

Chipping Away at

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Recycling Market

Loads of potential for firm that turns pallets into wood chips

Story and photo
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BELMONT — Don Budden's problem isn't a lack of business.

The North Star Industrial Recycling Inc. general manager has something else on his mind.

Budden, in business with partners Jack Dykxhoorn, Lloyd Boughner and Don Matthews, sees so much potential...and that's kind of the problem.

North Star takes wood pallets — used industrial skids — and turns them into wood chips suitable for decorative garden edging and livestock bedding.

In fact, the three largest Holstein sales arenas in the area use these chips and local dairy farmers are North Star's main customers.

The farmer calls ahead, pulls into the yard (acres of pallets stacked the height of a small house) and backs up his truck under a huge mulching machine.

One of the five full-time staffers feeds whole pallets through, 300 an hour, and the end truckload of product (after a magnet has sucked out the nails) is a thick, aromatic mixture of straw-like particles containing 40 per cent hardwood and 60 per cent softwood.

The pallets that are reusable are sold to another operation here, North Star Pallets, a separate business.

Farmers like the chip product.



Don Budden of North Star Industrial Recycling in Belmont turns wood pallets into barnyard wood chips. Local dairy farmers like to use the product to bed down animals and Budden hopes to cash in on the three-way recycling aspect: from pallets to chips; and then used chipped into the fields.

It's natural, recycled, seems to keep down fly larvae, soaks up urine and the cost is reasonable compared to traditional straw bedding. In addition, when farmers have finished with the bedding, they can spread it on the land; thus the recycled pallet is recycled a second time.

What to do with all this potential?

They're experimenting with how to package the slightly larger landscaping chips; they're experimenting with poultry and swine bedding;

they're trying footpaths for pig your-own operators; they're looking at compressing pallets into fireplace logs...they're wondering about the use of crushed pallets for growing shiitake mushrooms...and how about 50-pound bags of chips for hobby horse owners?.

What about the latest environmental buzzword — composting? Budden sees incredible potential with backyard composters and his chips.

Budden works out of a trailer

behind the old Borden Ice Cream building which he and some other partners rent to 15 tenants.

It looks like he moved in that morning. The phone's ringing off the hook, FM radio is blaring outside where workers are tearing apart skids and the notepad Budden uses to scribble his ideas, names and phone numbers is jammed full.

He's going to make a couple of presentations this week and try to land some big contracts with industrial pallet-using companies. If landfill sites raise fees for pallet dumping, another pallet source will open for North Star. As Reeve of Westminster Town, Budden's ear is close to the wall when it comes to municipal leanings and changes.

As a politician he knows anything with one of the three environmental R's can be wildly

successful. As former owner of a Glanworth car repair shop he also knows North Star is a new kind of business and finding the niche and developing that market is partly education, experience and entrepreneurial skills.

Budden gets a phone call. The caller, a man, asks if he has any sawdust.

"No," responds Budden. Well, how about shavings?

"No."

Well, what does he sell, anyway?

Responds Budden, "it's totally different, it's chips. You have to come in and see it for yourself."

Budden, waving his arm around his desk piled high with information, talks about how capital investment intensive this business is and how when you say North Star you're talking about the "realm of a lot of things."