



Contact: Will Sagar, Executive Director, [will.sagar@serdc.org](mailto:will.sagar@serdc.org), [www.serdc.org](http://www.serdc.org)

## **North Carolina Recycling Creates Regional Job Growth During Down Economy**

Recycling is widely thought of as a way to reduce trash, but it's less frequently considered an economic catalyst. The recycling industry directly supports North Carolina-based manufacturers by providing recycled feedstock for their manufacturing processes. North Carolina is well positioned to take advantage of the job creating nature of a robust local recycling infrastructure. The state boasts strong markets for paper, plastic and metal and its location provides easy access to regional markets in neighboring states. The plastic that went into yesterday's bottle could be feeding job growth at the PET recycling plant in Fayetteville and the nursery containers that were once headed to the landfill could be spurring job growth in Eden.

"The demand for recycled materials is growing because manufacturers understand that it is a dependable, green, affordable material for making new consumer goods," explains the Southeast Recycling Development Council (SERDC) Board of Directors Chairman Stephanie Baker. "Many people may not recognize it, but their home and office is full of products made from recycled goods. It just makes good business sense."

### **Boosting Recycling Rates will Boost Economic Return**

Will Sagar, Executive Director for SERDC says that Southeastern political and business leaders are interested in learning more about that business sense and how it can help them create local jobs. "In a study released in 2010, SERDC determined that more than 30 North Carolina industrial facilities depend on recycled feedstock to make new consumer goods," says Sagar. The report finds that those companies collectively employ more than 2,800 persons and see a sales volume exceeding \$1.1 billion per year. Regionally, 206 Southeastern industrial facilities depend on recycled feedstock. Those companies collectively employ more than 47,525 persons and see a sales volume exceeding \$29.4 billion per year. Sagar continues, "That's not a revenue stream, that's a revenue river."

Demand for recycled material is increasing and the resulting jobs are encouraging to local decision makers. What's needed? More recycled cans, bottles, and paper products to help fuel that local need for material. Sagar points out that growing demand may outstrip local supply. "We are eager to support community collection programs to help increase recycling rates."

### **A 5 Percent Job Growth Rate in this Economy?**

---

**Eleven states united to develop and promote sustainable recycling programs.**

**Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,  
Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia**



In addition to the manufacturing jobs supported by recycled feedstock, a recent study by the North Carolina Division of Environmental Assistance and Outreach finds that more than 15,000 North Carolinians are employed by statewide recycling companies specifically. Those jobs add up to an impressive payroll of more than \$395 million.

State officials say recycling continues to be a driver of economic activity and job growth for the state. Scott Mouw, State Recycling Program Director details, "Successive studies from 1994 – 2010 have shown consistent increases in recycling employment in the Tar Heel state. Our latest study documents that despite the deepest recession in decades, recycling jobs in North Carolina grew by nearly five percent in the last two years."

### **Leveraging the Power of North Carolina Businesses**

In 2011 alone, North Carolina saw significant investments in private recycling facilities, growing the number of jobs in the sector and strengthening the overall material processing infrastructure within the state. For instance, Unifi invested \$8 million in its new REPVEVE Recycling center in Yadkinville. The plant adds at least 25 jobs and has the capacity to recycle 400 million bottles into fiber each year. Similarly, Reflective Recycling constructed a state-of-the-art facility in Wilson to clean glass cullet, which will feed the nearby Verallia bottle manufacturing plant. The electronics recycling industry continues to expand in North Carolina, as well. A new processing line in Badin and a \$30 million upgrade to a recycling plant in Madison contributes to the investments, which over the past three years total over \$50 million and supports the employment of over 300 North Carolinians.

Traditionally recovered materials like plastic, metals, fiber and glass, weren't the only ones seeing expansion in 2011. Almost every major paving company in North Carolina invested in their processes in order to include post-consumer asphalt shingles in their paving mix. Additionally, Barham Farms in Archer Lodge invested in the state's first anaerobic digester for organic materials, which includes food scraps.

To foster expansion of the recycling economy within the Tar Heel State, the North Carolina Recycling Business Assistance Center works with businesses to start, grow, or relocate recycling businesses within North Carolina. They also provide, based on funding availability, small grants to North Carolina recycling businesses. In 2011, the state leveraged \$750,000 in grant funds against more than \$3.1 million in private investment by North Carolina businesses. If the 2011 projects perform as planned, they will create more than 180,000 tons of additional recycling capacity within the state, further supporting economic expansion and job creation.

### **Impressive Track Record with Opportunities for Growth**

As we've seen, North Carolina is well positioned to grow its recycling sector. The state benefits from strong access to recycling collection programs *and* healthy recycling markets. For instance, the largest PET recycling plant in North America is located in Fayetteville, North Carolina and at least 95 percent of North Carolina residents have access to some type of plastic bottle recycling. However, despite the widespread access, close markets, and a statewide landfill ban on plastic bottles, there is ample room for growth: over 75% of PET plastic bottles are still being disposed of in North Carolina landfills. Instead of paying to dispose of this material, it could be directed toward domestic job creation.

### **Economic Answers Found in Bottles, Cans and Paper**

North Carolina is a key player in the regional recycling framework. The state pulls recovered materials from neighboring states and benefits from initiatives to advance recycling collection programs in communities across the Southeast. The existence of such a healthy recycling industry within the state of North Carolina further underscores the need to invest

---

**Eleven states united to develop and promote sustainable recycling programs.**

**Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,  
Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia**



in collection programs within the state to maximize the amount of local material feeding North Carolina industries. Even small gains make a big difference. According to a 2006 study on the Economics of Recycling by the College of Charleston, it's estimated that if North Carolina recycled just 10 percent more each year, residents could expect to see a state-wide job growth of over 1,600 jobs and \$78 million dollars in personal income. The state would receive an estimated additional \$3.6 million dollars in state tax revenue.

Some of the nation's largest recycling end users call our region and North Carolina specifically, home. Unfortunately, many have to look beyond the Southeast to find materials, while we are paying to dispose of these same commodities in landfills across North Carolina. By strengthening local programs, and collaborating across state lines, we can build effective recycling collection systems that provide essential feedstock to manufacturers who employ 10s of thousands of people in the Southeast, many of whom live right here in North Carolina.

###

*The Southeast Recycling Development Council is a 501-c-3 dedicated to uniting industry, government and non-government organizations to promote sustainable recycling in the Southeast. SERDC's study on the demand for recycled feedstock can be found at [www.serdc.org/regionalresources](http://www.serdc.org/regionalresources).*

---

**Eleven states united to develop and promote sustainable recycling programs.**

**Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,  
Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia**