

IMPROVING RECYCLING RATES IN NEBRASKA COMMUNITIES

ABOUT FIRSTAR FIBER, INC. Founded in 1997, Firstar Fiber processes recyclables for businesses and communities throughout the Midwest. The company's mission is to enhance Nebraska's recycling infrastructure and assist the state in attaining higher levels of sustainable recycling practices. Within the Omaha metro area, Firstar Fiber serves both residential customers and commercial businesses with recycling services. More recently, the company has begun to work with many surrounding, smaller communities and businesses—including recycling centers—in expanding their recycling programs, providing education on proper recycling, and assisting with grant writing to offset equipment and facility improvements. Today, Firstar Fiber employs approximately one hundred people at its Omaha and Lincoln recycling operations, and markets close to one hundred thousand tons of recyclables annually.

THE CHALLENGE. Firstar Fiber is dedicated to increasing the rate of recycling in Nebraska. The company partnered with the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, part of the MEP National Network, to evaluate the recycling programs of four rural communities near Omaha and identify areas for improvement. At the start of the project, the rate of recycling in the target communities was approximately 30 percent. Firstar Fiber set a goal to increase the recycling rate to 50 percent.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Nebraska MEP arranged for a student from the College of Engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to work with Firstar Fiber over the course of a summer as part of the Partners in Pollution Prevention (P3) internship program. The student conducted on-site visits to recycling centers in the targeted rural communities, visiting with personnel and assessing current operations to analyze process flows and make recommendations. He advised some centers to purchase automated sorting equipment to streamline the recycling processes, and the improvements generated cost savings by improving the capture rate for recycling and diverting waste from the landfill.

"The support and process the P3 program followed undoubtedly enhanced the fine work produced by the intern in such a relatively short amount of time," explained Dale Gubbels, Firstar Fiber President/CEO. "His findings and the connections he made with the targeted communities have proven to be a solid foundation for ongoing improvements." Firstar Fiber was enthusiastic about the results of the P3 program, and the company leveraged a grant to assist two communities with additional improvements to their recycling programs.

"Our experience working with the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership and the College of Engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was great. We have participated in internship programs with others in the past, and, by far, the mentoring provided to the intern—and for that matter, ourselves—was exceptional."

-Dale Gubbels, President/CEO

RESULTS



\$74,000 in cost savings



\$2,500,000 investment in new equipment



\$27,000 grant for improving rural recycling programs

CONTACT US



University of Nebraska-Lincoln
3 Agricultural Communications
Building, 3625 East Campus
Loop South
Lincoln, NE 68583-0939



(402)472-5993



nemep.unl.edu

