

Biobased Certification Gets to the Root of Company's Commitment to Create Healthier Wood Coatings



According to Architectural Digest, experts call “one of the most complicated issues in health and wellness” the murky and unregulated relationships humans have with thousands of airborne toxins emanating from our building materials, furnishings, cleaning products, car interiors, and even candles.

For more than 20 years, Andrew Meyer has been dedicated to

solving this issue. He started Vermont Natural Coatings from a conviction that the choices we make about materials used in our homes, schools and workplaces should include consideration for health and the environment. Turning to his family's organic dairy farm for inspiration, he and a team of University of Vermont researchers and local woodworkers developed wood coatings technology that utilizes

whey protein powder — a biobased byproduct of cheese making. The whey protein powder acts as a co-binder, eliminating the need for toxic solvents and other harmful chemicals which can cause “off-gassing” emissions long after the initial smell of an item has dissipated.

In 2019, the company's PolyWhey® product line became USDA Certified Biobased.

“We’re as concerned about indoor air quality as we are outdoor air pollution,” Mr. Meyer has said.



“The BioPreferred® Program certification communicates something that other certifications don’t,” explained Mary Watkevich. “There are so many certifications out there, they all serve as good marketing tools, but we tried to look beyond some of the shinier versions and really look at the qualities, testing and validation. The biobased certification label aligns with our mission and gets to the root of the health issue better than other certifications.”

The label also opens the door to new conversations with suppliers. They’ve even developed a new resin blend with higher biobased content based on those conversations.

“We can only create healthy products by sourcing healthier materials,” she said. “Our hope is to eliminate the need for and use of toxic products and direct the entire industry in that direction.”

“We also want consumers to be aware of what they’re purchasing and to consciously choose items that are renewable; and to feel good about what they’re buying. Products like ours aren’t typically found in the wood coating industry. We want consumers to see that they can find products that are effective for the job without contributing to harming the environment.” The USDA Certified Biobased Product label provides consumers with the concrete information they need to make conscientious buying decisions.

With a “farm to finish” focus, Vermont Natural Coatings has developed a range of other biobased products, with its furniture finish, hemp oil, and hydro lacquer reactive sealer also being USDA Certified Biobased. To promote its mission, the company educates manufacturers and local communities about the importance of a circular economy and the principals of green building.

“We want the industry to be future focused when it comes to the structures we build and the way they’re built. Working with local communities and schools, we’ve coated gym floors, baseball dugouts and women’s shelters,” Ms. Watkevich said. “When schools learn what the products do and how they’re made, for example, they’re happy to have a solution that’s not going to smell terrible, that’s safer for the kids. And that’s a good feeling.”

