Why Guayule is good for the environment and your wallet

Green is good. That is the daily message we receive from the media. The focus that we, as consumers, maintain should be on green cars, green buildings, green plastic and now even green rubber. With products made from a desert plant called guayule, (such as latex gloves especially) this is proving easier and easier to do.

Most rubber is derived from hevea, a para rubber tree product. Native to Brazil, para rubber trees were transplanted to Southeast Asia where they have been bred carefully to increase hevea production. Today, most rubber comes from this region of the world, with the synthetically produced balance from petroleum. While most rubber is inherently organic, it's true that it's not necessarily "green"-at least not as green as guayule.

Beginning with proximity, the benefits of using rubber derived from environmentally-friendly plant guayule are simple to see. Whereas hevea must be grown overseas in tropical climates, the other natural source of latex rubber, guayule, can be grown in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The cost to the environment is lower than importing hevea-based rubber from overseas because of reduced fuel usage, since guayule is grown so close to home.

Guayule's location presents a second green benefit. Guayule, unlike the common hevea rubber produced from the para rubber tree grown in tropical areas, is a tremendously hearty plant. It does not require any chemical pesticides to keep its health because it's naturally resistant. Para rubber trees are tremendously susceptible to leaf blight, so they require chemical pesticides to remain healthy. Chemical pesticides have been associated with various health and environmental risks, so guayule's natural pest resistance is significant.

A third green attribute of guayule is that it can be used as an ethanol feedstock. Unlike corn, which is commonly used to make ethanol, guayule is not a food source and therefore does not impact the world's food source in availability or price. In some situations the demand for corn to produce ethanol has impacted the food supply in the market. But that's not an issue with guayule since it's not a food source.

Finally, guayule is an excellent source of hypoallergenic natural rubber latex. Hevea latex allergies are a serious issue-it's estimated that 10 percent of the U.S. population has a latex allergy. Currently, most hypoallergenic latex is derived from petroleum-based synthetic rubber. Obviously, a natural source of hypoallergenic rubber is fundamentally superior to rubber synthesized from petroleum.

Because of import restrictions, leaf blight decimation, and common latex allergies among health care providers guayule gained popularity throughout the 20th century. Although more rubber can be produced from a single para rubber tree than a guayule plant, the overall greenness, locale, energy-producing potential and hypoallergenic qualities of the guayule plant is unbeatable.

The question now is how do green-conscious consumers support this product? Local farmers in the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, along with the Yulex Corporation, are producing the crop and working to manufacture latex products from it. To invest in the success of the environment and the affordability of guayule produced rubber products, a sure way is to find ways to support these entities.

About the Author

Author Jason Lancaster is a devotee of emerging agricultural biotechnology. You can learn more about guayule at GuayuleBlog.com.

Source: http://www.onlineearnings.net