

Soya bean oil for tyre production not SA's priority

International tyre company Goodyear Tire and Rubber has discovered that soya bean oil can be used as part replacement for petroleum-based oil in tyre manufacturing.

The US-headquartered company's chief technical officer, Jean-Claude Kihn, said that using soya bean oil in its tyres would reduce dependence on non-renewable petroleum-based oils.

"Consumers benefit through improved tread life, Goodyear gains with increased efficiency and energy savings, and we all win whenever there is a positive impact on the environment," he said.

Goodyear is still only building prototypes of the tyres containing soya oil, but the company expected these tyres to become commercially available by 2015.

This discovery is unlikely to have any immediate impact on the South African soya bean industry. Chairman of South Africa's Protein Research Foundation, Gerhard Scholtemeijer, said that while free market principles encouraged SA agriculture to take advantage of best price opportunities, even if these were on export markets, it was wise to first consider these opportunities in light of the country's food security needs.

Currently SA produces nearly 1 million tons of soya bean grain annually. But this is not enough to meet the country's approximately 1,2 million tons per year demand for soya cooking oil, and the millions of tons of soya meal used in the national livestock feed industry.

Scholtemeijer said even if SA met its soya bean production potential of over 2 million tons per year by 2020, this would still not meet SA's soya cooking oil demand, but would come close to meeting its soya meal demand. "Despite this though, wherever there are niche markets for soya-based products and SA can meet the resulting demand, these markets are welcome," Scholtemeijer said.

International demand this year, driven by China in particular, for soya is increasingly intense as a result of drought conditions in the US severely negatively impacting harvests there. – *Lloyd Phillips*