ATLANTA, GA -- Soon, the fuel in backyard barbecues may be
made by a process invented at Georgia Tech.

Tech's Engineering Experiment Station has found a way to grind
up all kinds of farm and forest products, then compress them into
briquettes or "logs."

There's nothing complicated about this technology. The key is
in the "glue" which holds together ground particles.

Manufacturers make briquettes using starch to keep charcoal
from crumbling. Tech engineers have found a substance that
sticks to any particle of wood or plant matter. It's cheaper to
use than starch or any other chemical on the market.

"We've applied for a patent on this invention, so right now we
can't reveal what the substance is," says Tom McGowan, director
of Tech's Energy Technology Branch. "But it's available anywhere
in the world and easy to work with. You can mix it with wood
chips and water, and make a 'log' in any shape with your hands."

McGowan sees this invention as a way to conserve energy on a
large scale.

"Right now, we're throwing away an incredible amount of usable
fuel simply because we can't shape it into a form that can be
used in stoves or furnaces," he says. "With our process, it's
possible to make a briquette or a log with all kinds of waste
materials -- discarded tree limbs, dead corn stalks, straw, even
the clippings of vines in grape arbors."

The invention may be most attractive in those poor countries
where desert land is overtaking forests and trees are being cut
for firewood so fast that natural reserves are dwindling. One of
the sponsors of Tech's research in this area is the Agency for
International Development. This organization is trying to find a
way that Sudanese villagers without a power source can make their
own charcoal briquettes from wood.

The main source of energy in the Sudan is lump charcoal. When
villagers make this fuel, approximately a third of the charcoal
crumbles before it can be used. Georgia Tech is helping the
Sudanese to produce briquettes which won't fall apart. The Tech
process will allow production of char from abundant agricultural
products. These plant wastes are not used at present in the
Sudan because they yield only charcoal dust.

In another project, Tech is developing a method for recycling
Italian grape arbor clippings into "logs."

Three years of research have gone into the establishment of
this process. McGowan says his branch will need $200,000 to
$300,000 for each of the next two years to complete its work.

"There are still a lot of unknowns to solve," he says. "But I
really believe our technology will be simple and cheap to use.
We expect it to make a real contribution to the energy needs of
industrial and developing countries."

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