

▶ TOP 100 WOMAN-OWNED COMPANIES

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BIOCHAR INDUSTRY GROWS AS NEW USES IDENTIFIED

BY SUZIE ROMIG

A product that resembles chips of campfire coals has grown to a \$1.5 million annual industry in Colorado and is providing a financial boost to the state's wood products industry.

"The biochar materials market is doubling year on year in Colorado, and the applications in Colorado are growing in sophistication,"

than 10 people. Gaspard said his company, established in 2011, sells to about 300 clients across North America including large agricultural businesses.

John-Paul Maxfield, founder of Waste Farmers, was one of the first Colorado business owners to include biochar in his soil conditioner products in 2009. Maxfield foresees a mega-market for biochar in helping fight

says Boulder County resident Jonah Levine, who serves as an industry representative to the International Biochar Initiative. The traditional use for the absorbent carbon-rich product is as a soil amendment, but current growth areas for biochar range from producing non-smelly cat litters to helping clean up at oil and gas operations.

"It's the fastest growing segment in the diversified wood products business," says Levine, who serves as development manager for Confluence Energy in Kremmling, one of several Colorado companies manufacturing biochar. Confluence sells the product across the U.S. as well as in Canada, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, China and Taiwan.

Biochar made in Colorado is created largely from waste beetle-kill pine wood heated under super high temperatures in kiln-like equipment in a low oxygen environment. The process known as pyrolysis creates porous charcoal that helps soil retain nutrients and water.

"There are dozens and dozens of applications for high-quality biochar ranging from increasing yield in plants to cleaning up hazardous waste sites," says entrepreneur James Gaspard, CEO of BioChar Now in Berthoud that employs more

climate change because the product helps sequester carbon in soils.

"Biochar has very promising long-term potential," Maxfield says. "Success in that regard requires market demand, and we wanted to help be part of that solution."

Micah Langston of Colorado BioChar Resources in Pueblo says her family-run logging and pallet operations expanded to produce biochar from wood harvested in two forest fire-charred areas in southern Colorado. Biochar sells for about \$2,000 a ton, while logs sell for \$50 a ton, Langston says. The Pueblo company also has built 14 \$500,000 biochar manufacturing units shipped to Idaho, California and North Carolina as well as to Estonia, China and India.

Levine credits the assistance of personnel at Colorado State University, U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station in Fort Collins and White River National Forest in Glenwood Springs with biochar research and development. ☐