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Press release

Futerra inaugurates bioplastics pilot unit (PLA), a first in Europe

Futerra, a 50/50 joint venture established in September 2007 by Galactic and Total Petrochemicals, announces the inauguration of its bioplastics production unit in Escanaffles, Belgium on Friday 16 April 2010. Supported by the Walloon Region through the Marshall Plan, the purpose of this unit is to develop state-of-the-art technology for the production of PolyLactic Acid (PLA) bioplastics from renewable vegetable sources developed by the two partners.

By bringing this plant on stream, Futerra has become the first producer of this type of bioplastics in Europe. Clean, innovative and competitive, this technology comprises two main steps. Firstly, the preparation and purification of the monomer, lactide, from lactic acid, which is obtained by fermenting sugar, mainly from beet*. Secondly, the polymerisation of the monomer to obtain biodegradable vegetable plastic granules, PLA.

'I am especially delighted about the success of this project, which was one of the first to be selected by the competitiveness pole jury,' declared Jean-Claude Marcourt, Vice-President of the Walloon region and Minister of the Economy, SMEs, External Trade, New Technologies and Higher Education. 'Delighted and enthusiastic because, on the one hand, this shows that we were right to create the poles and to improve how all the innovative companies work and, on the other, because this is an example of the type of innovation that has to become Wallonia's trademark. A Wallonia that forges ahead, that searches... and finds. That creates tomorrow.'

'This project is perfectly aligned to the Total Group's research and investment policy for renewable resources,' says François Cornélis, Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee and President of Chemicals, Total. 'Futerra will allow us to diversify to an even greater degree with regard to the raw materials used in the production of our plastics. This technology could then be used in international projects.'

'This pilot unit is the result of more than 15 years of development. PLA will play an increasingly important role in the plastics industry and will in the medium term become the main product of lactic acid,' says Frédéric Van Gansberghe, CEO of Galactic. 'As well as being biological of origin, PLA can also be fully recycled at the end of its life, which makes it the first biorenewable plastic.'

The pilot unit, which has a capacity of 1,500 tonnes per year and represents an investment of 15 million euros, will be used to test and improve the successive steps in this technology. Futerro is now able to produce a complete range of products from lactic acid, including lactide, and PLA oligomers and polymers. They will be used by the packaging industry, primarily food packaging, and in sustainable applications.

* Other vegetables such as sugar cane, corn and wheat can also be used to produce lactic acid. Such renewable resources as biomass (forest and agricultural waste) are also conceivable in the future.

For more information, visit <http://www.futerro.com>.

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Galactic, a biotechnology company, is one of the world's leading producers of lactic acid and lactates. The company has three production sites (Belgium, China, United States) and exports products to over 80 countries. Galactic has more than 15 years of experience researching lactide and PLA technologies. (www.lactic.com)

Total Petrochemicals, one of the world's leading petrochemicals companies, combines base chemicals products and the polymers derived from them (polyethylene, polypropylene, polystyrene). Total Petrochemicals is active in Europe, the United States, the Middle East and Asia. Its products are used in many consumer and industrial markets, including packaging, construction and automotive. (www.totalpetrochemicals.com)
