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Turning yellow fruit into green paper



HAPPILY GOING BANANAS: Ramy Azer sees a global market.

Picture: MARTIN JACKA

By TANIA BAWDEN
AN IDEA born seven years ago in Adelaide is about to sprout the first commercial banana paper processing plant in Australia.

Papyrus Australia this week launched a \$4 million float to finance \$2.7 million worth of manufacturing facilities in north Queensland - close to large plantations of the raw material.

Managing director Ramy Azer said the banana paper technology had come into its own with the current market price for standard paper at \$1000 a tonne.

The technology turns banana plant fibre, which currently goes to waste, into raw paper

that is economically competitive with existing paper-making methods.

It also has the environmental advantages, engineer and Adelaide businessman Mr Azer said.

"We expect the capital and production costs will be significantly lower than those of conventional pulped paper factories as a result of the low cost of banana waste and a vastly different manufacturing process," Mr Azer said.

"We are a technology and engineering company and could be shipping these production machines all around the world if we prove the concept."

The Adelaide-based company's revenue target within the first two years is \$20 million

but it is yet to give a profit projection.

The company estimates the Tully and Innisfail area of Queensland has enough banana packing sheds to support nine Papyrus Australia production lines - for revenues of about \$180 million a year.

Each facility would be capable of processing up to two million banana trees into 20,000 tonnes of paper a year - without the need for chemicals or water or large amounts of electricity.

The offer of 20 million 20c shares - floating about 40 per cent of the company - closes on February 25, with a stock exchange listing expected on March 15.