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# Woodlots

PURSuing STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCIAL RETURNS FROM THE FARM BUSH LOT

## Mill advocates woodlot management

While Townsend Lumber sells its products abroad, its success hinges on a steady local supply

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*SPECIAL to Ontario Farmer*

**D**avid Townsend is always looking ahead. That's one of the keys to the success at Townsend Lumber Inc.

"I'm not a person of the past. I'm a person of the future," Townsend declares.

"We're the biggest hardwood sawmill operation with dry kilns in Ontario... We ship our products all over Canada, all over the United States, and around the world."

Townsend Lumber may be internationally focused but most of the raw products are local. In a typical year, the family-operated business draws upon woodlots within a 100-mile

radius of its main location at Tillsonburg to produce 20 million board feet of lumber. A smaller amount - perhaps six million board feet - is purchased.

This reliance on a regional resource - trees - means that Townsend must look to the future. He's an advocate of proper woodlot management, something that's crucial to the supply needs of his company and which also puts more money into the pockets of land owners.

A properly managed woodlot, Townsend explains, maximizes tree growth and quality. It boils down to leaving a wide range of tree diameter sizes combined with an optimum amount of space for tree growth.

"The more good trees you grow, the more revenue you'll get out of your woodlot," he says.

At the very least, landowners must abide by the tree cutting bylaw for their municipality,

Townsend says. Typical tree-cutting bylaws in Southwestern Ontario amount to a minimum standard that ensures woodlots remain viable.

"We, as an industry, pushed for practically all the tree-cutting bylaws. Norfolk was the leader. Other counties (more or less) copied their bylaw."

Townsend says that landowners should also make sure whoever is working in their woodlot is properly insured, provides a notice of intent, and works within the labour laws.

It's up to the landowner as to how his woodlot is managed, although tree removal must meet bylaw requirements. Townsend says there's generally a detailed discussion prior to a cut being made and the landowner is invited to walk the woodlot beforehand.

"Some owners take a big interest in their woodlots and for

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**David Townsend, standing in front of a bandsaw, says the value of a log can be reduced with the wrong cut.**

others it's just another business deal," he says.

Townsend has confidence in the logging crews his company contracts. He prefers to buy lumber directly from landowners through a purchasing agent representing the company. The agent generally accompanies the crews in the woodlot. The approach provides everyone involved with a greater sense of assurance that a good job will be done.

The harvest of trees usually occurs in the fall or winter to minimize damage to logs, remaining trees, and the woodlot in general.

Maintaining the value from the harvest is a theme that runs throughout the operation. One of the biggest concerns is stain, caused by either enzymes or bacteria that will discolour lumber products.

At Townsend Lumber, an attempt is made to process the oldest logs first to minimize the effect. In addition, special attention is paid during the air-drying process.

The sticks or laths used to separate the drying lumber are of a patented design Townsend developed over a decade ago. The raised ridges on the sticks allow for superior air penetration

into stacked lumber, minimizing the stain effect without the use of chemicals.

Townsend routinely uses the Breeze Dried sticks, along with similarly-designed bolsters, at his own operation. They're also marketed – in their millions – to other sawmills.

The Breeze Dried design is just one aspect of an extremely diverse company.

There are three sawmills, including one at New Dundee outside Kitchener, along with 18 kilns at the Tillsonburg site. These handle 20 different hardwood species from South-western Ontario.

There's an industrial division, producing such diverse products as railway ties, pallet lumber and industrial packaging materials.

The retail effort includes the sale of kiln-dried lumber, solid-wood trim and moulding, and finished flooring.

The floor finishing line, located five minutes down Highway 3 from the main site, has been up and running for about a year and a half. With the 18 employees, a large industrial building, and state-of-the-art finishing line, it represents a major investment for Townsend Lumber.



**David Townsend (right) has his entire family involved with the company, including his wife, Brenda, and daughter, Laura. Missing are his son, Andrew, and other daughter, Kristen.**

"It took us two or three months to work the bugs out of the line," says Gage Townsend, a mechanically-minded former tobacco farmer who manages the plant.

"The finishing process takes three and one-half minutes and the flooring is ready to lay."

Townsend grew up in the business. It was started in 1959 by his father, the late Robert Townsend and Bert Abbott Sr. They initially worked with portable sawmills before establishing a permanent location at Walsingham, near Tillsonburg. Townsend launched

today's business - Townsend Lumber Inc. - in 1985.

"This was just a corn field then. There wasn't even any hydro here."

Today, the business employs more than 250 workers and has total sales running into the millions. Townsend says the dedication of his employees is another key to success at the business and he values the relationships he has with the logging crews and landowners.

Townsend's wife, Brenda, and three children, Andrew, Kristen and Laura, are all involved with the business.