



Understanding Forest and Wood Certification Labels

by Jeff Stringer

As you walk through big box lumber and hardware stores or look through your mail and magazines you will notice a number of certification labels related to forestry, most commonly Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). If you look closely at these labels and the logos, you will see “Certified Sourcing,” “100% from Well Managed Forests” or similar statements. Understanding what these descriptive terms mean can help you understand how forest product certification works.

SFI Certified Sourcing

This label indicates that the product has come from a mill that has an SFI Certificate. As a part of the SFI program the mill agrees to promote logger training, provide information to landowners to help them protect threatened and endangered species, proper regeneration and use of BMPs and other good forestry practices. If the mill provides or helps ensure that these activities are occurring in the area from which they are procuring wood or fiber, they are able to label their product “SFI Certified Sourcing.” Generally SFI industries in a state will work together to make sure they are providing or satisfying the SFI requirements. The SFI label does not indicate that the wood comes from a certified woodland. If your woodland is in Kentucky (or any U.S. state in North America), you are growing and providing SFI mills with certified sourced wood whether you know it or not.



harvested from FSC certified woodlands. The remaining wood must come from what FSC calls “control wood.” Control wood comes from an area that the mill can prove has a low risk of being harvested illegally; infringing on civil or traditional rights; being harvested from a special or rare forest; being harvested on land that will be converted to other uses; or includes genetically modified trees.



Tracking Certified Wood

One interesting point when discussing the labeling of certified wood products is that these labels may not mean that the products they are associated with contain any wood that actually came from certified woodland. The following is an example of what can happen when an FSC Mixed Sources label is used. A mill buys 100,000 board feet of FSC oak logs. As those logs are received at the mill they are entered into what is called a credit account. The FSC logs are then sawed into lumber and sold without a label. Later the mill gets an order for FSC certified red oak. The mill will be able to fill that order (up to 100,000 board feet) with non-certified red oak lumber and label it as FSC Mixed Source as long as the lumber used was sawn from controlled wood logs. The reason this practice is allowed is that there is no difference in the wood properties of certified and uncertified logs. The difference is in how the woodlands the lumber was harvested from were managed and logged, not in the wood properties themselves.

These examples show how each woodland owner plugs into the certified wood network. Obviously providing certified sourced wood for SFI or controlled wood for FSC is not a problem. However having your woods ATFS or FSC certified puts you in position to garner more attention from mills and buyers based on their demand for a particular label.

SFI Certified Chain of Custody

This label indicates that a percentage of the wood that is in the product represents timber coming from either an SFI or an American Tree Farm certified woodlands. The remainder of the wood in the product must meet the certified fiber source criteria above.



FSC 100%

This label indicates that all of the wood that goes into the product represents timber or fiber coming from an FSC certified forest or woodlands.



FSC Mixed Sources

This label generally indicates that at least 70 percent of the wood that goes into the product represents wood that has been

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