

COGNIS CARE CHEMICALS

The Argan tree is endemic to southern Morocco. Largely found in the western areas bordering the Sahara, the Argan forest acts as a natural barrier against the advance of the desert. The fruit of the Argan tree contains a very hard kernel, which holds between one and three seeds, from which valuable oil can be extracted.

Cognis France is a leading speciality chemicals company, which markets products and solutions for personal care, home care and modern nutrition, as well as high-performance products for numerous industrial markets. One of its divisions – Laboratoires Serobiologiques - is known globally as one of the leading suppliers of active ingredients for cosmetics.

The company's activities are based on the principles of sustainable development. It is committed to finding a healthy balance between financial, environmental and social imperatives, without compromising the development opportunities of future generations.

In order to identify new sources for cosmetic active ingredients Cognis set up a partnership with the Moroccan cooperative network "Targanine". The Targanine Network aims at protecting the Argan forest and at the same time improving the social status of women, through developing the commercial potential of the region. Therefore the partnership agreement defines that all new developments must encourage the protection of the biological diversity of the Argan forest and support the local population.

In cooperation with its local partners, Cognis has started the phytochemical investigation of extracts from the Argan tree's leaves and the by-products of the oil production such as the oil cake. To ensure the sustainable use an impact study was undertaken to evaluate the effects of harvesting leaves on the growth of the tree.

Cognis commercialises three products from the kernel of the nut and the leaves of the tree, of which two had not been exploited before:

- The oil of the tree extracted by the Targanine Network in Morocco and sent to France together with the oilcake and the tree leaves.
- In France, Cognis extracts a protein complex from the oil cake, which possesses skin-tightening properties and polyphenols from the leaves that protects the skin from premature aging.
- As a third valuable ingredient Cognis commercialized the cosmetic grade of the edible Argan oil, which is used in regenerative products for skin, hair and nail care.

After nearly 6 years of collaboration, Cognis orders oil and products derived from Argan tree to the local co-operative network Targanine following the principles of sustainable trade: Fair prices, prepayment and direct trade, allowing additional and diversified incomes for the network's members and ensuring a sustainable activity.

In supplying products derived from the Argan tree through a local partner with a strong social and environmental commitment, Cognis supports the social integration of women and contributes to increased revenues of local cooperatives.

The decline of the Argan forest, which was due to changes in the rural lifestyle, could not only be halted, but is on its way to being reversed. Educational programmes, supported through Cognis and the empowered cooperatives are helping to improve the understanding of the value of the Argan tree. In addition, the local population gets involved in the protection and reforestation of the Argan forest through actively participating in taking care of the tree nursery.