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Cover: A piece of prehistoric Lapita pottery found on the Mussau Islands near New Guinea depicts a human face. The site where the fragment was uncovered has provided evidence that the Lapita people, thought to be ancestors of modern Polynesians, had a complex culture 3,600 years ago and probably originated farther west toward southeast Asia. (Image: Patrick V. Kirch)



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Letters

Fine print?

In the article on kenaf ("What's tall, tough and read all over?," SN: 8/1/87, p. 72) I read with chagrin the two statements: "With lower quality standards than other types of paper, newsprint is the logical first step to prove the plant's worth," and "But it remains to be seen whether kenaf truly is a worthy paper component."

In selecting newsprint to provide insights on the existing pool of knowledge on kenaf, my colleagues and I involved with the Kenaf Demonstration Project thought that dealing with only one product line would provide greater focus on an intended market. We chose newsprint to circumvent the chicken-and-egg syndrome of which business proceeds first. Newspaper publishers and newspaper suppliers often share a common business interest with a fully integrated infrastructure.

In 1960 we began the Agricultural Research Service \$4.5 million study of kenaf as a fiber resource for pulp at the Northern Regional Research Center, Peoria, Ill., in collaboration

with colleagues at Beltsville, Md. and Savannah, Ga. We concluded it in 1978 with the rationale that we had proven the technical feasibility. Promising economic projections were expected to be further refined by the private sector. We had provided entrepreneurial interests with data on several pulping techniques familiar to the industry. Kenaf chemical pulps were superior to commercial hardwood pulps and, except for tear resistance, were comparable to softwood pulps. Fiber from the bark fraction has been used in cigarette paper, rope, twine, burlap and felting materials. Also, the separate woody core fraction offers several interesting possibilities.

Kenaf papers have provided excellent printability characteristics by various techniques with commercial presses. Kenaf shows exceptional promise for newsprint; however, numerous exciting opportunities remain to be explored.

Marvin O. Bagby
Research Leader, Oil Chemical Research
Northern Regional Research Center
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Peoria, Ill.

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