

Versalis, Yulex partner to manufacture guayule-based biorubber

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Italian synthetic rubber producer Versalis is forming a partnership with agricultural-based biomaterials firm Yulex Corp. to develop and produce guayule-based biorubber that it expects one day will yield elastomers suitable for tire production.

The partnership will cover the processing chain from crop science to biorubber extraction to the construction of a biomass power station, the firms said without disclosing financial details or a development timetable.

Versalis, a subsidiary of Italy's Eni S.p.A. oil and petrochemicals group, will develop materials for various applications, starting with consumer and medical specialty markets but with an eventual target of optimizing the process for materials suitable for tire production.

Versalis, formerly known as Polimeri Europe, intends to launch an industrial production complex in southern Europe dedicated to the partnership.

The partnership will leverage Phoenix-based Yulex's core competencies, including crop science and biorubber extraction technologies, to boost Versalis' bio-based portfolio, the partners said. Versalis sees guayule-based rubber as a "supplementary business opportunity and an increased commercial offering."

Guayule (*Parthenium argentatum*) is a renewable, non-food crop that requires little water usage, no pesticides, allowing it to be grown in arid climates. It is considered an alternative source of natural rubber because of its latex-allergy-friendly properties.

"The partnership with Yulex is strategic to Versalis," said Versalis CEO Daniele Ferrari, "considering concerns over the forecasted scarcity in the butadiene market and volatility of this chemical, which in turn causes long-term pressure on the price of products like synthetic rubber.

Partnering with Yulex represents Versalis' commitment to entering the global market as a major green chemistry player, Mr. Ferrari said.

"All of our green chemistry partnerships aim to enhance Versalis' bio-based portfolio and will feed oil-based production chains with high-performance intermediates from renewable feedstocks, in particular in the elastomers business."

Yulex President and CEO Jeff Martin called Versalis "an ideal global partner" because of its ability to "rapidly scale and commercialize processes.

"Together, through our shared vision of expanding green chemistry, we can accelerate the positive impact that guayule-based biorubber high-value products have on the environment, human health and sustainable global growth."

Milan-based Versalis is considered one of the world's largest synthetic rubber producers, with 2012 global sales of 6.1 million metric tons. It is building a biorefinery in Porto Torres, Sardinia, Italy, in a joint venture with Novamont S.p.A.

SOURCE Yulex Official Press Release