

## How Abaca Fibers are Produced



The production of abaca fiber today is still arduous and done by hand. Its by-products are likewise crudely generated. In 18–24 months from planting, the abaca is ready for harvest by hand. Once the abaca is harvested, the

fiber is stripped from the pulp. The fibers are air-dried before being looped and stored.

### Sinamay

The steps in weaving to produce “sinamay” cloth are:

1. Preparation of the handloom.
2. Preparation of knotted abaca fibers.
3. Preparation of warp threads and other warping equipment.
4. Dressing the loom.



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## Fibers from Central Visayas





## Coconut and Abaca Fiber Industries

As Phillipine fiber products get the nod of the international market, the Central Visayas Region is currently looking into the prospects of two fiber industries: the growing coco fiber industry and the established abaca fiber industry.



Coco and abaca fibers are now the focus of most researches in the region, whose many island provinces are being eyed to supply the increasing demand for quality fibers in both local and international markets.

### Coco Fiber in Negros Oriental

In a report from the Negros Oriental Investment and Promotions Council (NOIPC), the coconut industry is the largest in the province in terms of coverage area. As coconut is planted province-wide, the overall area



planted with coconut has now reached 143,394 ha (from about 42,400 ha in 1990), constituting about 10% of the total land area. With the recent entry of Chinese merchants, the coco coir and coco peat industry is gaining popularity. To date, there are two coco fiber ventures in the province established in the towns of Bacong and Guihulngan. Due to lack of technical knowledge, both business enterprises are seeking help from government and private sectors.

### Producing Coco Fiber

To produce the coco fiber products, the husks are soaked to soften in a big tub before they are loaded into a decorticating machine. This process separates the coco fiber from the peat or dust.

The coco fibers are then dried and later baled, ready for the market as coconut fiber or padding material. These are used in bed mattresses, furniture, and for crafts such as carpets, rugs, doormats, bags, sacks, and fishnets. On the other hand, the coir dust is processed into organic fertilizer or used as growing medium for ornamental and agricultural crops.



### Abaca Fiber in Central Visayas

The Philippines supplies 83% of the world’s abaca fiber requirement (FIDA, 2004). This has tagged the country as the top producer of the internationally known “Manila Hemp.”

Abaca grows in almost all provinces in the country but 80% are found in the Bicol and Eastern Visayas regions. Central Visayas contributes a meager 0.4%, the bulk of which comes from Negros Oriental. According to FIDA, the industry contributed approximately US \$2,343.721 to the region’s economy in 2003 (FIDA, 2005).

### Abaca Fiber Opportunities for Negros Oriental

Central Visayas is now eyed as a potential producer of better quality abaca fibers. Negros Oriental is a traditional supplier of abaca fiber and its by-products. Of the 19 municipalities and 5 cities in the province, 19 grow abaca and produce abaca fiber. However, 94% of the total output comes from five towns—Valencia, Sibulan, San Jose, Pamplona and Amlan. Valencia is the top producer of ‘bitool’ (the local term for abaca fiber from the laob variety which has been classified as excellent grade fiber). Bitool is the preferred fiber for handloom weaving and fibercraft manufacturing. Hence, it is priced higher than abaca loose fiber or the ungraded/unclassified abaca fibers.



As of 2001, the local abaca industry has provided livelihood to 1,685 abaca growers cultivating a total land area of 2,295.5 ha. There are 24 duly-accredited abaca fiber traders in the region; 10 abaca fiber processors (including 4 fibercraft enterprises, 10 loom weaving centers with 123 weavers); and 315 abaca fiber knotters.



In view of promising employment opportunities and anticipated earnings from the industry, the Central Visayas Consortium for Integrated Regional Research and Development (CV-CIRRD) envisions a globally competitive and sustainable abaca industry in the region and in the country.