CORK RECYCLING TAKES FLIGHT

ReCORK America, a wine cork recycling program developed by Amorim, has received another boost to its rapid growth with an agreement to recycle used wine corks at American Airlines' Admirals Club locations throughout the US.

Admirals Club has partnered with ReCORK America and Sodexo (the airlines club services management vendor) to begin the environment-friendly program.

This initiative — offered in the 24 domestic Admirals Club lounges in the US as well as its San Juan site in Puerto Rico — will recycle natural corks used by the clubs as well as corks brought in by customers.

The corks will be sent to manufacturers and turned into items such as shoe soles or flooring. ReCORK America recently shipped seven tonnes of cork to a footwear manufacturer in Canada.

"We are pleased to work with ReCORK America to recycle and reuse products that would normally be thrown away," said Admirals Club president Nancy Knipp.

"Even small items such as wine corks, when recycled, can make a big difference to our environment."

The agreement is another successful partnership for ReCORK America, which has grown dramatically since its inception two years ago. Spreading swiftly through California's Napa Valley and beyond, the program has now recovered over three million corks.

One reason for its success is the involvement of major industry players including leading retailers, wineries and hospitality organisations.

Supporters of the program include Whole Foods Market (the world's largest retailer of natural and organic foods) in Northern California, Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates, Foster's Wine Estates, Domaine Chandon, Diageo Estates and the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena.

"About 13 billion natural cork wine stoppers are produced for the global wine industry each year," said Teresa Relogio, program coordinator for ReCORK America.

"Amorim's program is designed to turn as many of those corks as possible into useful products such as footwear, flooring and even soil amendment in compost.

"Natural cork wine closures are ideal for recycling. They are a truly sustainable resource and one of the few forms of product packaging that is 100 per cent recyclable, renewable and biodegradable."

Cork trees are not cut down to make wine corks, rather the bark is stripped from the trees every nine years during their average 150-year lifespan. Cork is also a natural retainer of CO_2 and helps fight global warming.

Apart from shoes and flooring, recycled cork is used to manufacture engine gaskets, insulation material, boat decking, industrial safety mats, inners for hockey balls and many other products.

Recycling natural wine corks is gaining momentum worldwide. Growing environmental awareness has led to the development of new community-based recycling initiatives in many countries as well as an increase in the volume of corks being processed through long-standing programs.

Girl Guides Australia has been collecting used wine corks since 1990. The Guides have traditionally collect about 30 tonnes of natural cork a year, but in 2007 they amassed an incredible 60 tonnes and raised AUS$100,000.

In Portugal, Amorim is supporting the Green Cork Recycling Program that started in 2008 and collected three million stoppers in six months. Supermarket chain Continente and over 10,000 restaurants are involved, with funds raised financing nature preservation through the Quercus environmental organisation.

Amorim has also initiated cork collection campaigns in Italy, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

In the UK, Amorim has a partnership with leading wine merchant Laithwaites to promote natural cork recycling and the planting of cork oaks in the Western Mediterranean.

In order to better manage its commitment to recycling in Portugal, Amorim recently opened a new unit for processing recycled stoppers. The plant is expected to process 90 million corks over the next four years.

Through this unit and its support for cork recycling programs worldwide, Amorim is playing a proactive role in recycling wine closures — and in the process adding to the strong environmental credentials of natural cork.

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