

NEWS

# Australian scientists recognised at Mullum Bio-charfest



Luke Mortimer | 8th Sep 2014 7:38 AM



**BIG HIT:** John Sanderson from Earth Systems shows off some biochar at Mullumbimby's Bio-charfest at the weekend.

Luke Mortimer

THE internationally-recognised innovation of Australian eco-scientists and researchers was highlighted at Mullumbimby's Bio-charfest at the weekend.

Industry experts on environmental issues offered presentations on topics ranging from biochar manufacture to hemp production, carbon farming and even 3D printed housing.

The well-attended festival also ramped up local interest in what's thought to be a world-first technology - the Charmaker Mobile Pyrolysis Plant, from Earth Systems.

Created by decomposing organic material at high temperatures in a process called pyrolysis, biochar benefits soil quality and farm yields, can be used to produce energy, acts as a carbon emissions sink and can be used as a building material, among a variety of other uses.

Earth Systems principal environmental engineer, John Sanderson, explained how the Charmaker works.

"Ultimately, the goal of the Charmaker is about capturing atmospheric carbon and sequestering it," he said.

"The process of creating biochar using sustainable biomass is the one technology we currently have to take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and sequester it for the long term.

"It's not an R&D thing. It's something anyone can do in their backyard. It's been proven and the Charmaker is a commercial device for doing that with the added benefits of making a char product which has soil amendment benefits and other applications."

Mr Sanderson said the char created had excellent filtration uses, prevented agricultural runoff, improved soils and had numerous material science benefits.

"It can be added as the filler to building materials, can make low-density cement blocks and different sorts of construction material," he said.

"If there are any drawbacks with biochar, it's really an economic one. The market is embryonic

at the moment. It is growing though."

The Charmaker, which is created with a repurposed shipping container, has yet to gain EPA approval in New South Wales, but is attracting attention from landowners across Australia.

Bio-charfest co-ordinator Don Coyne said the presentations by some of Australia's top biochar researchers and industry representatives were a hit with festival attendees.

He was pleased to see the festival opened by Byron Shire Council mayor Simon Richardson and hoped the festival would add to growing mainstream recognition of biochar.

Biochar is the name given to charcoal when used for particular purposes.

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