

Women cooperatives hand craft Argan oil

Berber women have been producing Argan oil in Morocco for cooking, beauty care, and skin treatment for centuries. The manual time-consuming production process (handed down over generations) was mostly home-based until the Moroccan government began funding Argan oil cooperatives* where poor rural women from nearby villages could work in a safe environment and have the opportunity to earn money for their families while contributing to the preservation of the endangered Argan tree in the south of Morocco.



During the traditional home-based production of Argan oil, the women crack the shell of the Argan nut with a stone to extract the kernel; grind the seeds between two slabs of rock to create a brown paste; and then filter the paste to extract the Argan oil.

A cooperative is a community workplace, unlike a product factory with rigid rules. The women have flexible work schedules that allow them to work for a day, a week, or for months, as their individual circumstances permit. It is a community and social environment devoid of pressure or competition. When the cooperative receives revenues from the sale of Argan oil, the income is distributed equitably among the women.

Argan oil production is eco-friendly because nothing goes to waste: the nuts outer shell is used as animal (sheeps and goats) feed, the nut shell as fire fuel, and the kernel to extract Argan oil.

Cooperatives hand-crafted Argan oil is generally of superior quality because the women make sure the best seeds are used for oil production and that the kernels are processed soon after the nuts are cracked open, thereby minimizing oxidation. The kernels are either roasted to produce the edible Argan oil or are cold pressed to extract Argan oil.



*Other examples of successful women's cooperatives throughout Morocco include everything from raising goats, to producing cheese, to making carpets. According to the High Atlas Foundation, a single cooperative can serve women and girls from up to ten villages (approximately 250 women), and increase household incomes by an average of 25% (<http://www.highatlasfoundation.org/projects/womens-cooperatives>).