

38159

2

1936

KENYA

38159

2

C0533/468

Sisal Softening: McCrae Process.Utilization of sisal waste for bedding, etc.

Previous

Subsequent

1937

R. 297

19/8

R. 309

27/10

W. Jackson

16

M. Clavin

19/10

Mr. Stoneale

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Mr. Lane

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R. 297

1. McCrae.----- 12.10.36.  
Comments on the possibility of manufacture of bags from Sisal waste, and considers that development of this scheme would be unsound; encloses sample of converted sisal tow and waste used in the U.S.A. for bedding and upholstery, and recommends that new industry be worked up to meet the demand.

O.I. Agric.

18 months ago Mr. McCrae was enthusiastic about the prospect of the Sisal Bag industry in Kenya. He prepared a complete scheme for establishing on his own sisal estate in Kenya a plant capable of producing sisal bags at a retail price of 4d. each. He found that the quality of his sisal bags compared very favourably with that of the jute bag, retailed in Kenya at 7d. each. His scheme has not matured because for the past year or so he has been directing his energies to research on sisal decortication, and has been in receipt of financial assistance from the Colonial Development Fund for that purpose. By the new process of fibre softening and splitting which he has patented, he claims that a softer fibre can now be produced which can be made into a cheaper and more suitable bag and will compete with jute on level terms.

It is necessary to state here that in 1932 a scheme was promoted in Kenya for the manufacture of sisal bags locally. The promoters asked for protection from two forms of what they submitted would be unfair competition. They feared that manufacturers of jute bags might "dump" quantities of bags in Kenya as a means of stifling the new industry. They were also apprehensive of <sup>premature</sup> promoting competition within the Colony itself by the setting up of more factories than the industry would support. As a result, Ordinance No. 31 of 1932 was passed which provided for a minimum sale price for bags in Kenya, i.e. the lowest price quoted by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

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It also provided for the control of the erection of factories by requiring persons to be in possession of a licence issued by the Governor.

Mr. McCrae says that the original scheme for the manufacture of bags in Kenya has not eventuated, but that the industry still contemplates the manufacture of bags from sisal waste, advantage being taken of the protection afforded by Ordinance No. 31 of 1932. This, he argues, is a mistake because it is now possible under his process to produce a softer fibre which will compete with some of the higher grade fibres, and with jute on level terms.

Particular of Mr. McCrae's views have already been his next point is that there is a very profitable outlet for waste and unspinnable fibres in the bedding and upholstery trades; and that he believes that he can be of assistance in developing a simple process to make sisal waste suitable for the requirements of the upholstery trade.

As far as action is concerned, we should presumably send a copy of Mr. McCrae's letter to the Governor so that he can ascertain the reactions of the sisal industry in Kenya to Mr. McCrae's suggestions. But Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Clauson will no doubt comment in the first instance.

*C.R. Tomlinson*  
16/10/36

*J. J. Parsons*  
16/10

I am inclined to agree with Mr. McCrae's view but it will be unwise to try to manufacture bags out of sisal waste; apparently the fibre from this waste would not be satisfactory, & be attractive

use which he proposes for it is clearly preferable.

But I do not quite understand the economics of the proposal to produce a softened fibre to compete with jute "on equal terms". At present prices jute is much cheaper than sisal & I should have thought that the softened fibre should be sent to better uses.

It is not very obvious what we are expected to do with this letter, but I agree that we should proceed as proposed.

Mr. Clauson agrees to leave it for the present. *11/10*  
Surely this is an *19/10/36*  
Remorse subject? *G. L. M. [Signature]*

*It is quite true, as Mr. McCrae states, that a real & fairly active demand for sisal waste bags arises in the bedding & upholstery trades & that with this demand for real work and the increased prices for sisal fibre there is little chance of a bag making industry developing in competition with jute.*

*I suggest that a copy of Mr. McCrae's letter might be sent to the Governor of Kenya.*

*J. A. Stockdale*  
21/10

*Yes: & thank Mr. McCrae.*

*J. J. Parsons*

*Yes: had had - I am not*  
**DESTROYED UNDER STATUTE**  
*To Kenya, Sglt. (R/C1) [Signature] cons - 4 NOV 1936*

*Responsible for comm. of [Signature]*

*[Signature]*

*Communicated to the Gov. the [Signature] Board of [Signature]*

*Mr. [Signature]*

C. O.

38169/2/36.

3

Mr. Groomwith.

Mr. *Parkin* 29/12

Mr.

Sir C. Parkinson.

Sir G. Tomlinson.

Sir T. Bottomley.

Sir J. Shuckburgh.

Permt. U.S. of S.

Party. U.S. of S.

Secretary of State.

RECEIVED  
3/1/37

DOWNING STREET.

~~October, 1936.~~

74 NOV 1936

2 DRAFT.

Sir,

K. E. Y. A.

NO. 891

I have etc. to refer to the

previous correspondence regarding

Governor.

Mr. James McCrae's sisal softening and

splitting process, and to transmit to

you, for your consideration, a copy of

correspondence with Mr. McCrae regarding

his suggestions for the improvement of

the sisal bag industry and the creation

of a new export trade in sisal waste.

2. I shall be obliged if you

will ascertain the views of the sisal

industry in Kenya on Mr. McCrae's

suggestions, and furnish me with a report

in due course.

I have, etc.

(Signed) W. ORMSBY CORE.

