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Oregon Lumber Mill Becomes First in U.S. Certified to Produce New Wood Building Material

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A lumber mill in Riddle is the first certified to produce a new type of wood building material praised as environmentally sustainable -- and one that might be a boon for rural Oregon. Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday $350,000 dedicated to boost the effort to make Oregon a hub for cross-laminated timber, or CLT. That money includes a forgivable loan and a $150,000 grant. The state is also sponsoring a competition that will provide $200,000 in funds and services to a company building with CLT for regulatory testing and documentation. Applications are open for the competition on Oct. 1 at the Oregon BEST website. Cross-laminated timber is made from compressed wood panels that, backers say, are as strong as steel.

Europe and Canada have been using and producing the panels for a few years now, and CLT is popping up in more skyscrapers and other building projects. Oregon officials hope to spur a new wood industry in rural parts of the state devastated by the collapse of logging and millwork since the 1980s, and others champion CLT for being more environmentally sustainable than other construction materials. The state is backing a Riddle lumber mill, D.R. Johnson, that is the first to manufacture building-ready panels in the country. Valerie Johnson, president of D.R. Johnson, also announced Thursday that the company's CLT has been tested and certified by the American National Standards Institute and the American Plywood Association, which clears the way for it to be used in more construction projects. "Our company has historically embraced opportunities presented by new technology and markets," Johnson said. "We are now ready to manufacture high quality mass timber components -- both CLT panels and glu-lam beams -- to advance the revival of building with the world's most environmentally- sound product: wood." Oregon BEST is a quasi-governmental entity that gives out money to help grow Oregon companies working on environmentally-conscious technology. In the past, the organization gave $150,000 to drone-manufacturer Honeycomb Corp., one of the companies leading the Northwest's bid to make the region a hub of unmanned aviation. Oregon BEST is now giving the D.R. Johnson plant a $150,000 grant for research and development of CLT. Oregon State University has been working with the lumber mill to test the boards. The university plans to make CLT part of its forestry program, and is fundraising to build a $60 million facility using the product to house those studies.

The CLT industry push has also been championed by federal agencies. But, this is one of the first direct funding investments in the project. Oregon grows the type of woods most desirable for CLT, and the state historically had a vibrant timber industry. "If this product is going to hit the market, it makes more sense for our state than any other," Brown said in her announcement Thursday at Oregon Best Fest. CLT made its Oregon debut as the roof on an Oregon Zoo bathroom. The panels were created in Canada by

Structurlam Products. A CLT project is slated for the Pearl District and Western Oregon University, both featuring D.R. Johnson panels. Johnson said the company is under contract or in design talks for more than a dozen projects along the West Coast. "Demand is there, and we expect other manufacturers may enter the market soon," Johnson said.

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