The slim, tall stems of giant bamboo grow faster than many other plants but this by no means makes it a fragile material. The wood-like enormous grass is so strong that it can be used for furniture and construction. Being a native species of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, Guadua angustifolia kunth is the largest of the tropical Americas and is usually referred to as “guadua”. On average, the mature bamboo reaches 20 meters in height and gains a diameter of 10 centimeters.

In spite of the guadua’s speedy growth, the bamboo is sensitive to overexploitation and hence, sustainable management is crucial to its survival. This issue is of the highest priority to the Colombian FSC certified group Corporación Guadua (Corporación para el Manejo Sostenible de Guaduales), which is a non-profit organization that unites producers and processors of guadua and has been FSC certified since 2005. The mission of Corporación Guadua is to enhance the demand for certified bamboo at national and international levels. The cooperation promotes FSC certified guadua as a sustainable and durable material for construction, furniture and kitchen-ware through multiple partnerships with governmental institutions, university research programs and NGO’s. The management and exploitation activities carried out in the forest management units are classified as low-intensity and Corporación Guadua prides itself on these forest operations that do not impact the surrounding natural environment, flora and fauna negatively.

The purpose of getting FSC certified was for Corporación Guadua to obtain recognition for their sustainable management of the forest and implementation of good harvesting practices. In addition, the company regards FSC certification valuable for improving their product’s position in the market place.

Corporación Guadua owns 41.21 hectares of FSC certified natural bamboo forest or groves in the western central regions of Risaralda and Quindío, crossed by the Andes Mountains. In these regions, the guadua is one of the species constituting the natural forest cover and the management of the bamboo production and its protection is therefore a task the Colombian Government is assisting in.
Multiple functions with modern options

Given its physical characteristics of lightness, flexibility, durability and very strong natural fibres, guadua is used for multiple purposes namely; construction, furniture, handicrafts, kitchen utensils, laminates and supports for crops. In construction, it is especially used in both initial phases for scaffoldings and brackets, and as an actual building material mainly for columns and beams.

Harvesting and processing

Corporación Guadua obtains 1,418.54 cubic meters of giant bamboo per year. Management, tending, harvesting and transportation are conducted with as little impact on the forest as possible. Most of the operations take place with hand tools such as machete and hatchets or low impact machinery like chainsaws.

In preparation for harvesting, the mature bamboo is carefully selected by experienced operators who ensure that the harvest is evenly distributed across the forest area. Other factors such as features required by customers are put into consideration when the Corporación Guadua members plan to harvest their bamboo crop. Once the bamboo is harvested, it is carried from the forest by the forest workers through designated paths to reduce impact on the standing mature and young bamboo. Tractors and loading trucks transport the bamboo from the edge of the forest to the plant of Yarima Guadua, who is member of the group, for washing and drying.

The workers of Yarima Guadua wash the guadua with collected rainwater in a high-pressure cleaner to remove moss, lichens and remains of dirt and dust leaving the surface smooth and clean. The bamboo is then placed in the sun to pre-dry and is later stored in a warehouse in separate layers for continuous air circulation. This method keeps the bamboo product dry and ready for sale.

FACTS

Certificate Holder
Corporación para el Manejo Sostenible de Guaduales (Corporación Guadua or CORGUADUA)

Certificate details
GFA-FM/COC-001333

Size of certified area
41.21 hectares

Species
Guadua angustifolia kunth

Products
Bamboo

Volumes obtained per year
1,418.54 cubic meters
Partnerships to raise bamboo awareness and demand

Corporación Guadua has put great effort in spreading awareness for FSC certified bamboo and in creating a market demand for this product. The group is a member of the WWF Colombia network that supports bamboo awareness creation through their marketing channels. CARDER (Corporación Autónoma Regional de Risaralda) in Colombia also supports Corporación Guadua’s activities for search of new markets and bamboo business opportunities.

Furthermore, Corporación Guadua recently entered into partnerships with the Colombian Ministry for environment and sustainable development and the Ministry for agriculture and rural development; Colciencias (The Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation) which is a Colombian government agency that supports research; INBAR (The International Network for Bamboo and Rattan); and the Technological University of Pereira. Together with CORPOICA, a research agenda for bamboo production and creating market access has been formulated with full support of the Colombian government.

Plans for the future

The members of Corporación Guadua continue to improve their sustainable forest operations to be more effective. The group also plans to increase its FSC certified area from 41.21 hectares to 70 hectares in the next two to three years to expand its commercial offer and become more visible.

Last but not least, the cooperation encourages the bamboo industry to embrace chain of custody and forest certification. In the future, Corporación Guadua would like to sell their FSC certified bamboo to companies in the sustainable construction industry and mining companies at national and international levels.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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