

Market for peat product steadily grows

By JEANNE SCHRAM

American Peat Technology (APT) would not be in Aitkin County were it not for Aitkin County Growth. It would have been located somewhere else.

That's what APT President Doug Green said about the company which originally came here from Siren, Wis., in 2001. Aitkin County Growth was also there to help when a new company formed in 2003.

APT is all about peat (an accumulation of partially decayed vegetation). It produces peat-based products for the legume inoculant industry.

Since 2003, American Peat Technology has grown significantly – from four employees to 17 (plus seasonal workers); and 1.8 million pounds of finished product to 12 million pounds per year.

It is owned by 15 partners – 11 local individuals and four corporations (Aitkin County Growth is one of the corporations).

American Peat Technology started in a 10,000 square foot building. In 2006, it added another 10,000 square feet and in 2009, added 15,000 square feet to accommodate a wood burner.

The wood burner was built to reduce the cost of propane needed to dry the peat. The company

“No chemicals are added to the product we manufacture here other than fine ground limestone,” Green said.

Raw peat contains about 70 percent moisture. It is reduced by between 35 percent to 45 percent in the first drying. The second drying stage brings the moisture down to between 9 percent and 14 percent.

APT sells its product to three major inoculant companies. These companies spray a bacteria on the peat granules, making an organic fertilizer. It is ultimately sold to farmers to help soybeans and other legume crops grow better, reducing the need for commercial fertilizers.

“We sell 95 percent of the ‘carrier’ used by the inoculant industry,” Green said.

APT also developed two types of APTsorb, a peat product that removes dissolved heavy metals from both water and soil applications. More APTsorb products are under development that target mercury and sulphates.

The future

“This company has the potential to grow into two or possibly three locations in the Aitkin County area,” Green said. “And we look forward to employing more people from Aitkin County.”



Peat after the first drying process and formed into pellets.



This is the raw peat that arrives at the plant.

Aitkin County Growth holds permits on 320 acres of peatland where APT obtains the raw product.

“Peat is renewable,” he said, “but it takes a lot of time.”

The company is one year into a 10-year project to convert hay into peat, although Green said the 320 acres will provide peat for the next 70 to 80 years.

went from using seven and one half loads of propane per month to one and a half loads. The wood burner was built with local help and the ingenuity of APT's own employees.

Product line

The primary end product at American Peat Technology is BioAPT – peat that has been dried, pelletized, crushed and screened into a fine granule.



Plant Manager Tom Plagman shows the finished product.