



SAFER Southern Bioeconomy Case Study Series

GEORGIA CENTER OF INNOVATION FOR ENERGY: BIOMASS ONE STOP SHOP

By Linda Hoke

“Georgia grows wood like the Midwest grows corn,”

says Jill Stuckey, director of the Georgia Center of Innovation for Energy.¹

In fact, with nearly 25 million acres of forests in Georgia, the state ranks second in the nation, behind only Oregon, in terms of forest acreage. In contrast to Oregon, where many of the forests are on federal land, 90 percent of Georgia's forests are privately owned.

Unfortunately, the forestry industry has been hit hard in recent years with the pulp and paper industry on the decline and housing starts slumping to record lows. Between 1998 and 2008, timberland growth in Georgia exceeded removals by an average of 546 million cubic feet per year – and this was added to an already considerable standing inventory.

It's not surprising then that a desire to find new markets for Georgia's wood products was a key impetus behind the creation of the Center of Innovation for Energy and one of its core services, the Biomass One Stop Shop.

The Biomass One Stop Shop was created in 2007, followed by the Center of Innovation for Energy in 2008. The latter is one of six Centers of Innovation that are part of the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Each center is designed to accelerate the growth of technology-oriented companies in its particular industry cluster. In addition to energy, these clusters are: agribusiness, aerospace, the life sciences, logistics and manufacturing.

The department describes the commonalities of the centers, noting that each:

- Provides direct access to university and technical college applied research, commercialization resources, technology connections, matching grant funds, potential investor networks and key government agencies.
- Connects client companies with industry-specific experts who are on the leading edge of technology and new ideas.
- Cuts red tape, streamlines connections and seeks technology solutions to industry-led challenges.



in bioenergy and, at the same time, a need to tap into other resources for help in responding to this interest.

At its most basic, the One Stop Shop brings new and expanding renewable energy businesses together with government and academic resources that can help them get off the ground. Pre-screened businesses are invited to a monthly meeting of the One Stop Shop panel. As shown in Figure 1, 14 organizations are represented on the panel, including state and federal agencies, as well as academic partners.

As Stuckey explains, "We get everyone that a company needs to deal with in the same room at the same time."

Because many business plans are confidential, each invited business has a one-hour private time slot on the agenda, beginning with an opening presentation of approximately 15 minutes. After a brief period for questions, the meeting progresses in a "round-robin" fashion, with each agency or organization in turn offering suggestions and indicating how they can help. Company representatives are given a flash drive at the end of the meeting that includes panelists' contact information, as well as relevant permitting and resource information.

The idea for the Biomass One Stop Shop grew out of the enthusiastic business response to bioenergy conferences held in the state in 2006 and 2007. The first Georgia Bioenergy Conference in 2006 attracted more than 800 participants. The event was expanded in 2007 to cover the Southeast.

Jill Stuckey, then the state's director of alternative fuels, saw an opportunity to capitalize on the growing interest

Stuckey estimates that the support provided by the One Stop Shop enables companies "to get the shovel in the ground anywhere from three months to a year sooner," than they would without this assistance.

While the panel generally focuses on the positive, in some cases the panel's help means providing a reality check and gently discouraging a business from pursuing a questionable project. Such was the case with several

biodiesel proposals around the time the biodiesel market had fallen precipitously.

“There is a wealth of knowledge sitting at that table,” commented Mike Peek, plant manager for Tennessee-based Lancaster Energy Partners, one of the more than 300 companies and \$2 billion in announced projects that have gone through the One Stop Shop since its creation four years ago.²

Lancaster Energy Partners is retrofitting an old power plant on the grounds of a former textile mill to produce biomass-based fuel. Plans call for the Thomaston, Ga., plant to be up and running by May 2012, creating approximately 20 jobs and providing enough electricity to power about 10,000 homes.

Peek speaks highly of his experience with the One Stop Shop.

“First and foremost, it was obvious that they wanted us,” Peek says. “It’s a really great way to attract business. I have done this since the 1990s and have never seen anything like it. I’m working in four to five other states. I wish every state did it.”

