



Our partners: [Dothan Eagle](#) | [WMBB](#)
Sunday, June 8, 2008 |
[Bonifay, FL](#) 97° Feels Like: 98° Partly Cloudy

Green Circle working with local tree farmers as operation gets under way



Mark Skinner/Floridan

A loader sorts trees before loading them onto log trucks.

Text size: [small](#) / [medium](#) / [large](#)

By [DEBORAH BUCKHALTER](#)

Published: June 7, 2008

As Green Circle BioEnergy completes its first tree-cutting in Jackson County, the company has contracts lined up with four or five others here and more in surrounding counties, according to Danny Duce, Green Circle's assistant manager in wood procurement.

John Alter, the first tree farmer in Jackson County to have supplied the company with wood, said he's been pleased with how the job has been handled.

Gay's Logging of Alford harvested his trees for Green Circle and the crew has done exactly what it was authorized to do on his property, Alter reports.

Working on a 40-acre and a 20-acre tract of his land near Bascom, the crew has been respectful of the land and

is using top-notch equipment, he said.

“I’m familiar with Gay’s Logging; it’s one of the best in the area, so that shows me that Green Circle is doing things right,” Alter commented. “It gives me comfort and confidence and I think other land owners can be assured that they’re going to not only get the best logging experience, which translates into profit, but their land is being respected.”

The logger thinned every fifth row on the two tracts, and separated larger trees for sale to a buyer who can use those for lumber and pay a higher price for the more valuable wood.

Green Circle is taking the smaller trees, those that measure four-to-eight inches in diameter, to chip and crush into flakes. The flakes will then be bound together into small wood pellets for use by European clients in the production of alternative energy sources.

The loggers are using three main pieces of equipment in what was the first thinning of Alter’s crop of pine stands.

The feller-buncher cuts the trees and grips four to six of them together, then lays them down in bunches for the skidder.

The skidder has a grappling hook that grabs the bundles and drags them to the loading deck.

At that point, the loader’s extendible grappling arm takes over to sort the trees into piles based on their size and/or condition.

Deformed, diseased, and small tress are loaded on trucks bound for the pellet plant.

The larger ‘super pulp’; and ‘chip and saw’ trees go to different buyers and are sold for Alter by Green Circle as part of the contract terms.

The trees are cut at the base, with the stumps left to deteriorate over time.

The trees being thinned for use by Green Circle are typically 12 to 15 years of age, and the thinning makes it possible for the remaining trees to grow bigger and better than if they had to keep competing with the others for sunlight and nutrients from the soil.

Alter said Green Circle is paying him “right in the middle of the range” of the going rate for his trees. He said their new presence in the market is good news for him and for other tree farmers who have seen prices gradually diminish as the number of competitors has shrunk over the years in a slumping market. At times, it has been hard to even find a pulp market for what is considered “waste wood” like limbs and undersized, deformed and diseased trees.

“It’s a new player opening new markets,” Alter said. “I read an editorial in a logger publication recently which says the northwest Florida and southwest Alabama area could become the wood pellet epicenter of the nation. The biggest benefit for our community is that this means an added value to the county. The trees are going to a member of the local business community generating jobs, and the money is going to be staying right here circulating in the local economy.”

Alter said that, over the course of roughly two weeks, the logger moved about 10 loads a day out of his property for Green Circle. Hauling duties were split among three trucks bound for the company’s plant near Cottdale. A few other loads were sent to different buyers.

Alter said this is the first but not the last cutting Green Circle will make on his land, and he predicts that the company will forge many more long-term relationships with other tree farmers in this area.

