



New fuel source from trees

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By Penny Marshall/Judy Kelly

A Mackay man is claiming that diesel trees could be a viable alternative fuel.

It seems too bizarre to be true, that a tree could provide an alternative fuel source for environmentally conscious motorists, but a Mackay nursery owner has brought this product to market and is confident Australians will embrace the ability of the diesel tree.

The tropical trees, which have the botanic name *copaifera langsdorfii*, produce a biofuel that can be tapped, filtered and used to power machinery. According to nursery owner, Mike Jubow, it will be about 15 years before the trees will produce enough fuel to run a tractor, but things are certainly progressing.

As the name suggests, the diesel tree contains a property that forms the basis of a fuel. Mike says you can run machinery straight off the oil that comes from the tree. "It secretes a lot of oil in the heartwood of the tree," he explains. "When the tree's mature you only have to bore a hole into it, hammer a pipe in and you can drain out the oil which you can put straight into a diesel engine." He adds that the oil doesn't need to be processed aside from doing some filtering to remove any foreign matter like dirt, bark chip or sawdust.

Diesel trees are native to Brazil and Mike says each mature tree is capable of providing about 40 litres of diesel per year. "You'll tap it twice in the year and each time you'll get around about 20 litres," he says. "But there's seasonal influences that control that as well."

He understands it all sounds a bit whacky and will be a bit of a hard sell but suggests the public look at it from a farmer's perspective. "If you've got one hectare of these trees in, eventually you'll have about 250 to 300 trees in a hectare and from that you should be able to produce around about 12,000 litres per annum," which he says is enough for a small farm. "The larger your farm, the more hectares of trees you plant."

In fact the majority of his customers for the 20,000 seedlings he's managed to get hold of from Brazil are cane farmers. He thinks this is in direct relationship to the amount of machinery they use on their farms. "Eventually they're going to become self sufficient in fuel," he says. "They're planting these in the corners of their farm where they can't grow sugar cane. There are other things they can do immediately to get their own biofuels like grow soya bean whereas with this tree, your cost of production is down around just cents per litre."

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Mike's been busy growing and maturing these trees which he describes as sun-hardened and ready to be planted but he just can't get enough. "The demand's been incredible. It's impossible for us to cope with from the point of view of getting enough seed out of Brazil to grow these trees for my customers." So are the Brazilians hanging on to them? Mike believes so. "I've had a lot of problems getting it. They realise they're on to a good thing and want it for themselves." He adds that there's now a program in Brazil where they're starting to produce fuel from this tree on a



Tropical North rural reporter Penny Marshall putting the seedling to good use. | Penny Marshall

commercial scale.

The obvious entrepreneurial thing for Mike to do would be to plant them all, get the oil out of them and make a million dollars, but he says it's a bit beyond him as an individual. He's heard whispers that major corporations are looking at the viability of diesel tree plantations as an investment option. "There's expectations this will happen." It's only a matter of time before we'll all be planting them to fill up our cars."

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