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# Substantial investment made in lumber certification

Townsend Lumber receives a Rainforest Alliance certification

BY JOHN PHAIR

Ontario Farmer

A Tillsonburg-area sawmill and wood products manufacturer recently received certification under the Rainforest Alliance, a global conservation organization that advocates responsible forestry management.

The company is now one of only a handful of Canadian companies to hold this designation.

Townsend Lumber is a family-owned business located on a 170-acre site just south of the Town of Tillsonburg.

However, after touring the sprawling site, one realizes it's certainly no Mom and Pop operation.

The fully integrated company operates one of the largest saw mills in Southern Ontario and while it handles the full range of lumber species, it has become a major player in the province's hardwood industry.

Through a number of its subsidiary companies, Townsend Lumber has become a force in the manufacture of hardwood flooring, mouldings and trim, white oak fencing and wallboard, industrial pallet components, railroad ties, speciality shipping crate components and certified heat treated lumber, just to name a few of its innovative products.

The company presently employs 156 persons but at peak times that number has eclipsed 200.

Owner Dave Townsend runs the business along with his daughter Laura and son Andrew. He noted that his father, the late Robert Townsend, founded the business in 1958.

"We were tobacco farmers and he set up a portable sawmill on the farm to give us something to do in the winter months," he said.

"At that time a lot of tobacco kilns were fired with straight wood, so every farmer was in the bush during the winter cutting wood for their kilns."

He added that in the 1970s they established a more permanent mill down the road near the settlement of Glen Mayer, where they carried on business until that facility was destroyed by fire in 1984.

They then moved to the company's present location and through its many innovative products have continued its trajectory of growth.

"When we moved here this was a



Zach Buchner, FSC manager with Townsend Lumber stands next to some of the two to three million board feet of logs inventoried in the company's log yard and staging area.

vacant field, there was nothing on either side of the road," said Townsend, pointing at the site which encompasses a massive log yard, two saw mills, retail lumber facility, trim and moulding plant, flooring manufacturing facilities, 13 drying kilns and various other facilities.

ZACH BUCHNER is the company's Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) program manager and took the lead on guiding the company through the relatively rigorous certification process.

"The company has recently received its accreditation from the Rainforest Alliance which enables us to sell FCC certified wood products in Canada and around the world," he said, adding that in order to receive that accreditation the company was required to undergo an extensive audit of their entire operation.

"That accreditation assures our customers that all our logs have been harvested sustainably and never in violation of any local by-laws, environmental laws, and not illegally in anyway."

The Rainforest Alliance visions a world where forests remain standing and people and the environment prosper together.

In its mission statement it states that

it seeks to do that by helping farmers, forest managers and tourism businesses realize greater economic benefits by ensuring eco systems around their operations are protected and that their workers are well trained and enjoy safe conditions.

It adds that once businesses meet certain environmental and social standards, they link them to the global marketplace where the demand for sustainable goods and services is on the rise.

Buchner noted that certification through the Rainforest Alliance is a big factor in being able to market lumber in Europe these days.

"A lot of places won't even accept wood products unless they are FCC certified and there is a very big market for certified lumber, especially in Europe," he said.

"They are very strict on what products they allow in and out."

BUCHNER NOTED that the company deals in 29 different species of lumber ranging from high value hardwoods to lower grades of soft wood timber.

"We buy logs, standing timber, or the rights to harvest a bush lot," he said, adding that on the rare occasion they may have a farmer drop in with a

wagon load of logs and want to sell them.

"It's not a real common thing but it does happen, which is nice for farmers in the area who happen to have a log or tree to remove and are able to get a few bucks for it."

He said one of the advantages the company has is its size and the diversity of products it produces.

"A lot of mills are only able to take in the higher value hardwoods because in most cases that's all they sell," he said, adding that usually includes premium woods such as hard maple, oak, walnut and cherry.

"We are willing to take in anything because we are able to use it in pallets, specialty packing crates and the many other products we manufacture."

He noted that their pallet mill gives them the ability to utilize some of the less desirable or smaller logs such as white ash because pallets can be made from nearly any type of wood depending on the structural integrity the customer requires.

"If our customers are looking for light pallets we can use poplar, aspen or other lower value woods," he said.

Buchner noted that 90 per cent of the timber they purchase is local, meaning

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they are sourced within a two to three hour drive.

The company primarily logs in Lambton, Kent, Middlesex, Norfolk and Elgin Counties.

“And that goes back to the issue of seeing that the logs are responsibly harvested,” he said, adding that in addition to the company meeting its certification requirements, it also wants to ensure the sustainability of their business.

“We’ve been around since 1958 and we want to continue in the business. We want to harvest logs responsibly so those same bush lots can be harvested again in another 10 to 20 years.

To a farmer and his or her



Townsend Lumber operations manager Mike Penner, left, with contractor Ron Kenny with the company’s recently acquired Bell Tree Harvester.

family, it allows not just one generation but each generation to get the value-added benefits of harvesting that woodlot.”

He noted that white ash,

which most farmers are trying to remove from the bush lots at present, is currently a big component of their pallet and specialty business.

“We are able to turn them into pallet products and pre-cut components, which is very beneficial to the average farmer.”

## Company recently purchased Bell Tree Harvester

Operations manager Mike Penner said at present many farmers would like to remove infected ash trees from their woodlots and that often presents a safety issue for the logger.

He noted that ash trees often have broken or weak upper limbs that can break off and fall on the logger when the tree is felled.

Consequently, he said the company recently purchased a Bell Tree Harvester, a specialized machine with a clamp that grasps the tree and cuts it at its base with an automatic cutting head.

“It’s not only dangerous but for most loggers it’s not cost efficient to go into a bush with a lot of dead ash and clean them up,” he said, adding that while the machine was a big investment, he is in hopes that a lot of farmers with dead ash in their woodlots will want them cleaned up.

“They’re not big trees and aren’t worth a lot of money but they need to be removed so other more valuable species can take their place.

Dave Townsend noted the company is a big buyer of ash trees, particularly in the Lambton County area.

“We have always had a good market for ash, the only thing is the trees are smaller than normal because the ash bore is killing everything,” he said.

Consequently, he said they are trying to salvage anything 10 inches and up.

“We don’t like to harvest trees that small because it is very inefficient but the farmers would like to get them out of there and get any reasonable price at all,” he said.

## Logs measured on the Doyle system

Buchner noted that during the winter the company’s inventories between two and three million board feet of logs in its staging yard.

“Every load of logs that comes in is staged and measured out using the Doyle system,” he said, adding that means every log that hits the ground is measured accurately and the logger or woodlot owner is paid on a board foot basis.

“It’s very important to us that these measurements be accurate.”



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