



# Making charcoal green

One of the pleasures of summer is alfresco cooking and dining. The barbecue season is now well under way with the smell of sizzling sausages wafting over garden hedges across Europe. Turning sausages the required colour can be achieved with a range of fuels. Some amateur chefs swear by gas while others prefer electricity: but for barbecue purists, there is only one possible choice: charcoal. In addition to its fast lighting, high temperature and long cooking time, charcoal has the added advantage of imparting an authentic smoky barbecue flavour. French charcoal producer CARBONEX SAS ensures that it is also the ecological choice.

The wood used by CARBONEX in charcoal production is sourced from sustainably managed forests from the local region of Champagne-Ardenne and Burgundy. "Wood quality is essential for a successful barbecue," says CEO Pierre Soler-My, who shares the leadership of the company with his brothers Jean and Philippe. "We use locally sourced oak, beech, hornbeam and other hardwoods to make our 100% natural, premium-quality charcoal."

Charcoal has been used as a fuel since earliest times, particularly in applications where an intense

heat was required. It was the traditional fuel of the blacksmith's forge and was also used for smelting iron and later for making steel. Today, however, other materials have largely superseded charcoal, which is now mainly used to fuel domestic barbecues. CARBONEX supplies the familiar bags that can be picked up from petrol stations or supermarkets for an impromptu alfresco dining session. "We produce around 20,000 t of charcoal each year, 30% of which 30% is destined for foreign markets such as Germany and Scandinavia," says Mr. Soler-My. "What is even more interesting is the fact that we

now generate a significant proportion of turnover through the sale of energy, which is produced as a by-product of the charcoal production process."

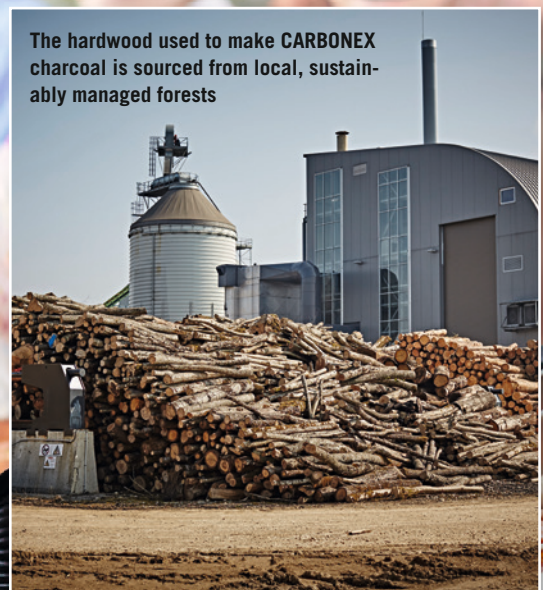
CARBONEX sells this energy in the form of electricity to the French power company EDF. The company generates 3.3 MW of electricity per year through the production of charcoal – enough to power tens of thousands of households. In addition to providing a clean source of renewable energy, CARBONEX has developed a unique process that greatly improves the ecological sustainability of charcoal produc-

tion. "Our process represents a revolution in the industry," says Mr. Soler-My. "It is highly automated, thus increasing efficiency and lowering environmental impact. We have developed, designed, built and started a complete installation from the preparation of wood – reception, cutting and drying – to high-efficiency charcoal and electricity production from the pyrolysis gases."

The success of this project has turned CARBONEX into a technology company. It is currently raising capital so that it can finance new projects. "Charcoal is still an im-



In addition to producing charcoal, the plant also produces 3.3 MW of electricity, which CARBONEX sells to French power company EDF



The hardwood used to make CARBONEX charcoal is sourced from local, sustainably managed forests

# CARBONEX

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**Charcoal is the fuel of choice for barbecues because of its high temperature and long cooking time**

portant fuel source in Africa and other developing regions,” says Mr. Soler-My. “With our clean process for its production and the added bonus of producing electric power at the same time, we can target new growth opportunities that will hopefully allow us to increase turnover ten-fold.” The company is currently evaluating several projects around the world to identify which ones will benefit most from this new technology. “There are 15 potential sites, but we also need to get investors on board in order

to move them forward,” says Mr. Soler-My. “Our business model is changing. We are no longer simply a charcoal producer. We are also an energy generator and a technology transfer company.”

**CARBONEX produces 20,000 t of charcoal each year**

