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UK SUPERMARKETS BACK AMORIM'S FSC CORK

Two leading supermarket chains in the United Kingdom have committed to using Amorim's environmentally friendly FSC corks in 2010.

Sainsbury's entered the new year with an announcement that it is to become the first retailer to make all its corks Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified.

The move started with the supermarket's Blanc de Noirs Champagne and will include all wines, spirits and beers sealed with natural cork closures by the end of 2010.

It will make Sainsbury's the biggest user of FSC certified corks in the world.

Amorim is the sole supplier of natural cork closures to Sainsbury's and the retailer is committed to ensuring all the cork it uses comes from the most sustainably managed forests.

The Co-operative Group — which has more than 2500 food stores and supermarkets across the UK — has also committed to Amorim's environmentally friendly closures, announcing that its own-brand wines packed at Kingsland Wines will be sealed with FSC certified corks.

The Co-operative Group intends to continue working with its supply base to move about a third of its own-brand wines to FSC corks in 2010.

All FSC certified corks are stamped with the FSC logo so consumers know that the cork has come from well-managed forests.

Amorim works closely with the Forest Stewardship Council and was the first company in the world to gain FSC status for its cork closures.

The world's leading cork producer also has strong relationships with major conservation groups with which it works to ensure the survival of the ecosystems that depend on cork oak forests.

In Portugal alone, there are more than 725,000 hectares of cork forest, representing 30 per cent of the global total.

Cork forests help maintain the delicate ecosystems of the Mediterranean and prevent soil degradation across large areas of Portugal and Spain.

The forests provide vital habitat for a range of flora and fauna, ensuring a rich biodiversity. They are home to some of Europe's most endangered species including the Iberian lynx, Barbary deer and Imperial Iberian eagle.

Cork oak forests also retain millions of tonnes of CO₂ every year, making them a significant carbon sink and crucial in the fight against global warming.

FSC certification is the best way to protect this environment for the long-term benefit of communities living and working in these regions as well as wildlife.

In order to gain FSC certification, cork producers have to ensure that they have minimal impact on biodiversity in the area, while also ensuring that harvesting is fully sustainable.

Amorim stopper division CEO Victor Ribeiro applauded the commitment by Sainsbury's and The Co-operative Group to FSC corks.

"The UK wine trade makes a vital contribution to the maintenance of the unique triple bottom-line balance between environmental, social and economic issues associated with the cork forests of the Western Mediterranean," he said.

"Because 70 per cent of the value-added income created by natural cork comes from its wine and champagne stopper application, the kind of leadership demonstrated by Sainsbury's goes a long way to help support a more sustainable trade.

"We are also delighted that The Co-operative Group has embraced FSC certified closures and we look forward to working closely with them as they move more of their wines to FSC corks."

Sainsbury's wine maker Barry Dick said the type of closure the supermarket chain uses is based on a number of factors.

"Where we use cork, it is important to us to make sure that the harvesting of that cork makes a positive contribution to the wildlife in the area, while at the same time managing traceability, consistency and quality to ensure our wines taste their best," he said.

"Our shift to FSC certified corks will make a huge difference, particularly when you consider that we sell over six million bottles sealed with cork closures every year. We're aiming to bottle all six million using FSC certified cork by the end of 2010 and we're starting straight away."

The Forest Stewardship Council is a non-profit organisation devoted to encouraging the responsible management of the world's forests. It sets standards that ensure forestry is practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable way.

“We tend to associate trees with everyday goods such as timber, paper and tissues. But supporting the cork industry so that cork oak forests continue to thrive is vital to the local ecology, especially in the Iberian Peninsular,” said Charles Thwaites, executive director of FSC UK.

“We hope Sainsbury's example will tempt other companies to make similar commitments and together we will preserve these precious landscapes and habitats.”

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