



A fiber crop leaf, Roselle, has the classic hemp leaf look.



Ed Herrmann, Solanco Young Farmer Association adviser, checks out the Tainung II variety of kenaf during the Groff field day.

## Field Day Proves 'Tree-Free' Paper

(Continued from Page 20)

newsprint, less ink is necessary — providing some cost savings for larger newsprint users.

The largest number of kenaf acres is located in south Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. Producers are trying to build a paper mill to handle kenaf processing exclusively in the U.S.

About 19 scientists are involved in research. Baldwin is a leading researcher with kenaf at the Mississippi Agricultural and forestry Experiment Station out of Mississippi State University.

Federal money was provided to conduct uniform variety trials. Eight varieties are under study in the program including three new American varieties. The varieties include one resistant to fungus.

The scientists are also working on varieties resistant to powdery mildew and zonate leaf spot. Zonate leaf spot (which comes from hickory trees) infects soybeans — and the kenaf can't be rotated to many plants to ward off the disease.

Also, nematodes, such as the root knot nematode, are a challenge to the plant. Correct rotation to kill nematodes, such as planting sunn hemp, must be employed.

Kenaf fiber is from the croatalaria family, a legal crop, according to Ed Herrmann, Solanco Young Farmer Association adviser. The crop is not to be confused with the illegal cannabis sativa.

Kenaf grows well on soils low in CEC (cation exchange capacity), Baldwin noted — sandy soils common to the Delmarva Peninsula. Kenaf is planted when soil temperatures are 60 degrees and rising.

Baldwin noted that the Northeast U.S. is at the "limits" of adaptation.

There are no seed treatments labeled for use of the crop. The crop emerges about 3-5 days from seeding.

The crop is harvested after frost-kill (about Nov. 1 in Mississippi). The crop can only be harvested with a forage harvester — a silage cutter without an auger, Baldwin said. (The dense and long fibers can wind up around the auger). The fibers can also get caught up in a rotary cutter. A forage harvester with a Russian-made Kemper header can work well. The material is blown into a silage wagon.

Row widths can range from 30 to 38 inches. But varieties perform best in the 14-inch range, a 20 percent increase in harvest from 38-inch wide rows, according to the kenaf researcher.

Though the agronomist has tested row widths from 14, 21, and 28 inches to 38 inches, 14 inches seems idea. The researchers are experimenting with 7-inch rows this year.

Grass weeds can be especially challenging in the field. A cotton herbicide is sometimes used. And kenaf can be susceptible to morning glory and cocklebur. Morning glory can wrap up stalks.

At harvest, stalks measure about 1-1/2 inches wide and are as light as balsa wood. Harvest is when moisture is below 20 percent.

(Turn to Page 25)

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