End uses of balsa

Export: Kiln dry sawmill products are loaded into shipping containers at the sawmill (left) for transport to the Port of Rabaul (right). All of PNG balsawood produced is exported.

Wind turbines: Most of the world’s balsawood is used as an outer skin in the manufacture of wind turbines used to generate electricity.

Other uses: Balsa has many other uses including wall panels (left), surfboards, toy models, and panels used in modern trains (right) and other transport equipment such as trucks.

For more information: See: www.pip.com.pg for copies of the fact sheets.

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ACIAR Balsa Project Fact Sheet #5:

Log processing & markets

Introduction

Balsa is a good tree for planting by ENBP farmers, providing future income by selling the trees to processors. Balsa has no on-farm uses, is only sold into export markets. Farmers growing balsa need to understand how to harvest balsa for maximum value. From cutting a balsa tree down at harvest, through a sawmill to commencing of drying the sawn boards, should take no more than four days. All balsa grown and the boards produced are exported in various forms for use overseas. This Fact Sheet (#5 of 6) overviews balsa processing and markets.

Log delivery and unloading

Loading and unloading: Balsa logs are loaded onto a log truck by the processor’s (log buyers) harvest crew (left) and the trucks are unloaded by another team at the sawmill.
Log sawing into boards

Log sawing: Balsa logs are sawn up by small (left) and large (right) sawmills into green rough-sawn timber boards.

Outputs: Green rough-sawn boards (left) and sawdust and offcuts (right) are produced by sawing up the balsa logs.

Kiln drying green rough-sawn boards

Kiln drying: The green rough-sawn boards are kiln dried (left & right) to prevent blue stain and to make them suitable for use by buyers. Dried boards are processed into a range of products for export. Logs cut from a balsa tree must be sawn into boards and kiln-dried within 4 days.

Kiln dry boards

Finishing: The rough-sawn kiln dry boards (right) are sanded (left) for use in local manufactured products or exported for use in a range of manufactured products.

Drymill outputs: The drymill produces kiln dry rough-sawn and machined boards (left) and glued blocks (right). It takes four cubic metres of logs cut from a farmer’s block to produce one cubic metre of export products after losses during processing (off-cuts and sawdust are produced).