



WINROCK
INTERNATIONAL

Banding Together for Efficiency and Profits

Winrock International

Improving Lives and Livelihoods Worldwide



In the early 1990s, Winrock's U.S. Programs unit looked around its home state of Arkansas, where forest products make up such an important part of the economy, and saw an opportunity to provide a service. Secondary wood processing—manufacturing everything from furniture and cabinets to pallets and roof trusses—was a vital industry, employing a significant number of people, but the field was largely made up of small producers, was not well organized, and was suffering from a declining national economy.

Winrock staffers knew that many of these businesses, largely located in rural parts of the state, could benefit from better communication, training, and marketing skills. As a result, Winrock created the Arkansas Wood Manufacturers Association, which in

the years since has developed into one of the most successful projects the organization has undertaken.

Composed of approximately 150 businesses, the AWMA has allowed firms that once worked in isolation to band together for purposes of market research, planning, political lobbying, and compliance with legal regulations.

Vic Hicks of Atkins can testify to the worth of the AWMA and of Winrock's continuing support. He had an idea for a business, but the would-be entrepreneur needed advice and direction getting started. In the meantime, Winrock had helped the AWMA obtain a Rural Business Opportunity grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish a Rural Marketing Assistance Program, conducted by a wood-products industry marketing consultant.

Hicks participated in the program and developed a marketing plan for his new company. In addition, the consultant visited with him four times during the following year and offered additional marketing information and recommendations.

The result? Hicks's new firm, Hardwoods Unlimited, went into business buying and selling kiln-dried lumber. A one-man shop at the beginning, Hardwoods Unlimited had after one year hired two full-time employees and built two new sections in its lumberyard for storage and equipment; it showed a profit after just six months.

Annett Pagan, head of Winrock's U.S.

Programs unit, helped get the AWMA off the ground. She says Winrock helped "introduce computer-controlled equipment into plants, and brought in consultants in to look at plant layouts and improve their efficiency and yields on raw materials—just a whole broad approach at increasing their profitability."

Once many of the members of the AWMA had modernized their plants and become more efficient, Pagan says, the companies "realized that their workforce was really ill-prepared to utilize those new kinds of technologies. So then we set out to design an apprenticeship program for the industry. We actually designed the curriculum and got the program approved through the U.S. Department of Labor. That program is still up and running."

The AWMA Wood Technician Apprenticeship Program is helping companies meet the challenge of finding skilled workers who will help them stay competitive in the global marketplace. The program uses a curriculum developed especially for and with the wood manufacturing industry. It includes a comprehensive educational component and targets key areas where job expertise is needed most, such as computer-assisted design programmers, production technicians, industrial designers, machine operators, and quality-control technicians.

The apprenticeship program offers technical training in 50 different courses. Part-



ners include nine high schools, three two-year colleges, the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, the Arkansas Department of Workforce Education, and the U.S. Department of Labor. Eighty-two students and 16 manufacturers are participating.

As is always the case, Winrock's goal is to create leadership and management capacity in those with whom it works, so that individuals and groups can continue development work on their own. "Just in the past two years, we've pushed more and more responsibilities to the AWMA," Pagan says.

"We don't do it for them. We're in the business of training them how to do it themselves."

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.