CLAIMS

1. A method of producing expanded tobacco stems for tobacco cut filler, the method comprising the steps of:

providing rolledrolling tobacco stems having to a rolled thickness of 0.1 mm to 0.5 mm, such that the cellular structure of the stems is at least partially broken down;

conditioning the rolled stems;

cutting the conditioned tobacco stems;

impregnating the cut tobacco stems with liquid carbon dioxide;

heating the impregnated stems to bring about expansion; and

re-conditioning the stems after heating.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein during the rolling step the stems are rolled to a rolled thickness of 0.2 mm to 0.3 mm.

3. A method according to claim 1 or 2 wherein the rolled tobacco stems are combined with tobacco lamina prior to the conditioning step such that the subsequent steps are carried out on the combined tobacco stems and lamina.

34. A method according to any one of claims 1 or to 2 3 wherein during the conditioning step the moisture content of the tobacco stems is increased to at least 12 % oven volatiles (o.v.).

45. A method according to any of claims 1 to 3 4 wherein during the re-conditioning step the moisture content of the tobacco stems is increased to at least 10 % o.v.

56. A method according to any preceding claim wherein each of the conditioning and re-conditioning steps comprises contacting the tobacco with steam, water or a mixture of steam and water.

67. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the impregnation of the tobacco stems with liquid carbon dioxide is carried out under a vacuum.

78. A method according to any preceding claim wherein during the heating step the tobacco stems are heated in a stream of hot gas at a temperature of between 150°C and 400°C.

~~8~~9. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the tobacco stems are expanded such that the filling power of the stems is increased by at least 20%.

~~9~~10. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the cutting step comprises cutting the rolled stems to a cut width of between 0.3 to 1.3 mm.

~~10~~11. A method according to any preceding claim further comprising the step of applying a casing solution to the rolled, conditioned stems prior to the cutting step.

~~11~~12. A method according to claim ~~9~~ 10 comprising applying an aqueous casing solution comprising a humectant.

~~12~~13. A method according to any preceding claim further comprising the additional steps of:

removing the stems from the tobacco leaf;

cutting the stems to an average length of between 15 mm and 80 mm; and

conditioning the stems to increase the moisture content; ~~and~~

~~rolling the stems to a thickness of between 0.1 mm and 0.5 mm,~~

wherein the additional steps are carried out prior to the steps of claim 1.

~~13~~14. A method according to claim ~~12~~ 13 wherein the conditioning of the stems increases the moisture content to 35 % o.v. or less.

~~14~~15. A method of producing cut filler comprising expanded tobacco stems, the method comprising:

producing expanded tobacco stems using a method according to any preceding claim; and

blending the expanded tobacco stems with at least one type of tobacco lamina, expanded tobacco or reconstituted tobacco to produce cut filler.