

# INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE CHILEAN BASKET WILLOW

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The basket willow (*Salix viminalis*) is a well-known species in Chile for its qualities for the production of baskets, packaging and furniture. It has been cultivated since the colonial times, when the species was introduced from Spain. Since then, the cultivation of the species and the production of goods have been carried out in rural towns, particularly in Chimbarongo (VI Region), where 223 hectares of basket willow exist in 88 plantations, most of them the property of small farmers. About 1,200 small handicraft shops manufacture a great diversity of wicker goods that are sold mainly in the local market. Some of the problems for this activity are the lack of technological development, raw material and products without the necessary quality to reach better markets, as well as knowledge limited to creating handmade products of designs manufactured over decades. As a result, some 4,000 people linked to the cultivation and production of wicker products reach subsistence levels only.

The revaluation of natural and handmade products around the world and recognition of their contribution to rural development have stimulated the production of natural fibers in many countries. In Latin America, Chile has excellent climate and soil conditions for the cultivation of wicker and rattan which have similar properties. In that context and after verifying the existence of an important Asian demand for rattan products, both domestically and globally, the Instituto Forestal (INFOR), with the collaboration of other national institutions, began the project “Integral Development of the Cultivation and Industrialization of the Basket-willow” with the objective of strengthening the national wicker industry, improving the quality and looking for opportunities to export raw material and products, particularly furniture. A significant change was envisaged from small scale handicraft to a Chilean wicker industry.

This paper presents the main activities and results in the three areas of work addressed by the project. The first, related to the development of wicker cultivation, was to identify locations to establish cultivation, select the best species, establish appropriate forestry techniques, improve the post-crop process and formulate standards of quality to favour the domestic and international commercialization of the raw material. The second topic was aimed at the industrial development of wicker furniture with the generation of new products, processes and standards of quality. The third topic was dedicated to generation and promotion of commercial information to foster the competitiveness and quality of production.

**Keywords:** Wicker, rattan, forestry, handmade and semi industrial products, designs, markets.

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