

The Government buys books with certified paper

A government decree establishes that purchases from the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (National Program of the Educational Book) with a print-run over 200 thousand units, be made with certified paper. For the sector, the measure values companies that work with sustainability concepts

By Marina Faleiros and Thaís Mattos

Brazilian paper produced from renewable and planted forests won an important ally at the start of 2010: public initiative. In accordance with a presidential decree signed in January, purchases with print runs of over 200 thousand units of new editions of books distributed to students of the public school system of the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD - National Program for Educational Books), of the Ministry of Education (MEC), should be printed with certified paper. "Brazil needs to increase and strengthen the internal paper market and, without a doubt, this is an important step for the sector", points out Elizabeth de Carvalhaes, president of the Associação Brasileira de Celulose e Papel (Bracelpa - Brazilian Pulp and Paper Association).

José Carlos Wanderley Dias de Freitas, director of the Administração e Tecnologia do Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação (FNDE - National Fund for the Development of Education), that controls the PNLD, tells that the intention of the project is to create a premise inducing production of graphic material to incorporate the concept of sustainability in relation to the environment. "As the MEC is one of the largest buyers of paper in Brazil, with more than 100 million books per year, the actions it's taking

have a multiplying effect, which is very important when dealing with the environment", tells Freitas.

The specifications, published on February 05, apply to non-coated paper, manufactured with bleached pulp fibers, normally obtained from wood by chemical process. In accordance with the regulatory text, the certificate can be issued in at least one of the certificate systems recognized and accredited internationally, as granted by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Programa Nacional de Certificação Florestal (Cerflor - National Program of Forest Certification) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

The requirement will be included in contracts of print-runs larger than 200 thousand units, like books, magazines and similar items. "At the start we established the minimum run so that the market can adapt, but in the future this could be increased", said Freitas. Non-compliance implies a fine of 10% of the value of the contract, which can be discounted from the payment owed to the company contracted. "The MEC is a key force in many issues involving paper, especially by its volume of purchases", says the director.

Elizabeth even explains that, in some countries, the certification is a pre-requisite for government purchases when choosing a product to be

imported, and for the private sector as well, which also needs to cater to the whims of more conscious and demanding consumers. "Currently, the consumption of paper in Brazil is quite low compared to the world average, and Brazil needs to increase and strengthen the internal paper market", she says. For Elizabeth, this advance shows without a doubt that the Brazilian pulp and paper industry is striving to promote sustainable growth.

According to the executive president of Bracelpa, the certification reflects the sector's commitment to sustainability, as it ensures the preservation of the forest, the maintenance of the biodiversity, in addition to contributing to the social and economic development of forest communities.

PRIVATE SECTOR FOLLOWS THE SAME PATH

In accordance with Bracelpa, the Brazilian certified paper market has ample ability to follow the decree. "More than 90% of companies in the printing and writing paper sector already have certification. This regulation will be important for self-evaluation as much as identification, measurement and projection of future demands of certified paper", said Elizabeth.

For the time being, the purchases of certified paper are for the PNLD books,

but a point of view exists that this type of requirement should also extend to other government spheres. “It’s what the industry longs for, not just for the possible financial results, but for the creation of a stronger market from the perspective of sustainability”, says the executive.

The private sector already has gone in the same direction. Itaú Unibanco bank, for example, earned the FCS certification for its printing department, which guarantees that it only works with ecologically sustainable suppliers. Editora Globo also announced in February that it

has obtained the same certification, or rather, that the paper used in the printing of the company’s publications also has the same requirements. “The demand for certified paper has grown more and more in the private sector; something we consider very positive”, confirms Elizabeth. For the executive, this certainly reflects an evolution in the understanding of the concept of sustainability and also in the understanding of the processes of the pulp and paper sector in Brazil. “Companies are starting to comprehend that the industry produces paper from raw materials that originate exclusively in

plantation forests, and that the certification stamp proves that the products were made under strict sustainability standards.

And if some fear exists about the increase in price of paper due to the certification process, Elizabeth stresses that this won’t happen. “The certification doesn’t imply any additional cost for the consumer, printing agencies or editors”, she guarantees. The pulp and paper sector has the largest area of certified forest among the main forest sectors in Brazil: in total there are 2.7 million hectares (including native forests). ▲

Sector maintains dialogue with the government

To closely follow what happens in the government sphere with relation to the purchasing of paper is important for Bracelpa. “Various related law projects follow the legal procedure in Congress and Bracelpa follows the debate processes and voting, in the sense of offering information to the parliamentary officials about the sector and the effectiveness of each measure, among other issues”, comments Elizabeth de Carvalhaes.

Some of these projects for example, deal with the use of recycled paper in public institutions, with the objective of promoting an environmentally correct product and to develop initiatives in the area of sustainability in the government arena. In all these opportunities for dialogue, Elizabeth confirms, Bracelpa explained to the parliamentary officials that both types of paper - recycled and virgin fiber - are sustainable options, reinforcing the importance of the certification of origin of the papers, or rather, the plantation forests.

The opportunity to present a project related to the purchase of the government’s certified paper arose in the middle of the international financial crisis. In this period, the sector negotiated with diverse institutions for support to confront this period as soon as the sector was strongly impacted by the reduction demand, fall in price and rise of the exchange rate; institutions like the Ministério da Fazenda (Ministry of Finance), Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (BNDES - National Bank of Social and Economic Development) and the Ministério de Desenvolvimento Indústria e Comércio (MDIC - Ministry of Development, Industry and Commerce). “Among the presented priorities in the negotiations with the federal government, the increase in the consumption of paper was seen as a viable opportunity, once the internal market showed signs that it was capable of prospering in the adverse period”, said the executive.

In this sense, Bracelpa suggested two related initiatives to the PNLD: increase the number of books distributed to students from the public system and including the distribution of notebooks for writing. “The representatives of public authority consider the measure to be legitimate because of its social character and for valuing the competitiveness of the national product.” The negotiations, especially for the distribution of notebooks, continue. Bracelpa estimates that as many as 48 million students could benefit.

So, it was in this context that the President of the Republic signed the decree to use certified paper in the PNLD books. “To give substance to the sector’s plea to increase the consumption of paper, Bracelpa and the printing and writing paper production companies compiled a document with information about the current situation of the certification for the books’ custody chain certificate, explains Elizabeth. With this data in hand, the government elaborated new regulation for the teaching materials distributed by PNLD, or rather, that all the paper utilized in the production of this publication originated in certified plantation forests.