewer opportunities. “It's embarrassing that there's no continuity between the forest and the end user,” Deumling says. “Regardless of the product there's a desire on the part of the customer to hear that story.”

“I would love to be able to go to Parr Lumber and have a grown-in-Oregon stamp rather than a grown-in-Chile stamp,” he says. “That's a step in the right direction, but then the next question is not only where was it grown but how was it grown.”

About an hour north of Zena, Peter Hayes of Hyla Woods is working on telling a similar tale. Hayes wears a practical outfit of running shoes, shorts, a blue button-up shirt and a gray hat as we tour the Mount Richmond forest outside of Gaston. Hayes is a fifth-generation woodsman with a penchant for experimentation. He sees the development of a more ecologically informed forestry as a way to build capital for the future while continuing to produce timber.

But so far he hasn't been able to tap the local market for sales of construction staples like two-by-fours. Hayes refers to the wood going to local markets from Hyla Woods as the “appetizers and desserts.” Regardless of their intent to keep their wood in local markets, much of their wood is still exported.

One solution Hyla Woods, like Zena Forest Products, embraces is adding value to their timber by milling onsite

and making products like cutting boards. The cutting boards Hyla Woods sells are stamped with the coordinates of the forest they were harvested from. Hayes says the idea is for consumers to be able to look at a satellite photo online and see that where the wood came from is still a forest.

Hyla Woods collects data on the growth of the forest and the health of the habitat. “We are one of the few forests that can actually quantify our biodiversity,” Hayes says. He says in the long-term he could see people investing in the biodiversity provided by their forest, but options for entering into the carbon market have yet to meet their expectations for forest management.

“We've probably been approached by 20 different outfits that have wanted to buy our carbon,” Hayes says. He says Hyla Woods is interested in getting credit for their carbon but don't want to enter the market until they're sure they will get a fair price. While Hyla isn't

managing exclusively for carbon, their holistic approach does increase the carbon stored in the forest. Hayes says that in a given year they only cut about 25 percent of the growth in the forest, which means that they are producing more timber and sucking in more carbon each year.

For The Joinery, which just celebrated its 35-year anniversary, timber operations like Zena Forest Products and Hyla Woods are a meaningful part of their business. The Portland furniture company has 35 employees and produces furniture and cabinetry, primarily from locally sourced hardwoods.

Jon Blumenauer, CEO of The Joinery and son of Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat from Portland, says “they help support our business and we help support them. A common denominator is an alignment of values.”

The craftsmanship and quality of their products must stand on its own merits, Jon Blumenauer says, but “for a lot of folks it makes a difference that we source local wood.”

COMMUNITIES TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR FORESTS

“If you think about secure communities and you think about safety and security and self-sufficiency — what is more important than being in charge of your own water?” Don Andre asks. “I can hope that some distant corporate bigwigs would care about my water, but I'm guessing that I'm going to care about the water near my home more than they are.”

One of the first campaigns of the Oregon Coast Community Forest Association was to work with the city of Toledo, near Newport, to manage the forest in its watershed and protect its water supply. In developing a plan for the forests in the watershed, the city isn't foregoing logging completely but crafting a strategy that integrates a healthy watershed with a productive forest.

Toledo hired Trout Mountain Forestry to achieve these goals through a timber management plan. Included in the plan is a desire on the part of the city to support the local economy by encouraging access to forest products for local artisans, woodworkers and foragers, a major focus of OCCFA.

Mark Miller, a partner in Trout Mountain Forestry, has worked at forestry with a conservation objective for three decades. He says demand for the services the company provides has been steadily increasing. Trout Mountain manages multiple watersheds for municipal governments across Western Oregon, including a 2,352-acre portion of the Rock Creek Watershed for the city of Corvallis.

Because they're tasked with managing the forests for water quality, Trout Mountain's operations are trying to change plantation forests into forests that are best suited to the city's goals. Miller says that one of their objectives is to create older and more diverse forests that consistently supply clean, high quality water.

In order to create a more diverse forest structure, Trout Mountain thins plantations and creates gaps in the forest to more closely mimic natural processes. Unlike typical plantations, they also maintain hardwood species and



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