

Columbit puts a cork in the carbon footprint of wine



First winelands member of UN Global Compact launches maiden initiative Columbit Corks South Africa has launched a landmark initiative that will work towards reducing their wine clients' carbon footprint. The project is Columbit's first as the inaugural wine industry member of the United Nations Global Compact for corporate responsibility.

The initiative makes use of South Africa's own carbon-absorbing 'superplant'; the humble and often-overlooked Spekboom shrub. A leafy succulent native to arid areas of the Cape, the Spekboom can store more than four tons of carbon per hectare per year; putting it in the same class as a moist, subtropical forest.

Spekboom plants will be issued free of charge to wineries and producers who buy cork closures from Columbit. Columbit Marketing Manager Bridget Davidtsh said, "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's also the sustainable closure of choice.

"Cork is renewable, recyclable and biodegradable, and is obtained from one of the most environmentally-friendly harvesting processes in the world," Davidtsh explained. "It therefore made 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 United Nations Global Compact is a non-profit agency established to 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 – 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.

Columbit has partnered with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry: 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," Davidtsh said.

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

For more information, contact Bridget Davidtsh on 083 443 8110.