

# The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**  
**Many environmental groups promote the use of hemp for making paper. Is this a good idea?**



Dr. Moore

In terms of meeting most of North America's paper needs—no, it isn't. Although hemp makes perfectly good paper, it doesn't make environmental sense on a mass scale. Why grow vast areas of hemp when we can grow trees?

The biggest problem is land use. To grow the amount of hemp needed, we'd have to turn existing forests into hemp farms. This would have negative consequences for birds and other wildlife, many of which need the shelter of forests to survive.

Keeping as much of the world forested as possible also helps to combat global warming, by taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and releasing clean oxygen. This partly offsets the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere when we burn fossil fuels.

In terms of using existing farmland, it's unlikely that any farm field could have more than 10 percent of the biodiversity found in the same size forest. If we have farmland to spare, let's grow more trees.

There's also the question of why.

With the current system, there's almost no waste. Most of the tree is used for building materials and the rest is chipped—and burned for energy or used to make pulp and paper, fiberboard or other products. Natural chemicals in the wood are used for everything from plastics to medicines. Bark is spread on playgrounds, used in products such as dyes and adhesives or, again, burned for energy. In other words, this is a highly efficient set-up, and the continued demand for these products provides the incentive to plant more trees every time an area is harvested. By using wood products, including paper, we actually motivate companies to invest in the new forest.

Producing hemp on a large scale would also bring technological and economic challenges. But even if these could be overcome, the potential loss of forest and its impact on the environment would be considerable—and there's no good reason for that. I think a sensible environmentalist would recognize this and support the responsible and sustainable use of wood to make our paper.

*Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to [Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com](mailto:Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com).*