FURTHER ACTION:

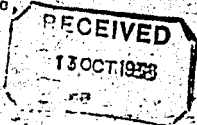
12/1/36  
(No. 1)

**LASIS**  
(REGISTERED)  
**FIBRE PRODUCTS**

**JAMES McCRAE, WELLINGTON FOUNDRY, LEEDS 1.**

12th October 1936.

The Under Secretary of State,  
Colonial Office,  
London. S.W.1.



Sir,

Reference 38159/36.

Upon reference to my memorandum of July 1935, it will be seen that the basis of the financial aid which I requested and which was granted, was to assist the Sisal industry by increasing the uses of the fibre along the lines of Softening and Splitting.

During the course of my studies of Sisal problems, investigations have ranged over a wide field, and as has been indicated in my communications from time to time, new aspects have emerged which warranted attention. The indications are that a considerably greater measure of benefit will accrue to the industry than was anticipated, by merely solving the problems of Softening and Splitting.

I have been actuated in enlarging the scope of my work by the knowledge that the assistance which was granted carries the basic implication of assisting the industry to attain a firmer footing. This principle has guided my studies.

The possibility of manufacturing bags from Sisal has been under consideration for some considerable time. In view of the new evidence which has come before me during my work, I believe that it would be advisable to review the position, and if my suggestions are considered helpful, perhaps they might usefully be passed on to the Government of Kenya, the Sisal industry there, and the Board of Trustees in London.

L. E. Kemp (3)

During depressed times, the industry in its efforts to enlarge markets, investigated the possibility of supplying the local bag market. In order to encourage finance to become interested, the Government of Kenya brought in a measure to protect this proposed bag manufacture against unfair Jute competition. The proposal to make bags however, did not eventuate.

Since then, conditions have altered considerably. The industry, under stressed conditions, has reduced its average "all in" costs of production to approximately £10 per ton at the point of production. This result has been achieved by considerable sacrifice of European and Native remuneration, and a reduction of Estate administration costs. All these items will tend to increase under profitable conditions.

The existing higher level of market values has also changed the outlook from what it was when the Government of Kenya granted fiscal protection to the proposed local bag industry. The tendency however will be for all values to encourage an increase of production, and unless substantial new markets develop, there will be the inevitable reaction on values in due time.

The industry however, under the aegis of economy efforts which hard times induced, still contemplates the manufacture of bags for local requirements behind fiscal barriers, and it is my considered opinion that a mistake will be made if this venture is persisted in along the lines which are proposed.

The proposal is to make bags from the extensive waste which occurs during the process of Decortication. A method has recently been developed for reclaiming this waste, but the system only partially cleans it. It is possible to spin and weave this fibre into an indifferent fabric of very coarse texture and heavy uneven quality, but it cannot compete on level terms with Jute either in price, or suitability for average purposes. The manufacturing costs of a hard fibre such as this, even if it were clean, are considerably higher than is the case with a soft fibre.

The various processes which I am engaged in developing, includes not only softening and splitting to produce a softer fibre which will make into a cheaper and more suitable bag, but a process of extraction which will lower costs by avoiding decortication waste.

From evidence which has accumulated, the indications are that Sisal, when grown, extracted, and converted, under some such system as my research has evolved, will result in the production of a softer fibre which will compete with some of the higher grade fibres, and with Jute on level terms. In my opinion, and also that of experts whom I have consulted and who are in close contact with my developments, the manufacture of Sisal bags on the proposed lines is unsound. It is highly desirable to see this industry established eventually, but if initial efforts result in failure, which an unsound basis is likely to bring about, then subsequent development might be jeopardised, or at least deferred.

I have represented these views to the promoters of the proposed bag industry in Kenya, and recommended them to defer a decision until my process has been demonstrated.

An alternative outlet for waste and unspinnable fibres is a new trade which has arisen within recent times. This trade offers a profitable market, and as it has every appearance of a long period of increasing consumption before it, prices should continue at satisfactory levels. It refers to the use of Sisal tow and waste in the bedding and upholstery trades. This market originated in the U.S.A. where stringently enforced bedding laws preclude the use of fillings which do not conform to a high standard of cleanliness. This law forced manufacturers to use clean new materials, and attention was drawn to Sisal owing to its then prevailing cheapness, and its suitability. Makers of textile machinery in the U.S.A. developed a process for converting Sisal waste and tow into a form of pad, a large sample of which I have taken the liberty of sending to you under separate cover. Already, the annual consumption of Sisal tow and waste in U.S.A., amounts to 15,000 tons, and several plants have been installed in this country and in Europe for pad manufacture. A result of this new demand has disclosed a shortage of supplies, which accounts for the recent rise in the value of Sisal tow and waste.

I had an opportunity of investigating the economics of this trade in the U.S.A., and it would appear that Sisal tow and waste which can work up into a pad with a manufacturing waste loss of 15%, should stabilise around £20/£22, C.I.F.

In my opinion, here is a new trade with every appearance of permanence and increasing consumption which the industry would do well to consider catering for. Short leaf and sucker plants contain suitable fibre, and even with more efficient extraction methods, there will always be a certain amount of waste fibre on Sisal estates.

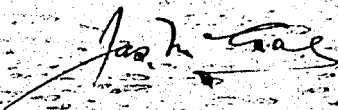


Manufacturers of pads will naturally favour a fibre, which will make a pad with the least waste loss, and I believe that I can be of assistance in developing a simple process for producing waste fibre to conform to requirements.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. H. Gale". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left and then curves back under the name.