



PRESS RELEASE

World Artisan Guild LLC
US Importer of
ARGAND'OR Argan Oil

**Sustainability in the Maghreb:
ARGAND'OR supports Reforestation Project in Morocco's Argan Forest**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin - June 25, 2008

Argand'Or joined forces with the U.C.F.A. Women Cooperatives (*Union des Cooperatives des Femmes de l'Arganeraie*), producers of hand-crafted Argan oil, and the Moroccan Forest Service DREF (*Direction Regionale des Eaux et Forets du Sud Quest*) to kick-off a large Argan reforestation project. The objective of the project is to plant more than ten-thousand of the endangered Argan tree during the next years, ten for every coop member. In today's initial ceremony, 300 trees were planted by thirty members of the Al Amal cooperative in Tiznit. The project is financed by *Argand'Or*, the international partner of the U.C.F.A., and the forest authorities which provided the saplings.

The Argan tree, native only to the Arganeraie, a semi-arid region in Morocco's southwest, plays a crucial role in the region's ecological system. Argan trees are the only major plant in this semi-desert. The tree, a wild-growing thorny evergreen which can be traced back twenty million years to the Tertiary period, has a unique, very deep and wide reaching root system that allows it to make excellent use of water in the soil. Argan trees survive even with very little rain. During severe droughts, Argan trees shed their leaves and become dormant - only to thrive again with the onset of rain. The root system also channels water from occasionally occurring torrential rain falls underground, thus playing a crucial role in the maintenance of ground water levels. The Argan forest protects the plains of south-western Morocco and the slopes of the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains from soil erosion and desertification.

Lately, the Argan forest has been under tremendous pressure. In pre-historic times, Argan trees grew throughout North Africa's Maghreb region. However, in the last century alone, two thirds of the Argan forest has been lost to uncontrolled development, overgrazing and logging for charcoal production and firewood. Today, only twenty million of these endangered trees are left, raising concern for the long-term survival of this unique species. Furthermore, the disappearance of the Argan tree would result in a drop in groundwater level, the depletion of flora and fauna, and desertification*. To protect the unique eco-system, UNESCO declared the Arganeraie a Biosphere Reserve in 1998.

During the last decade, indigenous Berber women founded Women Cooperatives with the goal to commercially produce Argan oil from the seeds of the Argan tree. Cooperative Argan oil production does not only help impoverished Berber women and their families - the increase in the economical value of the Argan tree also discourages logging and thus protects the remaining Argan forest. The U.C.F.A., which unites twenty-two Berber Women cooperatives, partners with *Argand'Or* in the production and marketing of hand-crafted Argan oil.

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"This event is a milestone in the protection of the Argan tree and the eco-system Arganeraie", said Mohamed El Karz, founder of *Argand'Or*. "We at *Argand'Or* are glad to assist our partners, the U.C.F.A. Women Cooperatives, and the Moroccan authorities in their efforts to rescue the Argan forest and to provide good paying jobs to Berber women in this rural and impoverished region".

Nafissa Bellouch, Vice-president of the cooperative Al Amal, added: "For us, the Argan tree represents hope. Today, we plant hope for our children and future generations. The Argan tree is holy to us - it blesses our village and provides us with strength, pride and the means to survive in our semi-arid homeland."

About World Artisan Guild:

World Artisan Guild LLC is the exclusive US importer of *Argand'Or* culinary Argan oil and the *Argand'Or* Argan oil based cosmetic line. *Argand'Or* Argan oil is produced by the Union des Cooperatives des Femmes de l'Arganeraie (U.C.F.A.), a group of 22 Berber women cooperatives in the Arganeraie, a UNESCO protected Biosphere Reserve in Morocco's Southwest. *ARGAND'OR* Argan oil is certified USDA organic and a product of fair trade practices.

**Dieter Nill, Elke Böhnert: Value Chains for the Conservation of Biological Diversity for Food and Agriculture, GTZ Report, August 2006*

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