

West Oregon Wood Products, Inc.

Columbia City, Oregon

TPM Member Since
April 2013



West Oregon Wood Products Inc. was bought in 1985 by brothers Francis and Chris Sharron, who sold nearly everything they owned to buy the small, struggling wood products company located in Portland, Oregon. The first 18 months were tough, as the equipment needed constant modifications and repairs to meet their customers' needs. In their first year of operation, Francis and Chris produced approximately 300 tons of product.

As the business began to grow, the brothers looked for new products to market. They saw a need to supply fuel for the growing pellet stove industry, and wood shavings which would be sold for animal bedding. Expansion hopes and increased production meant they needed more space, and this prompted their first move to the site of Lazy S Lumber in Beaver Creek, Oregon. At this



West Oregon Wood Products, Columbia City, Oregon.



West Oregon Wood Products loaded and ready for transport.

location, they were provided with manufacturing facilities and needed space. After a fair amount of time and money, the Sharron brothers solved the mysteries of pelletizing, and created a fuel that was economical, energy efficient, and produced very little ash.

As word spread of the success of West Oregon Wood Products' pelletizing process, the phone began to ring. Owners of mills all over the United States wanted to know how the Sharron brothers pelletized wood so successfully and economically. The Sharrons began consulting, designing, and installing pelletizing equipment through a spin-off company, Natural Resource Recovery. From 1989 to 1995 they designed and supplied equipment to over 15 pellet mills.

During this time period, pellet demand completely outstripped the company's ability to produce, and the decision was made to become the leading pellet company in the Western United States. This required a larger facility, so Francis and Chris moved into a vacant warehouse in Columbia City, Oregon. Over the next several years, the equipment to build another large mill was slowly acquired. Construction began in 1992. Employees were hired to operate 3 full shifts, and in December 1992 the new system began to produce an excellent, premium grade pellet. The old mill also continued to operate, producing premium hardwood pellets, sawdust and kitty litter. Pellets are produced by compressing the wood material which has first passed through a hammer mill to provide a uniform dough-like mass. This mass is fed to a press where it is squeezed through a die having holes of



*Unloading Chips the easy way.
Note the entire trailer is being lifted.*

Featured Member continued from page 8

Inside the Banks, Oregon plant processing area.

the size required (normally 6 mm diameter, sometimes 8 mm or larger). The high pressure of the press causes the temperature of the wood to increase greatly, and the lignin plastifies slightly forming a natural 'glue' that holds the pellet together as it cools.

Pellets conforming to the US Pellet Fuel Institutes' high quality standards have less than 10% water content, are uniform in density (density in excess of 1 ton / cubic meter, so they do not float if placed in water), have good structural strength, and low dust and ash content.

Because the wood is broken down by the hammer mill, there is virtually no difference in the finished pellets between different wood types. Pellets can be made from nearly any wood variety, provided the pellet press is equipped with good instrumentation, the differences in feed material can be compensated for in the press regulation.

Today, West Oregon Wood Products' corporate headquarters are still located in Columbia City, but in addition a new state of the art Wood Pellet Fuel plant has been built in Banks, Oregon. This plant is helping to meet the growing demand for West Oregon's products. When the Sharrons acquired the company, it produced 600 bags of sawdust per month. Now, the company produces an equivalent of 450,000 bags per month of various product lines, including commercial grade sawdust, animal bedding, all-wood firelogs, and fuel and barbecue pellets. The company employs 45 full-time employees and up to 5 part-timers. It is recognized nationally and locally as a model for turning waste wood into usable commodities, and for providing rural job opportunities.



West Oregon Wood Products maintains a fleet of vehicles.

Displacing the Myth Hardwood vs. Softwood Pellets

The myth that a hardwood pellet is better than a softwood pellet, or vice-versa should be displaced. Stating quality comparisons in terms of hardwood vs. softwood is too general, as quality is more relative to specific species. Furthermore, quality is also relative to the cleanliness of the wood fiber being used and the quality of the manufacturer's process, no matter what the quality of species.

- Many people base their thoughts on their experience with cordwood. In cordwood form, most hardwoods are denser than softwoods; therefore, a person may believe that hardwood pellets are denser and will burn longer than softwood pellets. However, it should be realized that in the process of manufacturing pellets, extreme heat and pressure completely change the structure of the wood fiber and a density of approximately 40 pounds per cubic foot is achieved, using either hardwoods or softwoods. Therefore, if the relative densities of hardwood and softwood pellets are comparable, they will experience equal burn time.
- Density is weight per volume. If density is comparable between hardwood and softwood pellets, weight will be comparable as well; eg: a pound of cheese weighs as much as a pound of crackers; a pound of hardwood pellets weighs the same as a pound of softwood pellets. Some hardwoods contain more heat (BTU) value per pound than some softwoods; likewise, some softwoods contain more heat value per pound than some hardwoods. So, it truly is species specific.
- Again, relative to weight, some hardwoods have a higher ash content per pound than some softwoods, and vice-versa. So, it truly is species specific.
- Quality of the manufacturing process is highly relative to the quality of the fuel, whether hardwood or softwood. If density isn't achieved; if moisture isn't removed; if fines aren't removed; then the fuel quality will suffer.....it doesn't matter if it's hardwood or softwood. Often some of the highest quality raw materials have been manufactured into the lowest quality pellet (if you could even call it a pellet!).
- Contamination in the form of rock/dirt/sand/ grit/silica will greatly affect the quality no matter what the species, whether hard or softwood.

West Oregon Wood Products can be reached at
 PO Box 249, 2305 2nd Street, Columbia City, Oregon 97018
 phone (503) 397-6707 fax (503) 397-6887 www.wowpellets.com