

Unifi Invests In Repreve® Backward Integration, Establishes JV

Greensboro, N.C.-based Unifi Inc. -- a producer of multifilament polyester and nylon textured yarns and related materials -- has announced it is investing in the backward integration of its Repreve® recycled polyester yarn supply chain in an effort to improve the availability of recycled raw materials and increase its product capabilities. Unifi will employ new state-of-the-art recycling technology that will give it better control over the production of the recycled chip used to make Repreve fibers, and also will enable the company to recycle post-consumer and post-industrial fabric waste back into Repreve. According to Unifi, the new capabilities should come online in February 2011.

"Bringing the extrusion process in-house is a natural step for us," said Roger Berrier, executive vice president, Unifi. "Being more vertically integrated will significantly increase our product development capabilities and capacity."

Unifi also has purchased a 40-percent interest in a biomass feedstock company to set up a joint venture (JV) named Repreve™ Renewables that will directly sell Freedom™ Giant Miscanthus to farmers, who will then supply the product to bioenergy and biofuel operations in the United States and European Union.

Giant Miscanthus is a perennial hybrid C4 grass that converts sunlight to biomass energy. C4 plants have a special adaptation that allows them to photosynthesize and grow during extreme environmental conditions including high drought, light and temperatures, and lack of nitrogen or carbon dioxide. In addition, its cultivation requires only small amounts of pesticide and fertilizers. Freedom Giant Miscanthus -- developed by Mississippi State University (MSU) researcher Brian Baldwin, MSU technology transfer specialist Chase Kasper and Georgia turf grass expert Phillip Jennings -- is branded as such because of its ability to free the United States from its dependency on foreign oil. It is uniquely suited to the South, doesn't require much land to grow and costs less than other biofuel sources such as corn, switchgrass and timber. According to Unifi, it is non-invasive and the highest-yielding crop available commercially.

"We are continually looking for innovative, sustainable initiatives, and we are very excited about participating in this renewable energy opportunity," said Bill Jasper, president and CEO, Unifi. "Both of these initiatives will support our strategy to grow the Repreve brand and product portfolio, and will add to our commitment in being a global leader in sustainability efforts."

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