

News from Celso Foelkel

Plantations: The golden opportunity for forestry and wood production in Latin America

People are demanding increased volumes of wood. The need for wood is a privilege of all human beings. Most of the wood in the world is used as energy source or for industrial purposes (saw timber, plywood, panels, round wood, furniture's, pulp and paper, etc.). The world demand for wood products is expected to significantly increase in years to come. The population growth and the improved living standards in the South Hemisphere and in Asia will surely lead to the need of additional volumes of wood to supply this extra demand. So far, it is hard to predict the future of the wood consumption, but it's assumed that it is to sharply grow. Till now, mankind has pacifically agreed to use most of the wood coming from sources such as natural forests. However, in recent years, strong opposition from NGOs and new strict regulations are forcing the wood based industry to search other ways to supply their needs for wood and fibers. In a great extent, the amazing rates of paper recycling are helping to make a better use of the natural resources. This is an unique feature of our paper industry in comparison to many other manufacturing industries. Paper industry is being very successful with recycling, receiving a strong help from all society. This is an important point to touch. Shifts and changes like these ones require commitments and participation of the society, not only from a small percentage of the population.

Plantation forests and more recently, cloning of trees, are breakthroughs to the forest based industry, no doubts about. The wood coming from plantations is one of the best choices to save most of the remaining natural forests from being harvested to supply raw material to a number of products , including pulp and paper. However, because the inability to communicate well, the pulp and paper industry faces the dilemma of being opposed in relation to plantations. Surely, wood is still one of the most wonderful environmentally friendly products we have, including the wood coming from plantations.

Plantations are not to be seen as a military parade of trees, placed one side by side to the others. The plantations are not to be

considered as industrial agriculture or fiber farms. They fulfill a lot of roles other than wood production, such as soil conservation, climate stabilization, carbon storage, social benefits, etc.

In general, there are at least five rules the pulp and paper industry has to keep in mind about forest plantations:

1st Rule: Plantations are to be planted in exhausted and already used soils, preferably those degraded by agriculture. The planted forests should not replace natural forests after clear cutting of them. Natural forests deserve other type of sustainable forest management: they may be economically used, but with a completely different approach.

2nd Rule: Plantations have to be managed in a sustainable way, being integrated to the other environmental sites and agricultural activities in the area. They should never be seen as the only player in this natural and social environment.

3rd Rule: Plantations are to be seen as promoters of social development in the region, not only to be seen as source of industrial wood or an agriculture crop in the short term.

4th Rule: Forest based industry does not need to own the plantations to be self-sufficient in wood. Local farmers also may benefit from plantation forests. A program dedicated to promote plantation forestry by local farmers is fundamental to guarantee the love and the respect from the community to this activity.

5th Rule: The forest breeding programs being implemented by the industry is to lead to better trees in a continuous way. Thus, offering or selling clonal seedlings and improved seeds to be planted by the local community is very fair and helpful to all. It should not be seen as a way of losing intellectual property or competitiveness. By contrary, it is a way to gain wood productivity and to improve richness to all. Shared richness is the most commonly request from local communities where plantation forests are being implemented. The forest based industry cannot disappoint this willingness.

Latin America, thanks to the highly productive forest resources and technologies for plantations is a natural choice to supply a great percentage of the additional wood to be demanded by the world. This golden opportunity is just there, waiting to be grabbed. To do this, the players have to rethink most of their thoughts and to be committed to a sustainable management in the forestry (SFM). It is a business, a golden business, but it is not to be seen as extractivism. Good example is being given by the Brazilians. A document about SFM with definitions, criteria and principles is close to be released. Under the umbrella of WWF/FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) , the industry and representative social and environmental NGO's have reached agreement about SFM on plantation forestry, leading to the production of wood , minimizing the impacts to the environment and promoting social growth.

This technical document is to become the basis for plantation forest certification in Brazil to those willing to get the certification under the principles of FSC. More information may be obtained at the web site <http://www.wwf.org.br/fsc/>