

Theptex: The First Thai Mattress Maker to Offer Mattresses with Organic Latex

Theptex Thailand Co., Ltd., a unique Thai manufacturer of latex cores without synthetic latex content for the bedding industry, has been awarded an IFOAM label and EU Organic label. The achievement follows after three years of trials and efforts to obtain organically-farmed latex.

Several customers of Theptex from Europe, the US and Thailand had indicated their interest in a purely organically-grown product but Theptex was unable to offer what they were looking for – until now.

Additionally frustrating was the fact that many producers of latex pillows and mattresses pretend to make a natural product but forget to mention the use of Styrene Butadiene Rubber, a synthetic polymer derived from the petrochemical industry and used to stabilize natural rubber. It can be best detected by lab examination, and therefore many manufacturers neglect to mention that they use it.

The initial search for organically-grown latex stopped abruptly in 2017, when it became clear that most plantations in Thailand use chemical fertilizers and insecticides, and hence the resultant products do not qualify as organic.

Founding members of Theptex, Dr Alain Missorten and Mr Dominique Bienfait, were astounded to learn this as Thailand produces 50% of the world output of latex derived from *hevea* plantations.

With the help of the conglomerate TPI Polene Plc., the biggest manufacturer of bio-organic fertilizers in the region, Theptex was able to identify just a handful of plantations working organically, thereby establishing the necessary paper trail to satisfy the certifier. Some coaching of the farmers was still required, however, so small workstations were set up for interested farmers and a framework was outlined for them to work truly organically.

Besides the much lower cost of organic fertilizer, an additional incentive for the farmers is the 10% higher price for organic latex compared to the official price quoted by the Songkhla Rubber Exchange.

Hence the project became a sort of a corporate social responsibility venture that helped rubber farmers in these adverse times of low rubber prices. Several other plantations are now also in the process of being certified.

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A niche player specialized in pure natural latex products for the bedding industry, Theptex started production in 2015 and today employs 140 people. Turnover in 2018 was approximately 200 million baht, thanks to over 100 business-to-business customers in Thailand.

TPI Polene Bio Organics Co., Ltd. has been producing organic fertilizers in full compliance with the strict standards of the Department of Agriculture and ACT since 2011.