“A great networking tool,” were the words that John Campbell of Rollcast Energy used to describe the One Stop Shop.³ Campbell’s project, known as Piedmont Green Power, is now under construction in Barnesville, Ga. The 54-megawatt biomass plant is expected to supply power to approximately 50,000 homes when it is completed in summer 2012.

In addition to 30 jobs at the power plant itself, an additional 300 jobs are anticipated relative to supplying fuel to the plant. In fact, Campbell credited the One Stop Shop with helping to market the project by spreading the word to potential suppliers.

While these examples are aimed at providing local electricity, the One Stop Shop has also assisted projects that create local jobs but aim at overseas energy markets.

“The lowest-hanging fruit right now is due to European mandates,” Stuckey says, referring to renewable portfolio standards for biomass. “I’m spending a lot of time in Sweden helping them meet their mandates, while providing a market for Georgia products. I think this will continue to be a big target for the next five to 10 years.”

Among the European projects the One Stop Shop has assisted is Georgia Biomass in Waycross, Ga. Georgia Biomass, which opened in May 2011, is one of the world’s largest wood pellet plants. Owned by German utility provider RWE, the plant is producing wood pellets for use in power plants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom, with expected expansion to plants in Germany and Italy in the future. Meanwhile, 85 jobs have been created locally.

In addition to serving as a direct resource to businesses, the One Stop Shop has had the added benefit of

increasing information sharing and coordination among resource providers. Member Nathan McClure with the Georgia Forestry Commission sums up the benefits this way:⁴

“The most obvious benefit is that it helps companies access information they need to make decisions. So, if they build a facility,

the One Stop Shop has helped them make that decision and helped them get it developed faster. If they do not build, they have not wasted more expense in extended investigations.”

“My favorite benefit of the One Stop Shop is that it allows the agencies to both make contact with company representatives and provide agencies information about the companies, so that they can manage and prioritize their resources and time. This saves the state and federal agencies money.”

“The One Stop Shop provides a time and format for agency staff to interact, learn from each other, and coordinate assisting actions to companies.”

Craig Scroggs from the U.S. Department of Agriculture

“We get everyone that a company needs to deal with in the same room at the same time.”

Jill Stuckey

Director, Georgia Center of Innovation for Energy

adds: "From my perspective, it has been a wonderful example of state and federal agencies working together to support a growing industry within the state. I have learned from the best people in the state on a wide range of biofuels and that has helped me in reviewing and understanding proposals that are submitted for USDA funding."⁵

"I have done this since the 1990s and have never seen anything like it...I wish every state did it."

Mike Peek
Plant Manager, Lancaster
Energy Partners

Indeed, Jill Stuckey says that the One Stop Shop "has become one of the most educated alternative energy groups" in the region because of this interactivity and information sharing.

Stuckey offers the following lessons to states that are considering something similar to the One Stop Shop:

- Be cognizant of your panelists' time. In Georgia, this means postponing meetings if there are not at least five companies ready to present and rotating meeting locations to different parts of the state to share the travel burden.
- Work with partners, such as your state's Farm Bureau and forestry association, to provide free meeting space and build relationships, but be clear that business meetings are confidential and don't include outside partners.
- Provide time during lunch and other breaks for panelists to interact informally in order to facilitate connections and enable them to work out problems on other fronts.

¹Jill Stuckey phone interview with Linda Hoke, Southern Growth Policies Board, August 22, 2011.

²Mike Peek phone interview with Linda Hoke, Southern Growth Policies Board, August 25, 2011.

³John Campbell phone interview with Linda Hoke, Southern Growth Policies Board, September 6, 2011.

⁴Nathan McClure e-mail to Jill Stuckey, Georgia Center of Innovation for Energy, August 25, 2011.

⁵Craig Scroggs e-mail to Jill Stuckey, Georgia Center of Innovation for Energy, August 25, 2011.



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SAFER's vision is to position the South as the national leader in renewable energy production. SAFER works toward this vision by providing strategic leadership to the agricultural and forestry sectors in advancing renewable energy initiatives. These initiatives focus on better policy, targeted research, efficient commercialization, and outreach and education.

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