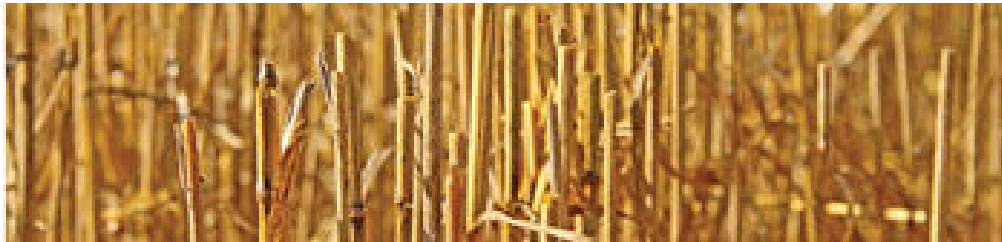


# New Ways to Add Value to Wheat

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A wheat field normally produces 100 lb. of straw per bushel. If a field produces 40 bu. per acre, that equates to 4,000 lb. of wheat straw per acre.

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## Technology expands market possibilities and profit potential for straw

Typically baled, burned or left behind, the wheat straw market is evolving. Technology breakthroughs combined with sustainability awareness and the renewable movement have elevated wheat straw and biomass as an ingredient in a host of commercial products. Finding the market based on region is challenging, but the profit possibilities are slowly opening.

“Paper, packaging, tissue, fuel and many other products have wheat straw as a significant ingredient,” says Aaron Harries, vice president of research and operations for Kansas Wheat.

In 2009, Heath Van Eaton founded WyoComp, a company that converts ag residues into high value commodities. Through a process Van Eaton invented, WyoComp manufactures agri-fiber and plastic composite building materials, such as fencing, structural components and recycled plastic, using wheat straw as reinforcement.

“We’ve advanced to the point where we put the material into any plastic parts, even for computers, smartphones and automobiles,”

Van Eaton says.

WyoComp is currently looking at pilot plant feasibility studies. The Cheyenne, Wyo.-based company also runs a custom harvesting business in western Kansas and Colorado to expand wheat straw sources and bring in straw at a lower transport rate while paying farmers a stronger price.

“We’re on location in wheat fields to foster relationships and provide technical consulting so growers understand how much residue can be removed,” Van Eaton notes.

Twenty years ago, when Van Eaton first developed biomass into a polymer filler and brought samples to distributors or lumberyards, he was ridiculed.

**Sustainability awareness has changed the attitude toward wheat straw.** “The laughing is over,” Van Eaton notes. “People recognize the better tensile strength and durability of the products. Our long-term plan is to boost the ag industry by creating a secondary revenue stream for farmers.”

In 2015, Kimberly-Clark Professional launched GreenHarvest, a line of tissue and towel products that contain wheat straw or other alternative fibers, intended for commercial customers, such as office buildings, universities, airports and sports venues.

“Increasing the use of plant fibers in our products supports our commitment to reduce pressure on natural forests,” says Ben Jarrett, North American sustainability leader at Kimberly-Clark Professional. “We are pioneering a new approach to sustainable fiber sourcing and delivering products with the quality and performance customers expect from our trusted brands like Kleenex and Scott.”

David Kreider, a custom harvester in Candler County, Ga., sells wheat straw to Kimberly-Clark. “We’re able to offer value to some farmers for straw that would otherwise go up in smoke, and they’re glad for that extra income,” he notes.

Kreider first began selling straw for erosion control. He built a processing machine converting large square bales into small square bales and wholesaled the bales. That was the bulk of his market until newer combines began fine-chopping straw. Kimberly-Clark is able to use the shorter fibers in its production process.

“We’re excited about new ways to add value to wheat,” says Harries with Kansas Wheat. “The more we can get from wheat straw products, the better the bottom line for wheat farmers.”

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