

By Brent Childers

The world is getting greener and so are textile and hosiery industries with the use of Ingeo – a fiber derived from the same substance Karo syrup is derived from.

So don't be surprised if you see it on a material description for your new drapes, bedding material and socks that lists corn as a material. (Or would that be ingredient?)

Yes, there even are socks being made from corn although most are in the development stage at this point.

There are numerous North Carolina yarn manufacturers producing Ingeo yarn, according to Joe O'Mara, president of

O'Mara Corporation, which has an agreement with Cargill Dow to manufacture and distribute Ingeo in the United States.

O'Mara said there are currently 10 to 15 yarn manufacturers in North Carolina using Ingeo and that its applications aren't limited to textiles. He said a company in Maine has begun using Ingeo in a commercial product application.

O'Mara signed the agreement to produce and sell Ingeo in the U.S. in February of this year.

O'Mara says he sees vast potential in Ingeo. Not only is it an environmental friendly alternative to synthetics, O'Mara said the product uses no petroleum.

"It's a tremendous alternative to some of the oil-based products we're using," he said.

The Hosiery Technology Center currently is conducting tests with Ingeo fiber in socks.

Carolina Mills in Maiden, and other yarn manufacturers, are producing yarn made with Ingeo fibers.

The name for fiber derived from corn is actually Ingeo, a trademark of Cargill Dow, which is a revolutionary concept that allows man-made fibers to be derived from 100-percent renewable resources.

The process to make Ingeo fiber is based on the fermentation of simple plant sugars to create a proprietary polymer that can be spun into a fiber.

Cargill says its fiber is ideally suited for a range of textile products and applications where it competes with traditional fibers on a price and performance basis.

Cargill has continued to enjoy success with the product since its conception just a few years ago.

One yarn manufacturer that is producing yarn with Ingeo is Carolina Mills and officials there say they see the potential for widening markets for the products.

Rusty Copeland, product manager for specialty products, says attests to some of the same Ingeo attributes cited by Cargill – UV resistance, flame retardant qualities, anti-pilling, low odor retention and stain resistance.

He says the Ingeo fibers also have a couple of negatives, such as low breaking point and low melt point.

"It smells like Karo syrup," Copeland says.

Copeland says the yarn produced at Carolina Mills is being used in apparel fabrics, woven and knit blankets and woven upholstery.

In April 2003, Cargill announced its corn-derived fiber was going global in teaming up with Toray Industries – one of the world's largest fiber and textile producers with operations in 19 countries.

In June of this year, Cargill announced that indoor furnishing producer Zucchi had chosen Ingeo for its bedding systems, mattresses, pillows and duvets.

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According to Cargill, Ingeo fiber has insulating properties that allow for normal body temperatures. The fiber doesn't support bacterial proliferation and doesn't keep the humidity.

The fibers can be washed with water, they dry easy and they do not need ironing.

That's one reason that Verdissima, a under/beachwear brand, has created a nightgown made of 100 percent Ingeo fiber.

Also this summer, outdoor clothing maker Salewa announced its second collection of commercial garments with Ingeo fibers for Spring/Summer 2005.

Most recently, Cargill announced that Shanghai Docare Cotton Garment Co Ltd. has worked with Xinjiang Color Cotton Co Ltd and Cargill Dow LLC in partnership to launch the new Natural Cotton blended with Ingeo fiber underwear for the coming Fall Winter 2004-05.

In the conference, Dr Zheng Zhen Nan who is called "the Father of Natural Cotton" said, "People in the world are becoming more and more concerned about the environment and health. This concern provides the platform for Natural Cotton to emerge as the most important and popular material in the industry because we emphasize 'no chemical, no pollution' in our product development."

Ingeo fiber has received numerous awards in recognition of its achievement. Included are The Discover Award for Environmental Innovation (USA) in 2001, Presidential Green Chemistry Award (USA) and Technology of the Year Award from the Office of Industrial technology, USA Department of Energy in 2002

Ingeo is the first man-made fiber in the world derived from a 100

percent annually renewable resource such as corn.

The fiber produces a very soft, silk-like material. As testament to its softness, the Ingeo fiber goes over cotton in Zucchi's bedding linen.

Liza Souza, of Lisa Souza Knitwear and Dyeworks in California, also testifies to Ingeo's attributes.

"Ingeo is a beautiful new fiber made from corn," Souza says on her web site. "It is an environmentally friendly alternative to natural silk and has the sheen and 'crunch' that any silk spinner is used to. It spins like a dream and is quite sturdy."

Dreamspin fibers has this to say about Ingeo: "Spin it like silk, it results in a lustrous yarn similar to tencel/lyocell. It is pure white in color."

Dreamspin says Ingeo blends well with wool and hemp – adding luster, silkiness and strength.

The Organic Trade Association will present

"Why and How to Integrate Organic Fabrics into Your Product Lines" at the International Fashion Fabric Exhibition in New York Oct. 5-7.

Companies in today's increasingly environmentally aware apparel market are finding that using organic fabric (fabrics made from organically grown cotton, wool, linen, etc.) makes good business sense.

The 4 p.m. Oct. 6 presentation at the Jacobs Javits Center in New York will be given by Sandra Marquardt, fiber council coordinator for the Organic Trade Association.

Several N.C., S.C. and Calif. yarn manufacturers will be sending samples for the presentation.