

Argand'Or achieves balance between nature and business

By Lucia Lorente



Argan oil presentation by Argand'Or GmbH

Local Moroccan producers following traditional methods are now able to bring argan oil to consumers around the world while preserving the ancient and rare trees that provide the crop. The nuts of the argan tree have long been a source of precious oil for the region's inhabitants. The trees grow well in southwestern Morocco's dry conditions, reaching 8 to 10 metres high and living up to 200 years.



Rudolf Bresink and Mohamed El Karz, founders of Argand'Or GmbH

Argan trees may have been growing there for 25 million years. Women have traditionally played a large role in preparing the oil: they break the nut's hard shell, grind the contents into a paste and work it by hand to separate oil from the dry matter. Many women's co-operatives now face competition from industrial factories.

The Argan oil contains 80% unsaturated fatty acids, is rich in essential fatty acids and has found favour with European cosmetics manufacturers

The tree, too, faces competition. Coverage has shrunk by almost half over the last century due to farming, grazing and charcoal production. A UNESCO biosphere reserve called Arganeraie covers more than 2,000,000 hectares of the area, but UNESCO says "excessive human exploitation" is a threat. Argan oil, a premium product, may help the region preserve its trees if harvested sustainably. One partner working to develop export markets for such oil is Moroccan-German Argand'Or.

The firm sells oil from the Union des Coopératives des Femmes de Arganeraie, consisting of 22 co-operatives with more than 2,000 members. Argand'Or distributes to Europe, North America and Asia.

Its nuts are wild-harvested and hand-ground with stone mills, an example of nature and commerce in balance according to Argand'Or founder and CEO Mohammed El Karz. Sales help preserve natural habitat and local communities.

A German facility bottles the organic certified product. Argand'Or oil won Product of the Year at BioFach in 2005, and in 2007 it won the Superior Taste Award from the International Taste & Quality Institute, a chefs and sommeliers organization.

The oil is high in tocopherols, antioxidants and phytosterols. Firms market it for skin use, either direct application or as part of a skincare product. Argand'Or, too, has launched a cosmetics line. Roasting the nuts before breaking creates a deep aroma appropriate for cooking oil.

"In the end, as it is often the case, it is the consumers' decision," El Karz says of his firm's

sustainable offerings. "It is up to them to decide if they want to contribute to the balanced circle that argan oil offers. It will be to their own profit, but also to that of the people living in the Arganeraie and for the trees!" ■



The arganeraie has shrunk 50 percent over the last 100 years. The traditional technique for oil extraction is to grind the seeds in a stone rotary quern.

Peru

(Continued from page 26)

same path as Uhtco include Koken del Peru. This ten-year-old organization sells different maca presentations. "We aim to continue exports of maca under our own brand and to diversify our line with other unique foods such as camu camu", says co-founder Ciro Castillo.

Gaston Vizcarra, managing director of Candela Peru, agrees that to be sustainable producers must add value to their exports. "For almost 20 years our co-operatives have specialised in the collection and exports of Amazon (Brazil) nuts. We are fair trade certified and receive premium for volume collected. We even have clients of the size of The Body Shop, to whom we sell oil. But we had to diversify our offer to free ourselves from market and price fluctuations of just one crop." Today, Candela Peru's network of about 275 sustainable nut harvesters produces roasted and chocolate-covered nuts, oils, butters and spreads and even candle-holders made from the emptied nut shells.

According to one calculation, a typical hectare in the Peruvian Amazon has a value of \$6,820 if it is kept intact and sustainably harvested. Clear-cut for timber, it's worth \$1,000 (a sustainable logger, perhaps harvesting nature's crops, too, would do better long-term). Reduced to pasture, the land would be worth about only \$148 per year.

Clearly, firms like Uhtco, Koken and Candela Peru are making the best choice. Perhaps more organics will soon be processed closer to the source of raw materials, as has happened in other global industries. That would bode well for biodiversity, Amazon and elsewhere. ■



Nora Juliet born 10/07 daughter of Jenny and Terry Xanthos of Frutzzo (USA). "I like baby clothes from Grembo Organics, food from Happy Baby."



Jonathan born 07/07 son of Anja and Joerg Demuth of Anika Cosmetics (Germany). Favourite food? "Breast milk and Holle baby food."



Sophie born 08/07 daughter of Cristina Stiegler and Jean-Charles Cigal, collaborators of OWN (Germany). "I like Weleda's calendula line."

Seeds of the future

Join our poster project!
Share your new baby's picture with the international organic community and help us build organic gardens at schools!

For more information contact
amichael@owelln.com
Ph 1 613 526 6207
Fax 1 613 526 0480
Ottawa, Canada
Organic & Wellness News

