



Harvard University sees the good oil in NT sandalwood plantation

One of the world's most prestigious universities has taken a stake in a Top End station growing Indian sandalwood.

Harvard University has invested an estimated \$A40 million in a 399-hectare plantation set up and run by Tropical Forestry Services (TFS) in the Douglas-Daly region about 150 kilometres south of Darwin.

The investment was confirmed after TFS transferred part of its water license to an Australian company, owned by Harvard.

TFS manages the largest area of Indian sandalwood plantations in the world, with projects in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland.

A new planting method means TFS used two million tree-guards and four million bamboo sticks in last year's Northern Territory program.

Planting occurred last July, with a team of about 70 people digging in and positioning seedlings by hand, inside cardboard biodegradable tree-guards held in place by two bamboo sticks.

US business magazine Forbes estimates Harvard's investment arm as having \$US36.4 billion in its coffers.

Harvard has been contacted for comment.

Sandalwood as pimple cure?

Harvard's interest comes as big pharmaceutical companies focus on the potential for sandalwood oil to treat acne.

TFS says its Indian sandalwood oil is part of clinical trials to develop a prescription drug to treat the skin.

Last year the company struck a half-a-billion-dollar deal to sell its sandalwood oil to Nestlé owned company Galderma, which saw the price leap to \$US4,500 per kilogram.

The company's head of global products Mario Di Lallo said at the time Galderma would use the oil in various products.

"Things like eczema creams, warts, acne, actinic keratosis, which are the pre-cancerous skin lesions that people go and get cut off and burnt off... most things that afflict the skin."

A resource in demand

Sandalwood is an endangered species in its homeland of India, with TFS claiming on its website more than 500 million sandalwood incense sticks are burned during worship each day.

TFS says "over three tonnes of sandalwood was burned on Gandhi's funeral pyre".

The oil, which is used in about 70 per cent of commercial fragrances, is also used in many religious ceremonies and has been claimed to have anti-inflammatory properties.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-12/harvard-university-invests-in-nt-sandalwood/6463730>

May 12th 2015