Consumers Push For Reycled Paper

Erik Olson, AP Writer

LONGVIEW, Wash. (AP) — For retailers, the "100 percent recycled" label on a product is a badge of honor declaring their civic responsibility. For consumers, it's a status symbol showing their environmental awareness.

For manufacturers, such as Longview Fibre Paper and Packaging Inc., the label is a gold mine to grow their business.

Sales of the company's newest lightweight kraft paper, the environmentally friendly FibreGreen, have been growing since it hit the market in March, Fibre marketing director Matt Elhardt said.

After shedding 40 percent of its work force beginning in late 2007, Fibre's sales have quickened this year, largely due to a jump in orders for container board used to manufacture boxes. The company has added about 40 jobs since last spring and now employs about 1,040.

The company hopes FibreGreen, which is made entirely with recycled paper and is used for grocery bags and fast-food sacks, will help it grow.

Recycled paper is often relatively thin and weak, but Fibre developed technology to maintain quality in tests, Elhardt said.

Fibre obtains 40 percent of the material used to make FibreGreen from paper recycled by consumers. Most of the rest comes from paper products rejected by the mill.

FibreGreen is the type of product that customers are clamoring for these days, Elhardt said. This spring, Texas-based Whole Foods Market became the first grocery retailer nationwide to switch to 100 percent recycled bags. Starbucks is pushing to increase its recycled packaging, as is the nation's largest retailer, Wal-Mart.

"Companies now are seeing this sea change in the market," Elhardt said.

FibreGreen will help Fibre keep its business more stable because it's a product that will have reliable customers, he said. The fast-food industry, in particular, weathered the recession better than most, Elhardt said.

FibreGreen is manufactured on the company's No. 12 paper machine, which produces about 400 tons of paper per day. The 100 percent recycled paper was about one-fifth of the machine's September output — nearly 20 times higher than its March debut.

"It's really over the last few months we've seen an exceptional amount of growth,"

Elhardt said.

New products will help keep jobs, Elhardt said. The company also is developing FibreLok, a paper product used to make fruit boxes. FibreLok contains no petroleum-based wax coat, so it can be recycled, he said.

Fibre has long sold bag paper that includes recycled material mixed with wood pulp. When Toronto-based Brookfield Management Associates bought the company two years ago, Fibre officials identified recycled products as a market with the potential to grow, Elhardt said.

Bags represent about 20 percent of Fibre's kraft paper business, and they weather poor economic times because they carry food, Elhardt said. "Food is generally a good market to be in.

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