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PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY: [What is the state Legislature's top priority this se](#)

Sustainability: Oregon's brand and niche

Portland Business Journal - 2:13 PM PST Thursday by [Aliza Earnshaw](#) Business Journal staff writer

Oregon can -- and should -- seize the moment and capitalize on its worldwide reputation for sustainability. That was the recurring theme of the opening remarks and first panel discussion at Oregon's fifth economic-development summit, held Thursday at the Oregon Convention Center.

With the theme of this year's meeting set to "Gaining Sustainable Advantage," the first panel of the day focused on what sustainability means for industries ranging from agriculture to venture capital.

Sustainability -- the concept of bringing economic growth in harmony with protecting and nurturing the environment -- has traditionally been viewed by many businesspeople as an expensive luxury, a practice certain to add cost while yielding no particular business benefits.

On the contrary, said John Carter, president and CEO of Schnitzer Steel Industries Inc. His company has saved money and enhanced profits through energy conservation practices, recycling and reducing water use.

As corporations and governments seek ways to save on fixed costs, building sustainably has become an export industry for Oregon, said Dennis Wilde, principal at Gerding/Edlen Development LLC.

Gerding/Edlen has grown nearly tenfold in the past 10 years, to a \$3 billion firm, building and renovating in Oregon and up and down the West Coast. Oregon architects and building engineers, too, are known -- and consulted -- by clients from all over the world, Wilde pointed out.

To capitalize on sustainability, the Oregon Legislature needs to continue investing in transportation, said Carter, to enable efficient export of Oregon's sustainable products and to encourage visitors seeking to learn from the state's sustainability experts.

Oregon should also seek to manufacture more sustainable building materials in the state, so that firms like Gerding/Edlen do not have to import as many, said Wilde.

Oregon should also look to the fast-growing biofuels market, and invest in research and development of fuel from Oregon agricultural products, said Al Gosiak, CEO and president of \$80 million cooperative Pendleton Grain Growers.

"Most people assume ethanol will be made from corn," said Gosiak. "We don't grow much of that in Oregon." But ethanol can also be made from cellulose, if "a tricky chemical problem" can be solved. That could mean big business for Oregon's grain growers, as well as a valuable market for dead and diseased wood cleared from Oregon forests.

Oregon should also look at exploiting its environmental reputation by reaching out to a fast-growing area of venture capital investment.

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"Oregon can be a leader in clean energy," said Nancy Floyd, managing director of \$400 million venture capital firm Nth Power, which invests in energy and energy-related technologies.

That means investing in more research, as Oregon has already done with its nanoscience and micromaterials institute, and with a newly proposed wave energy park and research center on the coast.

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