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**Enviva begins building start-up inventory**By: Royce Armstrong
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 Air brakes squalled as a steady line of tractor-trailer trucks lurched to a momentary stop on the scales before moving on. The flow of wood through the new Enviva pellet mill has begun with trucks loaded with smaller and low value logs rolling into the storage yard where grapples pluck the wood from the trailers and add them to the growing inventory of wood as the plant prepares to ramp up operations.

 As a Quality Technician, Angela Crawlet, a George County native who spent the last eight months working at the Enviva plant near Cottondale, Florida, records each weight, smiles and waves each driver on with the words, “See you on the way out.” Crawlet spent the time in Cottondale training on the latest technology in scale equipment and gaining experience in assessing the loads. Enviva is committed to using low value wood, such as treetops, smaller trees and materials that would otherwise be left as debris after harvests are made for pulp wood or saw lumber.

 True to Enviva’s commitment to hire locally, over 50% of the plant’s employees reside in George County.

 Enviva has also committed to using materials from sustainable forests. Through its Track and Trace® program, each load of wood can be traced back to the forest tract where it was harvested.

 Currently, the mill is stockpiling low value wood. It takes a while, and a lot of wood to build a start-up inventory for a mill to [MM1] be fully operational. Crawlet said she is weighing in about 30 truckloads each day as the plant is building inventory. When fully operational, the plant will be receiving upwards of 200 loads of chips or logs per day.

 The wood being stockpiled now will be run through an on-site chipper and be sent into the pellet mill where it will be processed into high density, industrial grade fuel pellets.

 The pellets are destined for electric power and heat generating plants in Asia and Europe. According to Rick Fredrick, Community Relations Manager for Enviva’s Gulf Coast Region, the goal is for the wood to be chipped both the forest, where it is sustainably sourced, and for loads of biomass chips to be delivered to the plant. In the future, the plant will also have permanent chippers on site.

 Construction began on the Lucedale plant in March of 2020. During construction Enviva management recognized a need to expand it from its original 750,000 metric ton annual production to a fully-permitted~1 million metric tons. The Lucedale plant is the first of four plants planned as a cluster that will ship pellets through the Port of Pascagoula.

 The second plant in the Pascagoula cluster will soon start construction in Epes, Alabama. All four plants in the Pascagoula cluster should be up and running at capacity by 2025, with additional cluster serving ports in Savannah, Georgia and Wilmington, North Carolina. Each plant takes about 18 months to build at a cost of about $200 million.

 Earlier this year Enviva announced in a press statement that it planned to also convert biomass material into a replacement for crude oil that is used for producing sustainable aviation fuel.

 For now, trucks are rolling across the scales at the nearly complete Lucedale plant, building inventory as the company prepares for the first pellets to begin flowing out of the mill and into rail cars destined for the Port of Pascagoula, Fredrick said.