Setting the Record Straight

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Knowing the facts will help you share our industry’s progress with others

Few industries besides ours provide so many products that are so essential to the health, communication, education, and well being of the world’s population. Because the paper industry utilizes the world’s only truly renewable natural resource — wood and plant fiber — ours is a genuinely sustainable industry.

Of course, those of us who work in the pulp and paper business already realize this. But how do we share this message with the public — especially our children, their teachers, our friends, and our neighbors? When you hear our industry being subjected to unfair criticism, do you wish you had access to some quick and verifiable facts that could help you set the record straight? At one time or another, all of us have probably wished we had a little more information on our side.

Fortunately, there is plenty of data out there that supports our industry. In fact, we have a proud record of efficiency and environmental sensitivity that needs to be told. While TAPPI has a variety of outreach programs designed to do exactly that, there is no substitute for well-informed members who are able to tell the real story about the paper industry. So the next time you find yourself in a position to discuss our industry, you may want to utilize some of the following points.

Sustainable Forestry

Our industry uses sustainable forestry practices to maximize the growth of trees and the health of forests. By nurturing and planting new trees, we manage our nation’s forests efficiently and responsibly. Through selective thinning of timberlands, we are learning how to improve the health of our forests while protecting wildlife habitat — often creating valuable new habitat in the process. We remove dead and dying trees to help protect timberland from forest fires, disease, and insects. Many species of birds and animals, including white-tailed deer and quail, have flourished in managed timberlands. In fact, many sportsmen now consider paper company land to be ideal habitat for a variety of species.

Because young, rapidly-growing forests tend to produce more oxygen than older, slowly-growing forests, good forest management actually improves our atmosphere by maximizing the generation of oxygen and the removal of carbon dioxide. Healthy forests serve as the earth’s “lungs” by cleansing the air and adding water to our atmosphere. The carbon dioxide that is removed from the air is sequestered in the forests’ wood and soil in the form of carbon. It is estimated that every acre of America’s 737 million acres of forestland can store as much as 1252 pounds of carbon a year.

Left unmanaged, those forests would contribute far less to our atmosphere, and would be much more prone to forest fires and insect infestations.

Our industry is looking for new and innovative ways to manage forests and extract forest resources while ensuring renewal and biodiversity. New forest management techniques are designed to mimic natural growth processes and work in harmony with forest cycles.

In their highly acclaimed book, Facts, Not Fear, authors Michael Sanera and Jane S. Shaw recommend that you talk to your children about the role of forestry in our country. Explain to them that when the settlers first arrived in America, they cleared trees to plant farms and to build towns. As more and more people came to live in America, Sanera and Shaw explain, they needed timber to
build their houses and to use as fuel for factories, trains, and ships. Wood was cheap and plentiful, so no one bothered to replant the trees that were harvested. This accounts for the deforestation that occurred in America's early days.

But times have changed. In fact, America's forests have actually grown in size over the past century. We have more trees today than we had in 1920, and some 4 million more trees are planted in America every day (3). Some 80% of these trees are planted by private companies and private timber growers. While our children's textbooks tend to blame the private sector for exploiting forests in the 1800s, they seldom give them credit for their successful reforestation efforts in this century.

Here are some other interesting forest facts you can share:

- The United States has 30% more timber volume per acre than in 1952 (4).
- Every year, more than five trees are planted for every American. Millions more regrow naturally from seeds and sprouts (5).
- More than 10 million acres of old growth forest can be found in Oregon, Washington, and California alone (4).
- Forest growth now exceeds harvest in the U.S. (6).
- The U.S. population has more than tripled since 1900. Even so, our forests are in much better condition than they were a century ago (7).

RECYCLING

The paper industry reuses our natural resources by recycling paper products. In fact, the use of recovered paper in paper manufacturing is becoming so widespread and prevalent that some predict it will soon be the industry's major raw material (8). Nearly 50% of the paper used in America today is recycled back into new paper products. Here in the United States, more than one-third of the fiber needed to produce our paper every year comes from recycled fiber. And by exporting recovered paper to countries with limited forests, we help ensure that people throughout the world have the paper they need while we conserve valuable resources.

Because of the increased rate of recycling, the demand for pulpwood is increasing less rapidly than in previous years, even though paper consumption is increasing. And we are continually developing new technology that allows us to use more types of recovered paper than ever before—from newspapers and corrugated boxes to office paper and magazines. Meanwhile, the paper industry is working with the government and other industries—such as ink and adhesives producers—to develop materials which will make paper products even easier to recycle.

