

Brazilian Pantanal Uses Bone and Horn, All to Sell Furniture

Contributed by Débora Rubin
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Nature in the Brazilian Pantanal is generous. There are savannahs, a little Amazon forest and 35% wetland. Wood is not lacking. Neither is creativity.

Furniture producers from the midwestern Brazilian state of Mato Grosso want to seek in alternative materials the solution to their market.

With two strong hubs, one in Cuiabá and Várzea Grande and the other covering the cities of Alta Floresta, Sinop and Lucas do Rio Verde, businessmen in the sector are fighting for a place in the sun.

This is because, according to the local branch of the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae), 80% of the furniture consumed in the state comes from other places. On the other hand, exports are still a problem as costs are very high and ports are distant.

Of the almost 400 companies in Cuiabá hub, only four export. The solution, they believe, is to make furniture with a more typical face, with an exotic touch.

According to Hamilton Leitão, manager of the Cuiabá and Várzea Grande Local Productive Arrangement (LPA), the richness of alternative material is extensive. There are vines, roots, cattle and crocodile leather, horns and bones.

In May, Leitão visited the International Home Furnishing Center, in High Point, North Carolina (USA) with twelve businessmen from Mato Grosso. Apart from noticing how much the North Americans like heavy, solid wood furniture, they saw that the use of alternative material is very successful there. "The businessmen were pleased," she explained. "After all, we have plenty of raw material."

Businessman Fernando Ávila, from Odorata Móveis, already uses some of these materials. In his factory, he adds handicraft to the products, as well as using fiber, seeds and working with teak, a tree of Asian origin that adapted well to the Brazilian savannah.

"Companies here are organizing themselves to set up a strong hub and win the national and international market," stated Ávila, who is also a member of the Sindmóvel, a union that brings together furniture sector companies in the region.

According to him, making furniture with typical characteristics is the bet to enter the foreign market, and, who knows, one day fighting with the giant China.

Environmental Conscience

The work of the Mato Grosso state branch of the Sebrae is the support of sustainable development. In the state, despite the strong use of wood from afforestation, there is still a lot of illegal logging.

"This is a very isolated place, of vast extensions, and inspection only arrived recently. Controlling illegal extraction of trees is still very complicated," explained Leitão, from the Sebrae.

In the hub in Cuiabá, the most common woods are MDF, laminates and chipboard. In Alta Floresta and region, solid wood furniture prevails.

The work of the Sebrae still reaches few companies, 116 of the 400 in Cuiabá and Várzea Grande. With them, business management, marketing and design work is being executed.

Apart from that, the group, which has been under development since 2003, participates in national and international fairs after new ideas, new markets and after making the furniture hub an expressive furniture production centre in the country.

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