

Portucel
Promoting forest certification:
reaching out to smallholders
and private owners



As well as managing its own certified plantations, Portucel relies on supplies of wood from private forest owners in Portugal. The complexity and costs of forest certification are a challenge for these suppliers, many of whom manage very small areas. Portucel runs a number of outreach initiatives to promote forest certification and help private owners become certified.

Background

The Portucel Soporcel group is one of the world's leading paper manufacturers, and a major player in the eucalyptus forestry sector. It is one of Portugal's three leading exporters, with sales to 120 countries accounting for some 3 per cent of Portuguese exports.

The company manages around 120,000 hectares of forest, but it depends heavily on buying wood from other forest owners who grow eucalyptus. Most of these growers operate on a very small scale: Portugal has around 400,000 forest owners, 85 per cent of them owning less than three hectares.

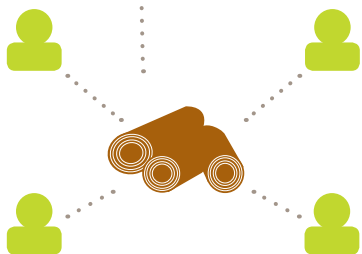
Sustainable forest management is a key concern for Portucel, and its own operations are FSC and PEFC certified. However, securing supplies of certified wood from small forest owners has been a challenge. Many see the forest certification process as complex and costly, and there is a lack of national and European policies and incentives to encourage certification. With forest fires also posing a significant risk, Portucel decided to take action to improve forest management and build certified supply.



Portucel runs guided tours to demonstrate good forest management.

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85%

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“The premium launched by Portucel has been decisive in encouraging forest producers to form associations and begin the certification process. This allows them to have access to a more demanding market and obtain an additional income of €40–60 per hectare and per year.”

José Joaquim Raposo, forest manager at Herdade dos Fidalgos, a member of the certified group APFCertifica

The project

In 2006 Portucel began paying a premium of €2.50 per cubic metre to all suppliers of FSC-certified wood. This has since been increased to €4.00. For smallholders managing fragmented and dispersed areas of forest, this can make all the difference: it covers the costs of certification and provides a tangible financial benefit. Portucel's policy has been extended from Portugal into Galicia in northern Spain, and has since been adopted by other companies.

This has given an incentive to small forest owners to join together to form forest certification groups. Working as a group reduces the cost and administrative burden of certification to individual forest owners. A number of forest owners associations covering different regions of the country, such as ACHAR, APFCertifica, Flopen, Unimadeiras and Abastena, have gained certification since the project began.

Alongside this, Portucel promotes forest certification among private owners in several ways. It worked to establish protocols with the main sector organizations: the Portuguese Confederation of Agriculture (CAP), Forestis (the Forest Association of Portugal), the Union of the Mediterranean Forest (UNAC) and the Federation of Forest Producers of Portugal (FPFP).

Portucel runs training for contractors and ongoing awareness-raising and demonstration activities for forest owners and forest association staff. These are a way of transferring technology and forestry knowledge, from both the company's research and development unit and its operations and certification team. To complement this, Portucel has published a **Code of Good Forestry Practice** based on its own procedures, which is freely available on its website.

The company has also set up a network of demonstration plantations, with example forest management units of eucalyptus and other species. A programme of guided tours gives forest owners, contractors and suppliers the chance to see good forestry practice at first hand, and encourages them to adopt similar methods.

Portucel has been active in several initiatives promoted by WWF and FSC on certification for small forest owners, such as those related to the Lisbon Process (the EU's development strategy for 2000-2010). It has also been involved in drafting and revising national certification standards, and strives to find simplified solutions that will help smallholders become certified.

Benefits

Paying a better price for certified wood has led to improved incomes and market access for an increasing number of forest owners. Portucel has helped to make the certification process simpler for small forest owners, and has helped many of them to meet certification standards by sharing its knowledge and experience.

These initiatives have contributed to a significant increase in the certified area in Portugal, meaning better forest management and a more sustainable forestry sector. By 2009, forest associations directly influenced by Portucel's initiatives managed over 12,500 hectares of certified forest, over half of the total certified area belonging to small and medium-sized private owners in the country. As a result, small forest owners are reducing their impact on the environment, complying with all legal requirements and reducing the risk of forest fire.

Portucel, meanwhile, is able to ensure a supply of certified wood to meet its environmental and social commitments and fulfil customers' expectations.

Next steps

Now that the first groups of smallholders and private owners in Portugal have achieved certification, others are seeking to follow. Portucel continues to promote forest certification and continues to update and improve its outreach programmes – working with forest owners organizations, providing technical support and training on forest management and biodiversity conservation, and pushing for more accessible certification schemes for these producers.