Natural Binders for Fibreboard Made of Hemp

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Ljubomir Radosavljevic; Ralf Pecenka; Christian Fürll
11245 Max-Eyth-Allee 100, 14469 Potsdam, Germany,
Email ljradosavljevic@atb-potsdam.de

Abstract
A novel technology and pilot plant for production and preparation of hemp fibre has been developed, along with its application in fibreboard production. The raw material is obtained through anaerobic storage of wet harvested and chopped whole hemp plants. Similar to wood fibre processing, the raw material goes through an extruder mill, refiner and dryer. Further steps are binder application, fleece forming and hot pressing into the final shape. A new production line offers an income alternative for agricultural producers and ecological diversification of crops. Fibreboard as well as three-dimensional pressed parts could be applied in the furniture, automotive and construction industries. The end products are competitive to conventional ones qualitatively, economically and ecologically. They are high quality due to the great strength of the plant fibre compared to conventional wood fibre. Also the other included plant parts such as leaves, flowers etc. contain their own natural juices, materials and bonding properties, which contribute to higher strength and water resistance. The mixing of the fibrous material with binder is optimized, so that binder quantity is reduced and its distribution improved. Natural binders such as starch, sugar, cellulose, plant oils and proteins were compared to a conventional synthetic binder, phenol-formaldehyde resin. Selection of natural binders should either be cheap or agricultural waste disposed of from some other production process, although useful here. Natural binders are inexpensive, ecological, natural, renewable, biodegradable and environmentally friendly, but slightly harder to apply, form weaker bonds and usually are not water resistant. Economic evaluation has shown that the price of the products made in an existing pilot plant already falls in the range of the mass products priced on the market. Mechanical characteristics of the produced fibreboard have been investigated and they reach those of the commercial products, with a potential to be increased through the further optimization of the process.

INTRODUCTION
In the Leibniz Institute for agricultural engineering, Potsdam-Bornim (Germany) a novel technology [4,6] and pilot plant for production and preparation of the hemp fibre has been developed, along with its application in fibreboard production. The raw material is obtained through anaerobic storage [3] of the wet harvested and chopped whole hemp plants. The raw material is processed through an extruder mill, refiner and dryer. Further steps are binder application, fleece forming and hot pressing into the final shape. A new production line offers an income alternative for agricultural producers and ecological diversification of crops. Fibreboard as well as three-dimensional pressed parts could be applied in the furniture, automotive and construction industries. The end products are competitive to conventional ones in quality, economics and ecology. They are high quality due to the great strength of the plant fibre compared to conventional wood fibre. Also the other included plant parts such as leaves, flowers etc. contain their own natural juices and materials with the bonding properties, which contribute
to higher strength and water resistance. The mixing of the fibrous material with binder is optimized, so that binder quantity is reduced and its distribution improved [5,7,9]. Natural binders such as starch, sugar, cellulose, plant oils and proteins were compared to a conventional synthetic binder, phenol-formaldehyde resin. Selection of natural binders should either be cheap or agricultural waste disposed of from some other production process, although useful here. Natural binders are inexpensive, ecological, natural, renewable, biodegradable and environmentally friendly, but slightly harder to apply, form weaker bonds and usually are not water resistant. Economic evaluation has shown that the price of the products made in the existing pilot plant falls in the range of the mass products priced on the market. Mechanical characteristics of the produced fibreboard have been investigated and they reach those of the commercial products [1,2], with a potential to be increased through the further optimization of the process. The raw material (wet preserved hemp) is shown in Fig. 1. Samples of the end products are shown on Fig. 2.

![Fig. 1: Wet preserved hemp as a raw material for fibreboard production](image1)

![Fig. 2: Samples of the fibreboard](image2)

**METHODS**

In current investigations of fibreboard production, the combinations of the fibre from wet preserved hemp and pine wood are used in 60:40 dry mass ratios. As a comparison some of the boards were made exclusively from the pine wood fibre. The binders used in the experiments are natural binders such as starch, cellulose, raps pressed cake (waste from the raps oil production), solution of PLA, glucose, etc. as a semi product of the lactic acid and rye plant rests from the glucose production as well as conventional synthetic binder, phenol formaldehyde resin. Some of the boards are pressed without any binder.

In Fig. 3 the machine for the binder application is shown. The fibrous material is mixed in the two bars mixing chamber, and sprayed with the binder through the four nozzles from above. In Fig. 4 the used materials are shown.
The bending strength of produced fibreboard is investigated. The sample board for measuring the bending strength is shown in Fig. 5.

**RESULTS**

In Fig. 6, the bending strengths of the fibreboard made of hemp silage in a mixture with 30% wood fibre are presented. As a comparative value, the minimum required strength with regards to the EN 622-2 standard for HDF boards of common purpose use in dry areas is given, along with the requirement for highly reliable boards for construction purposes in moist areas. Figure 7 shows the quality comparison between fibreboard made of preserved hemp and that made of wood fibre.
Mechanical strength of fibreboard made of preserved hemp and natural binders reaches those of the conventional wood fibreboard.

The fibreboard made of preserved hemp could be produced with a 40% savings of the binder compared to the fibreboard made of wood.

In the case of fibreboard made without any binder, preserved hemp is superior to wood as a raw material.
Wet preserved hemp, when used as a raw material for fibreboard production contains its own characteristically natural juices and substances originating from leaves, flowers, seeds and other non-fibrous parts of the plants. Under hot pressing conditions, those substances develop bonding characteristics and probably polymerize.

REFERENCES