

UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Kenaf

Introduction

Kenaf is a warm season annual row crop and a member of the Hibiscus family. Plants are capable of growing to a height of 20 feet under favorable conditions; however, heights generally average 8 to 14 feet in a growing season of four to five months. The stalks consist of two kinds of fiber: an outer fiber (bast) and an inner fiber (core). The bast is comparable to softwood tree fibers, while the core is comparable to hardwood fibers. After harvest, the plant is processed to separate these fibers for various products.

Kenaf was first investigated in the U.S. as a source of twine in the 1940s. Since that time it has been used in such products as rope, twine, bagging and carpet backing. Currently kenaf shows promise as a source of pulp for the manufacture of various grades of paper and cardboard. A company in Texas manufactures kenaf into decking and fence material. In addition, kenaf has been investigated as a possible livestock feed, with very favorable results. U.S. research into the production and development of kenaf primarily continues in several southern states.

Marketing and Market Outlook

The domestic demand for kenaf is currently limited. At this time, the only known processing plants in the U.S. are located in Texas, Mississippi and Georgia. All acreage is contract-grown for these companies. Because the harvested stalks are too bulky to ship any distance, kenaf production necessarily must be located near a processing plant. Despite



this crop's apparent promise as a ready source of fiber, the lack of any nearby market currently makes kenaf an unsuitable alternative crop for Kentucky.

More Information

- About the Kenaf Plant (VisionPaper, 2005)
<http://www.visionpaper.com/kenaf2.html>
- Alternative Field Crops Manual: Kenaf (University of Wisconsin and University of Minnesota, 1991)
<http://newcrop.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/afcm/kenaf.html>
- Kenaf Production (ATTRA, 2003)
<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/kenaf.html>
- Kenaf: Production, Harvesting, Processing and Products (1993)
<http://newcrop.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/proceedings1993/V2-416.html>
- Kenaf Project (Omini Ventures, Illinois, 2003)
<http://www.chuckmerlin.com/ivardc/omni/projects/kenaf/>



*Photo: Morris Bitzer,
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