KeyGene and Kultevat enter into a collaboration to develop commercial rubber production from Russian dandelion.

Today the US based biotech company Kultevat and KeyGene, a biotech company from the Netherlands announced that they entered into collaboration for production of rubber based on the Russian dandelion. This plant has demonstrated potential as a domesticated crop for the U.S. and Europe; the origin of the species is the south eastern part of Kazachstan. Kultevat and KeyGene will invest in the development and commercial introduction of new dandelion varieties that are enriched for latex in its roots that are suitable for large scale production of natural rubber. KeyGene will be responsible for development of new varieties using state of the art molecular breeding technologies while Kultevat will develop appropriate production practices and large scale latex extraction and rubber production in North America. KeyGene will use the newly developed varieties and its production technologies for production of rubber in other global locations.

Natural rubber is used in many high quality rubber products including medicinal gloves, clothing, as well as in automotive and heavy duty tires. Currently, natural rubber is almost exclusively derived from latex harvested from the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) that is cultivated in Southeast Asia. Because of the high demands for rubber in emerging economies, the price of raw rubber has sharply increased in recent years, fueling the need for an alternative source. The Russian dandelion, *Taraxacum kokssaghyz*, produces high quality rubber that can be extracted from its taproot. Current varieties produce roots that are relatively small in size. KeyGene will apply molecular breeding technologies to increase plant size and productivity of latex, while Kultevat will adapt modern agronomic practices to different growing sites in the U.S. to further ‘domesticate’ the new varieties developed by KeyGene.

“Kultevat will apply its knowledge of commercializing alternative rubber crops, biotechnology, rapid variety improvement, process economics and feedstock to maximally valorizing co-products.” says Dan Swiger the founder of Kultevat and former founder/ COO of Yulex Corp a Phoenix based company that was involved in the production of latex from the desert plant guayule. “We have been working on Russian Dandelion since 2008. With our extensive network in agriculture, greenhouse, seed propagation and commercial rubber sales KeyGene is an ideal global partner for Kultevat, because they are the leaders in plant breeding, research, partnerships, and molecular genetics. This will improve on our ability to rapidly scale and commercialize.”

“Using the results from an EU co-funded program EU-PEARLS combined with its own investments KeyGene has generated a wealth of knowledge about the genetics of this dandelion species. A breeding program has started a number of years ago that aims at yield increase and quality improvement of the rubber producing dandelion plant. By making interspecific crosses between the Russian dandelion and European common dandelion plants we want to reach our breeding targets.” says Arjen van Tunen, CEO of KeyGene. “We are unleashing all molecular breeding technologies and molecular trait tools that we have developed in KeyGene in order to speed up the development of commercially interesting rubber producing varieties. KeyGene is confident that together with partners like Kultevat improved Russian dandelions will be developed for cultivation that will solve the worlds need for sufficient amounts of high quality natural rubber within a period of 5 -10 years.”

About KeyGene

KeyGene is a privately owned, innovative molecular genetics Ag Biotech company with a primary focus on the improvement of 6F (Food, Feed, Fiber, Fuel, Flowers and Fun) crops. KeyGene’s passion is a Green Gene Revolution approach to explore and exploit natural genetic variation in vegetable and other 6F crops. KeyGene delivers sustainable responses to the world’s needs for yield stability & quality of vegetable and field crops. It supports its strategic partners with cutting edge breeding technologies and plant-based trait platforms to meet their needs. KeyGene performs strategic and applied research with more than 135 employees from all over the world, with state of the art facilities and equipment. KeyGene has its headquarters in Wageningen, the Netherlands, a subsidiary in Rockville, USA and a Joint Lab with the Shanghai Institute of Biological Sciences in Shanghai, China.

About Kultevat

Kultevat is a privately held company incorporated in California. Kultevat serves sustainable agricultural markets, primarily by the production of rubber and mixed sugar feedstocks for the biofuels market. Kultevat has vast experience in the commercial utilization of plant materials to develop profitable, sustainable, and environmentally-benign sources of rubber, while simultaneously supplying the biofuels industry. Kultevat serves to reduce near-total dependence on foreign sources of rubber globally.

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