

Fruitful future for banana waste

By ANTHONY KEANE
and AAP

An Adelaide man has produced biodegradable paper from banana plants, and Queensland growers are jumping out of their skins over his invention.

Mr Remy Azer is developing machinery that mass produces papyrus-like paper in a fashion similar to the ancient Egyptian techniques that used sliced reeds or other plant material.

His company, Papyrus Australia, is about one year from perfecting the tech-

nology for sale, but is already being courted by Queensland banana growers.

Mr Azer said banana plants shot to more than 2m high in one year but only produced fruit once in their lifetime before having to be chopped down.

"Banana producers end up with at least 200kg of waste for each 60kg of fruit. And they pay lots of money to get rid of the waste," he said.

Banana plant material is ideal for making papyrus, which is 3000 times stronger than forest paper.

The general manager of the

North Queensland Banana Growers Co-operative, Mr David Wharton, said 10 million banana stalks were left to rot in north Queensland fields each year.

He said the co-op had been freighting banana stalks to Mr Azer in the hope that members would become suppliers to any emerging paper industry, and a written agreement was being negotiated.

"We're trying to lock them in," Mr Wharton said. "We hope within the next two years something will be up and running."

Mr Wharton said if an industry were to develop it would have to be based in Queensland where the bulk of Australia's bananas were grown.

Mr Azer said his papyrus-making enterprise was driven by the fact that forests were declining worldwide while demand for paper was rising.

"It's not only fully biodegradable, it's 100 per cent forest-friendly, chemically free, and no water is used in its production," he said.



Remy Azer with some of his banana waste products.