

## Doing the right thing with lovely lumber

By Eric Olson

Wednesday, January 3, 2007

The idea of paying a bit more for products that help us live healthier lives is no longer foreign to most people. As proof we need only look to the growing interest in fresh, locally produced fruits and vegetables and the rise in sales of organic milk. Some people take the next step and choose products that do not yield personal benefits so directly, but do favor producers over middlemen (Fair Trade coffee) or are considered better for the environment (recycled paper). How about wood used in furniture and construction? Are there ways to encourage logging companies to minimize harm to both local and tropical forests?

Roberta Durschlag of Waban asked just this question recently when she and her husband, Mark, set out to remodel their back porch. They hoped to use a beautiful tropical wood called Honduran Mahogany but hoped *not* to support companies that are cutting forests willy nilly. So they did some research and found that there is indeed such a thing as “sustainably harvested” wood. In a sustainable logging operation, trees must be cut and processed in such a way that a forest’s soils, wildlife, waterways, and other essential features are only temporarily disturbed by selective cutting and carefully constructed logging trails. Trees are big plants, of course, so any logging operation results in some damage. But by inviting foresters and ecologists from the Forest Stewardship Council and other groups to observe a logging operation, companies can prove that they are following best-practice rules. For this whole notion to work, of course, homeowners and businesses must then favor these firms with their purchasing decisions.

Consulting the Green Decade Coalition/Newton, Ms Durschlag learned several dealers of certified wood in this region, but it turned out that only one – Sterritt Lumber of Watertown – was willing to deal with a residential customer. Though it cost significantly more than standard lumber, the Durschlags chose the certified product. Knowing that their wood came from a certified forest should lend it a special glow as they enjoy their porch for years to come.

The Green Decade Coalition/Newton would like to hear similar good news stories from other local buyers and sellers of certified lumber. [info@greendecade.org](mailto:info@greendecade.org).

*Eric Olson, PhD, Adjunct Professor of Ecology in the Sustainable International Development Program at the Heller School, Brandeis University, is Chair of the Energy Committee of the Green Decade Coalition.*