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RECORK ON A STRONG FOOTING

ReCORK by Amorim, a US-based cork recycling program, continues to build momentum with the announcement of a major partnership with a Canadian shoe manufacturer, strategic agreements with leading US wine trade associations and a strong re-branding program that is raising its consumer profile.

ReCORK has entered into a partnership with SOLE to reclaim and 'upcycle' a portion of the billions of natural cork wine and champagne closures opened each year by US and Canadian consumers.

A leading footwear manufacturer that distributes its products throughout North America, SOLE has been working with ReCORK for 12 months and the formal partnership agreement will dramatically expand collection efforts.

"ReCORK provided us with thousands of used corks and we did the R&D necessary to successfully come up with a cork blend in our footwear products that enhances the material properties of the footwear while extending the useful life of the cork for years to come," said SOLE chief executive Mike Baker.

"This is the kind of sustainable effort that benefits everyone."

ReCORK also recently announced that the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance Board (WWVWA) has selected ReCORK to collect and recycle used and surplus natural cork closures from its 100-plus members in Washington state.

Elizabeth Martin-Calder, executive director of WWVWA, believes this recycling effort touches the very core of sustainability.

"When you consider there are 13 billion natural corks sold into the world market each year, most of which find their way into already overcrowded landfills, it just makes sense to find new uses for this, until recently, under-appreciated resource," she said.

"As a grower and winery trade association, with a commitment towards sustainable farming and winery operations, it feels appropriate for us to take the lead in promoting this kind of initiative through our members."

Natural cork wine closures 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 CO2 and helps fight global warming.

The agreement with WWVWA is another successful partnership for ReCORK, which has grown dramatically since its inception in 2007.

The program now has recycling partnerships with many familiar names in the US wine, hospitality and retail markets, including American Airlines, Sodexo, the Wine Tasting Network (WTN), Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines, Rodney Strong Wine Estates, Rutherford Wine and PlumpJack, to mention a few.

Event-based partnerships are also a feature of the program, such as the decision by the Washington State Wine Commission to select ReCORK as its natural cork recycling partner for the recent *Taste Washington!* wine and food event. ReCORK is now working with the commission to roll out a recycling program for its membership that comprises more than 650 wineries and other hospitality concerns.

Through partnerships such as these, ReCORK has recycled more than six million natural wine corks with a dramatic increase in volume over the past six months.

In addition to recycling used corks, the program is contributing to ongoing conservation efforts in Portugal's cork forests. ReCORK and SOLE have pledged to sponsor the planting of a minimum of 4000 cork trees in Portugal in 2010 and are on target with close to 1000 trees planted by late March.

Previously known as ReCORK America, the program has recently been re-branded in an effort to raise consumer awareness of the valuable role cork forests play as a sustainable natural resource and to increase the number of natural wine corks recycled by the American public. The re-branding program includes a new-look website at www.recork.org

António Amorim, chairman of Corticeira Amorim and the driving force behind the company's acclaimed environmental efforts, said he was thrilled with the success of ReCORK to-date and excited by the program's potential.

"This program is more than just finding new uses for old corks," he said.

"It's about waking up the planet to the importance recycling and environmental stewardship play in our everyday lives.

"We are looking for ways to extend the life cycle of a natural product and to heighten awareness of the important role cork forests play in the fight against global warming. ReCORK gives us the opportunity to tell both stories."

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