

A pole of reference for the development of technical flax

In a context where the environment and sustainable development are all the rage, it is the raw materials that offer natural benefits that stand every chance of making headway. FiMaLin was born out of the concerted efforts of manufacturers to promote the French flax sector. Mr. Guy Dehondt, Chairman of the Association, tells us more.



AN INTERVIEW WITH
GUY DEHONDT,
PRESIDENT,
FIMALIN

JEC Composites Magazine: Why was FiMaLin formed? Weren't there already any existing structures to which you could have contributed?

GUY DEHONDT: Since 2003, Groupe Dehondt has been working on the development of an engineered flax material, targeting the composites market. There was no specific structure that could cater to this ambition. After six years of effort and cooperation between universities and industry, Fimalin was born out of this

industrial drive to create a dedicated, collaborative and pioneering technical flax sector with the following founder members: Terre de Lin, Institut Technique du Lin, Groupe Dehondt, Arkema, Clextral and Dedienne Multiplasturgy Group.

The purpose of Fimalin is to create, structure and promote a dedicated technical flax industry that will make flax the number three reinforcement fibre alongside glass and carbon fibre. The ultimate goal is to mass-produce a new generation of eco-materials for composite applications.

The notions generally associated with natural plant materials are the reproducibility of their intrinsic



qualities and the reliability of supply. Fimalin, representative of the value chain both upstream (seeds) and downstream (semi-finished products), meets the needs of manufacturers by securing the entire value chain, from seeds through to the production of



Focus: About FiMaLin

Created in March 2009, the Association comprises the companies Dehondt Groupe®, Arkema, Clextral, Dedienne Multiplasturgy® Group and Terre de Lin, as well as the Institut technique du lin (Technical Flax Institute).

The association has set itself the following objectives and missions:

- to be a pole of reference for the development of technical flax;
- to promote the establishment of a development platform bringing together all those concerned: major manufacturers and innovative SMEs, both producers and users; research centres and technical institutes; educational establishments;
- to identify market needs and consolidate R&D projects and initiatives around a value chain covering every stage of the production channel from the applications right down to the sowing of seeds;
- to provide creative input vis-à-vis the public authorities in terms of development strategy, action programmes and changes to the regulations or standards;
- to encourage the manufacture of eco-design products, mainly using plant-based materials, without negatively impacting the food industry and while respecting the imperatives of sustainable development;
- to promote this group structure and build on the sector's appeal.

semi-finished products for end-user sectors such as railways, automotive, aerospace, sports and leisure, renewable energy, etc.

The creation of this new agro-industrial (non-food) branch of industry is the perfect showcase for a new type of flax, branded Lin Technic®.

JCM: What are the main objectives and priorities of the association over which you preside?

G.D.: The group has several goals:

- Initiating innovation and development work enabling the needs of end users to be met by removing the technological barriers; this objective is a priority;
- Mass-producing and marketing raw materials, semi-finished products and

finished products;

- Developing and sharing with members and partners the results of the work undertaken.

JCM: Have you set yourself precise deadlines in terms of getting your products to market?

G.D.: We are targeting the first market launch by the end of 2010, in sectors such as transport, sports and leisure, and design.

JCM: Are you targeting particular application sectors, and if so, why?

G.D.: Sooner or later, all the sectors of application for composites may be envisaged. The specifications coming from the clients will determine the priorities.

Flax fibre has a natively low density (1.53*), even less than the density of glass fibre (2.54*). The first practical applications will address the need to produce lighter reinforcement structures in order to increase the range of electrical vehicles, trains, and the like, thereby contributing to a reduced carbon footprint through the integration of bio-sourced products.

JCM: Do you envisage approaching or collaborating with other organisations dedicated to natural fibres, or opening up the association to other companies?

G.D.: Absolutely. Partnerships are being worked on and agreements being signed. ■

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