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FSC Cork: a natural choice

Cork is the bark of the cork oak (*Quercus suber* L.), a tree species native to the Mediterranean basin. Portugal has the largest area of cork oak forests in the world and is the leading exporter of cork. Due to the versatility of this material, cork is used worldwide in numerous sectors, from wine to construction and furniture, fashion and sports, transport and aviation. Cork trees can help to curb desertification, protect biodiversity and strengthen links with other sectors, thereby promoting FSC certification worldwide.



Scope and main objectives

Strategic collaborations could drive to positive change through the power of market dynamics and help to understand how FSC can position itself as a tool to strengthen forestry value chains, and the system role regarding other adjacent sectors, like agriculture.

This collaboration between NPs and FSC International features the example of cork and how can one single product contribute in so many ways for the FSC mission. Connecting cork oak forests and vineyard landscapes with wineries and consumers around the globe allows us to raise awareness among key stakeholders on both supply and demand sides.

Cork oak forests are known as natural barriers to desertification and the certification of these areas can not only contribute for the implementation of FSC solutions by smallholders and communities but can also bring an important short and long-term social, economic and environmental outcomes, including HCV maintenance and improvement.

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Innovative approach

This project showcases the significant potential for a sustainable business model that this type of area can provide and sets an example for other woodland areas that could be managed using a landscape approach, also setting the tone for potential collaborations with other sectors (in this case, the agriculture/wine sector) that are highly dependent on forest-based products (such as solid wood, fibres, etc.) and ecosystem services, and which have great visibility among consumers and society.

The approach was to connect this unique product with a completely different and 'far-away' sector, highlighting the full potential of this value chain and of FSC overall.

Implementing FSC certification through market and communication activities within the wine sector helps create value and raise consumer awareness of the importance of responsibly managing cork oak forests, especially as they serve as vital habitats for High Conservation Value species such as the Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) and the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*).

Eighty-nine percent of FSC Forest Management Certificate Holders report that adherence to the system has resulted in changes in management practices in cork oak areas, particularly in soil protection, increased biodiversity, profitability, and stand vitality.

Cork is a 100% natural and renewable raw material, harvested without cutting down the tree. It can also be easily recycled—transformed into granules used for coverings, shoe soles, or even energy production—which is a clear example of circularity.



Conclusions

The experience with the wine sector, from the certification of landscapes that include forest and vineyards, to the use of certified cork and other forest-based materials, is a key case to explore how FSC certification can increase added value and facilitate market access.

The relationship between forest, agriculture and ecosystem services, highlighting how FSC certification can add value and contribute to biodiversity protection and landscape management of these areas and how this is linked international commitments (SDGs, Global Biodiversity Agreement, Restoration Law, etc.) and also at a social level (contributing to the work and income of thousands of owners and local communities) and an economic perspective (opening up new market opportunities and improve productivity, etc.)

FSC certification of forest products can become a competitive advantage for different sectors in the global market. Features all the application that this material can bring along with all other value chains related with the wine sector closed the loop... Cork stoppers, paper labels, wooden barrels, cardboard packaging, wooden poles for the vineyards, wooden pallets for transportation... bringing FSC worldwide! And this is worth celebration! Cheers!

