

## Getting engaged? Sharing expertise enriches all involved

By Bill London, WSU Today



**Vikram Yadama** is an engineering hybrid. At the Wood Materials and Engineering Laboratory, Yadama's time is split between research on new composite materials and outreach to the wood products industry. An assistant research professor and extension specialist, Yadama views his job as bridging fundamental research and the needs of industry.

In 2004, for example, Yadama began an ongoing project with Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc., of Colville to develop new building products out of lumber residue.

"We're trying to create a prototype for them using their raw materials," he said. Sawdust, which has little value, is being used in a wood plastic composite that eventually could be used for decking

and other building projects.

The result may be a new value-added product for the company and a significant boost in economic development in northeastern Washington.

### Expanding opportunities

Yadama's position is a model for the expanded role that engagement serves in today's university, said **Linda Kirk Fox**, dean of WSU Extension.

"The original land-grant public-service mission has moved from outreach, where the university provides information, to engagement, which is two-way, mutually beneficial sharing of skills and experience. Engagement enriches both research and the student experience," Fox said.

Fox would like to fund more positions like Yadama's throughout the university. The most recent example is the newly created position of veterinary outreach specialist, funded by extension and the College of Veterinary Medicine.

"With this position, we will engage with livestock commodity groups in a more direct and effective way to help them and to improve our programs as well," said **Larry Fox**, professor of veterinary clinical sciences.

### Meeting society's needs

Larry Fox is also interim director of another hybrid: The Field Disease Investigation Unit, which is funded by extension and the colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences. The unit focuses on food safety and animal health through the evaluation and management of disease outbreaks.

"Enhancing engagement is an important part of the university's strategic plan," Larry Fox said. "These positions, created in partnership with extension and oriented to respond to the most pressing needs of our society, are helping fulfill that mission."