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SUCCESS STORY

Blazing trails and American barbecues: Namibia exports the world’s “greenest charcoal”

With USAID support, Namibian charcoal arrives in the U.S. market, offering an economic lifeline and safeguarding local biodiversity.



A U.S. customer happily grilling with Namibian charcoal

“By building a brand for Namibian charcoal here in the large U.S. market, we’re helping to advance employment and prosperity within Namibia. We are proud to be working with Namibian businesses and USAID on this initiative. Here in the United States, Pecos Pit, Food Renewal Bank, and 2nd Street Pantry were all thrilled to participate in our food drives across the country and were very appreciative of us feeding many families facing food insecurities. This motivates us to keep going.”

– Ben Jablonski, CEO and Co-Founder, TGCC

Communities across Namibia grapple with the problem of acacia bushes that encroach on their land. The invasive acacia reduces pastureland available for livestock, sucks up groundwater, and negatively impacts Namibia’s indigenous plant and animal species as it competes for natural resources. Africa Burns Charcoal, a Namibian firm, is addressing these problems, through an environmentally and economically sustainable solution: root out the invasive acacia plant and convert it into charcoal, in line with the Forest Stewardship Council’s (FSC) specifications. Africa Burns has won acclaim for this innovative approach. Its supply chain consists of hundreds of local small-scale suppliers who are transforming the acacia into charcoal which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing devastating droughts, has become an economic lifeline to over 10,000 people in Namibia’s charcoal sector.

Following discussions in 2021, Africa Burns Charcoal has received support from the United States Agency for International Development’s Southern Africa Trade and Investment Hub (USAID TradeHub) to increase exports of its ‘green’ charcoal to a U.S. buyer, aptly named The Good Charcoal Company (TGCC). To date, the USAID TradeHub support has facilitated the sale of over 1,000 metric tons of Namibian charcoal to TGCC, who is now eagerly marketing the product to get it off its shelves into American barbecues.

The USAID TradeHub fostered the relationship between Africa Burns and TGCC. The program initially assisted Africa Burns to obtain the vital FSC certification in June 2021, by cost-sharing with them. Acquiring this internationally recognized certification has added credibility to the charcoal’s standing, especially in export markets with environmentally conscious consumers.

The USAID TradeHub also supported Africa Burns Charcoal to better understand U.S. market-entry requirements and logistical hurdles, so they could export their charcoal to the United States duty-free under Normal Trade Relations —formerly called Most Favored Nation status. TGCC, on its part, is now partnering with local communities across the United States to support and sponsor free weekly barbecues – 6,000 free meals and counting – to people experiencing food insecurity in the United States, thereby staying true to its name. Truly, the good charcoal company!

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April 2022
Southern Africa Trade and Investment Hub
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