Children and the general public enjoy recycling because it is something they can do to contribute to our environmental well-being. We must keep the benefits of recycling in perspective, however. Some people believe that recycling will “save” trees. But, as Sanera and Shaw (9) point out, the trees that would be “saved” are usually those planted specifically for paper. Explain to your children that much of our paper comes from these trees (not from tropical rainforests or national parks, as so many people fear). While recycling is a good way to use our natural resources wisely, it has its limitations. For instance, it doesn’t do any good to manufacture recycled materials that are so costly to produce that no one will buy them.

Here are some more facts about recycling:

- In 1994, the global paper recycling rate reached nearly 40% (10).
- Every day, Americans recover over 200 million pounds of paper an all-time high (11).
- Six out of every ten newspapers sold in America are recovered for recycling (11).
this “bonus” energy even provides supplemental electricity to the surrounding community.

Over the past 20 years, the pulp and paper industry has become remarkably more efficient. We have reduced total energy consumption per ton of paper by 18.7% and slashed oil consumption by a stunning 67.9%, as self-generated energy has met more and more of our paper manufacturing needs. In 1972, 22.2% of the total energy consumed by the paper industry was provided by oil. By 1995, that figure had declined to just 5.8% (15).

Furthermore, our papermaking processes are becoming cleaner as we continually develop new technology for reducing air and water emissions. Through process and technology modifications, our industry has been successful in reducing the formation and discharge of chlorinated organic compounds. Since 1985, when trace levels of dioxin were first discovered in pulp mill effluent, dioxin levels have plummeted by a whopping 94%. And emissions of SO₂ (sulfur dioxide) have fallen by more than 30% just since 1980 (16).

The industry uses forests resources wisely as well as efficiently. Cellulose is used to make paper and other products such as rayon, while the oils and resins are extracted to make products such as paint thinners and detergents. We even utilize the bark and sawdust to generate energy to run the mill, as well as for products such as garden mulch. Because of this high degree of utilization, we are able to use nearly 100% of every harvested tree, so virtually nothing is wasted.

FIBER SUPPLY

Because of increasing restrictions on land use, the industry is becoming more creative in how it uses its land. Scientists are discovering new ways to genetically engineer trees to make them stronger, faster-growing, more resistant to disease, and higher in fiber content. Timber company scientists are developing trees they believe will mature in 10 years or less, compared to the 30 years it takes now to grow a normal tree to maturity. These new “supertrees” will help ensure that our growing population will have the paper it needs in the future.

Of increasing importance today are fiber plantations—land planted solely for fiber production. The fiber yield on these plantations is so high that they provide 29% of the world’s fiber even though they account for only a very small percentage of the world’s forests (13). Plantations are efficient (both in terms of care and maintenance and land configuration), the fiber they produce is plentiful and uniform, and they can be located near mills and transportation facilities. By growing fiber in plantations, companies are able to control the genetic material, thereby making optimum use of the area’s growing conditions. In theory, the world’s demand for wood fiber could be supplied by a high-yield plantation of only 40 million hectares—an area less than 40 times as large as the current area of high-yield plantations (14).

ENERGY AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Paper manufacturing today requires fewer resources, such as water and energy, than it did in the past. Over half of our energy needs are now met by using self-generated and residue sources of energy. Moreover, at many mills, recycling is an essential fiber source for papermaking.

- One-third of the material used to make grocery bags is recovered paper (11).
- Americans recycle more paper than is sent to landfills (12).

PRODUCTS FOR BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

It is almost impossible to imagine life without paper. For 2000 years, paper has provided man an irreplaceable tool for communication and education. From stationery, newspapers and books to maps, globes and photographs, paper is essential for the transmission and storage of knowledge and ideas. We also depend on paper for food packaging, shipping, medical and sanitary supplies, recreation, and finance. It has been estimated that over 10,000 different products are made from paper, and in many cases there are simply no feasible substitutes.

Our industry also plays an important role in the economy. Nearly 1-1/2 million Americans are employed in the paper industry, and the annual payroll for these workers is US$ 6 billion. But that’s just part of the story. Consider these other facts:

- The forest industry ranks among the top 10 employers in 40 of our 50 states (3).
- It is estimated that at least 3.5 million people world wide were employed in the pulp, paper and converting industries from 1987-1990 (17).
As you can see, the pulp and paper industry not only plays a huge role in the world’s economy, but it also provides a countless array of products that vastly improve our quality of life. Along the way, our businesses have made tremendous strides in developing cleaner, more efficient technologies that benefit our environment. All of these accomplishments have contributed to the legacy of papermaking in this century, and all are part of a story that’s worth telling. Armed with the facts, that’s just what we should do.

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**LITERATURE CITED**