

Portuguese Cork – Good for the People, the Planet and the Economy

Cork is a natural product originating from the renewable bark of the Cork Oak tree, which primarily grows in Mediterranean regions such as Spain, Italy, France, Morocco, Algeria and Portugal - where it grows in particular abundance. In fact, Portugal is home to over 1.8 million acres of cork forests, making it the world's primary exporter of cork. Since the 18th century when the production of cork stoppers became its main objective, the Portuguese have maintained the *montado* (the Cork Oak forest). In following years, the cork industry began to invest in this remarkable raw material, fueling new technologies, innovations and developments which gave rise to a whole new world of cork products. Today, the cork industry sustains a triple bottom line industry for Portugal– one that is good for the people, for the planet and for the economy.

Good for the People

- The cork industry is one of the largest employers in Portugal
- The cultivation and maintenance of the *montado* is responsible for 10,000 direct jobs in the cork industry and 6,500 jobs in forest development and management
- Indirectly, cork contributes to thousands of jobs related to its products (livestock farming, restaurants, tourism, etc.)

Good for the Planet

- The *montado* is an important reservoir of biological diversity. It is home to hundreds of plants species and is the preferred habitat of endangered species such as the Iberian Lynx and the Imperial Eagle
- The crowns of the cork oak trees are important for soil protection from the direct impact of rain that may cause soil erosion. The crowns intercept rainwater and funnel it to the soil beneath the tree as it flows down the tree trunk and drips from the leaves. The result is soil that is rich in organic matter, water storage, nutrient retention, aeration and root growth capacities
- By playing a big role in soil conservation and protection, the *montado* contributes to the regulation of the water cycle and is an important factor in fighting desertification
- Like other forests around the world, the *montado* functions like a carbon sink and helps fight the greenhouse effect by absorbing over 10 million tons of carbon dioxide annually

Good for the Economy

- As the largest international producer and exporter of cork, Portugal currently exports close to \$1 billion US per year in cork products, making the cork industry a key element in the country's manufacturing sector
- Ninety per cent of cork produced in Portugal is for the foreign market and 40 per cent of Portuguese businesses are involved in the exporting of cork
- In addition to producing and exporting cork, Portugal is also the world's greatest importer of cork, especially from Spain. Portuguese factories receive the raw material, process it and then export it as final consumer products
- Cork stoppers remain the primary export reaching a value of close to \$600 million, followed by cork building materials at over \$200 million (all figures are based on 2010 statistics)