

Our Infant Pulp And Paper Industry

By

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Recent newspaper articles report the formation of several pulp and paper companies in the Philippines. Some active, foresighted entrepreneurs have felt the need of producing pulp and paper here to supply our annually increasing consumption of these articles. This will help conserve our fast diminishing dollar reserve, which should be used only for importing essential goods that we cannot produce for ourselves.

According to statistics compiled by H.K. Collinge, United Nations' pulp and paper consultant, recently on a tour of duty in this country, and reported to the Philippine National Economic Council on Jan. 30, 1957, this country in 1955 imported 71,295-tons of all kinds of papers and fiber-boards valued at ₱33,626,000.

Collinge classified these papers and fiber-boards roughly into cultural papers, such as printing and writing papers; fiber-board, excluding building boards and products thereof; coarse papers including wrapping, bag papers and converted products; miscellaneous papers such as office supplies, sanitary, health, absorbent papers, etc.

In view of this heavy importation, one cannot help asking: "Can we not economically produce here pulp and paper on a bigger scale than what we have done heretofore, thus expanding this infant industry and creating jobs for the unemployed as well as conserving dollars?" This question is not easy to answer. There are many factors involved.

There is a big local company that, for the last six years or so, has been seriously studying the problem of installing a 200-ton integrated pulp and paper mills in Mindanao

to produce newsprint, bond, wrapping papers and possibly other kinds. This company has spent more than a million pesos in this study, but so far it has not put up the machinery or buildings. It is very cautious in approaching the problem from all conceivable angles, for if it ever puts up a factory, an investment of ₱50,000,000 or more will most likely be required.

Factors such as proper factory, site, easy access to longtime replenishable materials like wood, bamboo, or agricultural fibrous wastes, stream pollution problem, distance from markets, procurements of suitable machinery and capable technicians, adequate capital have to be carefully considered.

Regarding local raw materials, this writer believes that there is enough of it in certain parts of the country to supply the demand. We still have vast forests in several regions. The great deforested areas may still be reforested and those parts of the country unfit for agricultural purposes may be afforested.

We have more than 3,000 wood species in the Philippines in about 15,000,000 hectares. More than 1/2 of the country's total land area is forested. Out of the 3,000 species, 65 or more are being dealt with by the sawmill operators to produce lumber for local consumption and for export. The rest of the species do not have much use at present except for firewood, production of charcoal, or for fencing. Furthermore, there is much wood waste, which may be utilized for pulp and papermaking, from the logging areas, sawmill and veneer plants.

Regarding technical know-how, our country at present does not have sufficient men

well trained in pulp and paper technology. It is true that we have young engineers and chemists, but these people need an opportunity to learn for some time the techniques of this specialized industry. In the meantime, our country should engage the service of foreign pulp and paper technologists to start operating the mills to be established here, and to train local technicians to take over the job later.

I believe there is enough local capital lying idle waiting only for an opportunity to be invested. By nature our local capitalists are conservative. They hesitate to venture into a new field unless it has been demonstrated that it is a paying proposition. In other words, reliable and convincing information on all the aspects of pulp and papermaking should be disseminated to these prospective investors to guide them in their decision whether or not to put up the capital to finance the establishment of pulp and paper mills in suitable places in this country.

Equipment and machines needed cannot yet be manufactured here. However, these may be obtained by ordering them from foreign countries like the U.S., Japan, Sweden, or Germany. This, of course, necessitates the expenditure of dollars, but in view of the advantages to be gained, we should be able to pay for them.

The Forest Research Institute presently undertakes pulping research and chemical analysis of our Wood and bamboo species. This is to learn what species can be used profitably for pulp and papermaking, production of wallboard, and other pulp products, and to develop the best mixture of species and the best processing techniques for producing the various products desired. The main function of the Institute is to be of service in the development and improvement of the wood-using industries of the country, and it is now manned and equipped to render such service.

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