



Versalis: agreement with Bridgestone for research development on guayule

San Donato Milanese (Milan), February 12, 2018 – Versalis, Eni’s chemicals company and a major player in the polymers and elastomers industry, and Bridgestone Americas (Bridgestone), the leading global producer in the tyre industry, have signed a strategic partnership agreement to develop and deploy a comprehensive technology package to commercialize guayule* in the agricultural, sustainable-rubber and renewable-chemical sectors.

The partnership combines Versalis’ core strengths in guayule research, commercial-scale process engineering and market development for renewables with Bridgestone’s leadership position in guayule agriculture and production technologies.

This partnership brings together the two largest global guayule research efforts within a common project management, in order to deploy a commercially attractive technology package. The two companies will also make the new joint technology available to industrial partners willing to cooperate to maximize the value of these innovative products.

The agreement will enable Versalis and Bridgestone to focus on developing proprietary, highly productive varieties of guayule using the latest genetic technologies. The associated growing protocols developed in line with this agreement may position guayule as an attractive and profitable crop for independent growers in appropriate regions. The guayule process technologies will be optimized at the Bridgestone Biorubber Process Research Center (BPRC) in Mesa, Arizona, to achieve industry-leading performance for product yield and quality.

Versalis will lead product development activities to enhance the value of guayule rubber production, also for non-rubber components. For resins, for instance, market applications will include adhesives and wood protection, while bagasse has shown promising performance as a feedstock for the production of industrial sugars suitable for biofuels or chemical precursors.

Versalis has a strong commitment to renewables in order to strengthen its value chain and lay the basis for long-term cooperation on sustainable materials with Bridgestone, one of its key partners in the tyre segment. The initiative is also a part of Versalis' focus on green tyres. It includes the development of new elastomer grades with improved performances, enabling lower fuel consumptions, and active rubber from recycled tyres.

***Guayule**

Guayule (*Parthenium argentatum*), a shrub native to the deserts of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States, has proven to be a promising source of high-quality natural rubber. The plant is not intended for food use, requires little watering, and is an alternative source of natural rubber thanks to its hypoallergenic properties, as opposed to the more common *Hevea* rubber.

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