

Sustainability on a Red Grandis® scale

By Simon Fineman, CEO Timbmet



FSC Pure Red Grandis is also a positive example of how a new plantation-grown species can benefit commercial customers, consumers and the planet in terms of sustainability, natural durability, ease of use and continuity of supply.

What is Red Grandis and how is it used?

A high-grade clear timber delivering consistency of appearance, grain and workability, Red Grandis – or *Eucalyptus grandis*, to give it its scientific name – is most often used in the production of internal mouldings, including skirting, architrave and thresholds, furniture, cabinets and exterior cladding profiles, as well as within the window and door frame industry.

Simon Fineman is a life-long environmentalist with a passion for sustainability. As CEO of Timbmet, one of Europe's leading timber distributors, he oversees a company committed to responsible trading and ethical standards. That's why Timbmet has recently chosen Red Grandis®, a Forest Stewardship Council certified (FSC®) red hardwood as a legal and sustainable alternative to uncertified Meranti and Sapele, as Fineman explains.

With nearly 70 years in the timber business, Timbmet owes its strong green credentials in large part to the vision of its founder, Ludwig Kemp, who had a passion for wood as a raw material. From sourcing, purchasing and kilning to storage, selection and delivery, the company is always on the lookout for timber grown and harvested with the long term health of the environment in mind.

Were he alive today, Kemp would approve of the latest addition to the product portfolio. Given the ever increasing global demands on timber as a natural resource, South American Red Grandis offers an environmentally friendly alternative to Meranti and Sapele, and Timbmet has been appointed exclusive UK distributor.

The timber has undergone independent third-party testing by TRADA Technology Limited and Building Research Establishment, achieving impressive results for natural durability and resistance to fungi - key for long-term performance - as well as Class D35 for strength and stiffness, and Class C35 for density to prove its suitability for joinery and structural use.

How is Red Grandis grown?

During the plantation growing process, intensive pruning is carried out to provide a knot-free, clear, uniform timber with sapling thinning to enable the trees to reach significant diameters. Because it is easy to machine and shape and because all lengths are identical, there is less waste, substantially limiting potential landfill use and subsequent damage to the environment.

With an annual growth rate of 3.4 metres in height and 25mm in diameter, this red hardwood can grow to 60 metres high, with mature trees available after just 23 years, ensuring a reliable continuity of supply for years to come.

What is Timbmet's source of Red Grandis?

Timbmet works closely with Urufor, a Uruguay-based forestry company, which shares the same ethical and environmental values and which is committed to growing and marketing high quality *Eucalyptus grandis*. The ►

company exports its products to over 15 countries in Asia, America and Europe and its corporate mandate is to provide a high quality product based on sustainable forestry management.

Since 2001, the company has been certified to FSC standards: this recognises its exemplary use of forestry resources and its adherence to specific economic, social and environmental regulations in terms of forestry management.

Given its geographical location and smooth topography, Uruguay is ranked among the world's leading countries in terms of environmental sustainability. Its forestry industry has been growing steadily since the late 1980s, thanks to the introduction and implementation of positive government policies.

The total land area owned by Urufor is 52,000 hectares or 128,000 acres. To date, the planted area covers 27,000 hectares or 67,000 acres, with current demand leading to 1300 hectares being harvested annually.

Where it all begins

To guarantee the production of high quality wood, Urufor says the procedure starts at the nursery. Its Tree Improvement Program for *Eucalyptus grandis* strives to enhance the growth and performance of this species on existing forestry sites, at the same time working to strengthen disease tolerance and develop genetic diversity.

Working in conjunction with its associate company, Cofusa, seeds are carefully selected and improved over several generations, with vegetative reproduction technology cloning outstanding performing trees. Approximately 1.5 million seedlings are planted on an annual basis, ensuring sustainability on a grand – or perhaps that should be, *grandis* – scale!

After six months, small plants developed at the nursery are transplanted to land where new forests will be established. Soil preparation, fertilisation and weed control are all closely monitored throughout the process to ensure the development of a satisfactory and sustainable plantation.

Pruning and thinning techniques are carried out later on in the process to generate a good yield of logs with no defects and large diameters. The first pruning is carried out when the seedling reaches 18 months, the second at three years, and the third after four-and-a-half years. By this time, the trees have already grown to 12 metres in height.

Harvest time

With crop development and growth completed, harvesting can begin. Due to the favourable conditions of the soil and the climate, as well as Uruguayan investment in road improvement, harvesting continues throughout the year.

This uninterrupted activity paves the way for ongoing reforestation, further benefitting sustainability and environmental protection.

The future is Red, the future is Grandis

In the 20-plus years I've worked in the timber industry, I've learned that although progress often seems frustratingly slow in communicating the imperative need to achieve environmental protection and forest sustainability, the programmes and results that are emerging are very encouraging. In forestry terms, where change is measured in decades, the 20th century witnessed destructive devastation, as the global hardwood industry ravaged environmentally sensitive forests.

In the early 90s, I went on my first overseas mission to investigate what was happening with Brazilian mahogany. It didn't take long to find out. Forestry management plans were bogus works of fiction and the Amazon forest was being wrecked by loggers interested only in a few valuable trees per hectare. It's hardly surprising that today we sell little or no Brazilian hardwood.

The story was similar in many other forests of the world, particularly, though by no means exclusively, in tropical developing countries. Thankfully, we've learned some valuable lessons from that damaging period in our environmental heritage. The path to change has brought about scrupulous supply chain auditing, stringent certification and the introduction of plantation grown hardwoods.

In the 21st century, more and more organisations, governments, companies and individuals are working to reverse and repair the damage done to the world's rich landscape. Gradually, we are learning how to protect our ecosystems, while at the same time harvesting timber from environmentally benign sources.

It is timbers such as Red Grandis and companies such as Urufor which are leading the way. The next 20 years will be beneficial for hardwood sourcing, and for an industry - and a world - with little to fear and much to gain. ■

