

# Cork manufacturer joins UN Global Compact

**C**ork manufacturer Columbit Corks South Africa has launched a landmark initiative that will work towards reducing its wine clients' carbon footprint.

The project is Columbit's first as the inaugural wine industry member of the United Nations (UN) Global Compact for corporate responsibility.

The initiative makes use of South Africa's own carbon-absorbing 'superplant', the often-overlooked Spekboom shrub.

The Spekboom is a leafy succulent native to arid areas of the Cape and can store more than four tons of carbon for each hectare a year, placing it in the same class as a moist, subtropical forest.

Spekboom plants will be issued free of charge to wineries and producers which buy cork closures from Columbit.

Columbit marketing manager **Bridget Davidtsz** says: "We wanted to find a way to give back to our loyal clients for using cork closures on their wines.

"Cork is often chosen out of personal preference or market demand, but it is also the sustainable closure of choice."

Cork is harvested from the bark of cork oak trees.

The bark of the tree is stripped every 9 to 12 years, leaving it unharmed and allowing it to live for anything up to 300 years.

Efficient carbon absorbers themselves, cork forests store

some 4,8-million tons of carbon a year.

Cork forests form diverse ecosystems that are essential to the survival of some of the world's most endangered species.

They prevent desertification, help to conserve soil, buffer against fires and assist to refill water tables.

"Cork is renewable, recyclable and biodegradable, and is obtained from one of the most environment-friendly harvesting processes in the world," Davidtsz explains.

"It therefore makes sense that we use the sale of cork as the basis for the Spekboom project."

The project will become the first of Columbit's initiatives to fulfil its obligations under the

UN Global Compact. Host to 6 200 signatories, the UN Global Compact is a nonprofit initiative established to help ensure sustainable growth and good corporate citizenship.

Columbit joined the compact in December 2008, with the Spekboom project addressing the eighth of its ten guiding principles, which is to promote initiatives for environmental responsibility.

Columbit has set up a Spekboom nursery in the heart of the Wellington winelands at Africa's largest vine nursery, Lelienfontein.

Support will be provided by Spekboom specialists R3G, the research restoration group of Rhodes University.

Initially, potted plants will be sent to Columbit's cork customers for placement in tasting rooms.

This will create awareness of the Spekboom plant, its carbon-absorbing capacity and the importance of carbon reduction.



#### THE STOPPER OF CHOICE

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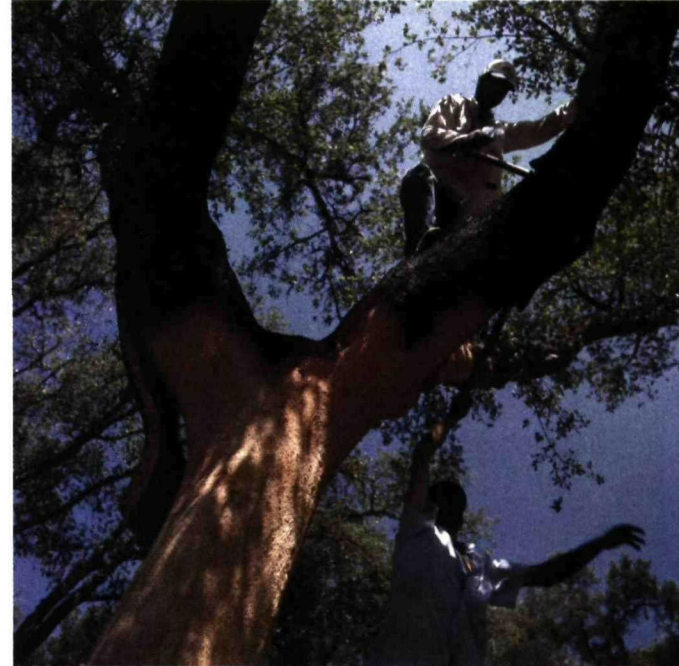
Columbit has partnered with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry's Working for Water Programme and R3G, to enable additional funding to plant more trees. The long-term benefits will be greater carbon absorption and the creation of jobs in caring for the trees.

"With the support of the

industry, and in partnership with R3G, we hope to see a drastic reduction in the carbon footprint of wine," Davidtsz said.

The initiative will begin immediately, with the first of the Spekboom already planted at Schalk Burger & Sons' Wellington winery.

Columbit was founded by



#### HARVESTING CORK

Cork is harvested from the bark of cork oak trees, every 9 to 12 years, leaving the tree unharmed

**Ernest Zeh** in 1938 and is a pillar of innovation in the wine industry. The company aims to supply high-quality products at

value-driven prices, understand new trends and anticipate market demands.

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