

# KEES AT THE CORE

TREETALKS | “My trip to our reforestation site” - Corekees’ Editor Kees Rottinghuis on his visit to the trees



By Kees Rottinghuis

**At The Corekees Foundation, we offer carbon compensating, fuel producing trees. Our tree is known for its ability to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> - or carbon. Furthermore, the nuts on the trees contain crude oil. This oil is used as renewable fuel; a direct alternative to fossil fuels. The combination of replacing fossil fuels and absorbing carbon, makes these trees about as green as it gets.**

**This summer I traveled to our reforestation site, Estancia Santa Rosanna in Paraguay. This is how it exceeded my expectations:**

## THE TRIP

It’s quite the trip. First the eleven-hour flight to Sao Paulo, followed by another flight to Campo Grande. A five-hour drive to Porto Murtinho and from there a short boat ride on the Rio Paraguay. Combined, these emissions are the equivalent of seventeen trees, which I bought just before take-off. It is a beautiful journey but a long one nonetheless.

Once you arrive though, it immediately feels worthwhile.

Our Estancia (that is Spanish for farm) is where everything tree-related takes places. It is where the greenhouses, nursery and most of the reforestation areas are. Also, the cloning of the trees, genetic research, planting and eventually crushing of the nuts for the crude oil takes place there. This makes being there exciting, there is a real buzz about the place and you feel right in the middle of it all.

Estancia Santa Rosanna is located on the Paraguayan side of the Rio Paraguay, with Brazil at the opposite side. The location plays a crucial role. The seedlings need a lot of water and there is plenty; approximately 30 million liter flows through the river every second. But the river is also a very easy way for transportation. Ships with large barges can come to collect oil and directly ship it off to oil companies. A few hundred meters upstream there is a little island that is used as a natural roundabout for the freight ships to turn.



Estancia Santa Rosanna

The water also plays a crucial role for power at the estancia. Electricity comes from the

hydroelectric power station at the Iguazu waterfalls. So, at the estancia we are not only sequestering CO<sub>2</sub> but also running on clean energy.

At the time of my visit, the temperatures were in the high 20 degrees, quite comfortable. In the summer temperatures can run up to 50 degrees, which is quite unpleasant for us but great for the trees.

## MEN BEHIND THE TREES

There are a few important local people that keep the estancia going and give it such a great atmosphere. It is a relatively young team, which means a lot of energy and a fresh set of ideas.

In charge of managing the estancia is Federico ‘Fredy’ Montoya, who seems to know everyone. He used to be a Paraguayan footballer and even played for the national team, which probably helps getting to know so many people in football-

crazy South America. Fredy is also in charge of the reforestation areas, which he inspects regularly on horseback. So, his job becomes more encompassing as more and more trees are sold. But like the sportsman he is, he is impatient for the challenge.

Humberto Pagliosa is the Tree Production Manager. As a forest engineer specialized in greenhouse and nursery operations, it is his job to ensure an ever-increasing production. This means he is constantly tinkering with new and improved ways of planting and nurturing seeds and trees.



*A concentrated Humberto*

Another important figure at the estancia is Francisco Vergara. He is in charge of the genetics of the

trees. This means that he is looking for the best genes to ensure a high fuel production but also a high survival rate. Francisco travels a lot to find the best Pongamia trees, like recently to India and Australia. Because of Francisco's work our Pongamia trees are getting better and better.

### TREE FACTORY

Fredy, Humberto and Francisco are crucial for the tree and oil production process. And it's quite the process. All trees are clones. This means they are cut from so-called mother trees, which are selected by Francisco because of their genetics. These cuttings have to be made in a very specific way. It requires a few weeks of training. At first this was done by men, but they were too rough-handed. Women proved far better at it. The estancia uses as much local labour as possible and they are paid above average wages, which is unique for the region. So, the estancia is becoming a popular place to work.



*Trees waiting to be planted*

After the cuttings have been made, they are potted and placed in a greenhouse for 2 months, where they are watered with a thick mist. Next, they are repotted to bigger pots and placed out in the sun for about 6 months. The trees are then ready to be planted. We plant our trees on the land of local cattle farmers. According to Paraguayan law, farmers need to reforest 50% of their land so we offer an easy solution to that. The only sacrifice farmers have to make is that they cannot use the land for the first year after planting, because the trees need to grow and not be trampled by the cows. After a year the tree is resilient enough to survive. All of this means we have farmers lined up to join.

### EYE-OPENING

I thought I knew a lot about Pongamia and the whole process but being at Estancia Santa Rosanna was eye-opening. There is so much more going on than can easily be explained, from details about the genetics to the massive undertaking of planting thousands of trees. The whole operation is thought through and very well structured. Every single question I asked was answered immediately. I can't wait to come back next year and see the progress made, even though I have no questions left.



*Farewell but not goodbye*