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Helping Reebok Grow a Plant-Based Shoe

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At the heart of a [circular economy](#) is the reengineering of conventional linear production models so that value creation is decoupled from the consumption – then disposal - of finite resources. What was once considered waste becomes the feedstock for new processes. One way to drive this shift toward circularity is by designing renewable materials that can displace the use of sensitive or fossil-based resources.

This is particularly important in consumer clothing and footwear markets where the emergence of middle classes in countries like China is driving a rapid increase in global demand for these products. Some estimates suggest the market for footwear alone could reach [nearly \\$260 billion by 2023](#), a 25% increase compared to the market in 2014. While the wage growth behind these projections underscores the rise of millions out of low income lifestyles, the corresponding consumption is not without environmental consequences.

Athletic shoes for example often use synthetic rubber as a sole material. This is a petrochemical derived from crude oil and carries with it the corresponding environmental footprint. Another issue is the end-of-life waste streams clothing and footwear can produce. In the U.S., approximately [15 million tons of textile, rubber, and leather waste](#) is added to landfills each year. Takeback and recycling programs can help but more innovate solutions are needed.

That's why Reebok approached DuPont Tate & Lyle Bio Products with a challenge: to help develop a plant-based, sustainable shoe. The effort is part of the global fitness brand's "Cotton + Corn" initiative designed to develop sustainable products "made from things that grow". The first step on this journey with Reebok will be a shoe that has an upper comprised of organic cotton and a base originating from industrial grown corn (a non-food source).

As a leading manufacturer of high-performance bio-based solutions, DuPont Tate & Lyle Bio Products is uniquely positioned to help industry leaders like Reebok achieve their sustainability goals. For example, we have developed a range of innovative renewable solutions including Susterra® propanediol, a pure, petroleum-free, 100% USDA certified bio-based product, derived from field corn. Susterra® propanediol is used to create the sole of the Cotton + Corn shoes and is a vital ingredient for Reebok's first Cotton + Corn shoe release.

Despite this early success, the end goal is much bigger. As Bill McInnis, Head of the Reebok "Future Team" responsible for executing this vision said, "our goal is to create a broad selection of bio-based footwear that can be composted after use. We'll then use that compost as part of the soil to grow the materials for the next range of shoes. We want to take the entire cycle into account; to grow from dust to dust."

Reebok's Cotton & Corn initiative concentrates on all three phases of the product lifecycle. First with product development; using materials that grow and can be replenished. Secondly, ensuring that the footwear performs just as well as petroleum-based materials without sacrificing on the look that consumers love. And finally, focusing on what happens to the products after use.

At DuPont Tate & Lyle, we see Reebok's progressive product innovations as the leading edge of a broader shift toward demand for more sustainable products. As [SGS](#) notes, the U.S. consumes more than 200 million pairs of shoes and that with consumption expected to double every 20 years, "consumer product sustainability [will be] a key element of discussion for nearly a decade." [Other studies](#) indicate that the increasing use of eco-efficient products is among the most important emerging trends in the athletic footwear industry.

[DuPont Tate & Lyle BioProducts](#) is well-positioned to help consumer brands meet this demand for more sustainable products. Our sophisticated science delivers consistent, predictable building blocks that can be turned into ingredients that increase the performance and reduce the environmental impact of the products we use every day across a range of industries. Along with our customers, we believe we can deliver high-performance products that enhance people's lives, reduce the world's dependence on petroleum, and protect the environment by shifting toward a more circular economy.

Please visit the [Reebok "Cotton + Corn"](#) and the [DuPont Tate & Lyle BioProducts](#) website to learn more.

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