



International Year of Natural Fibres 2009

Information Note

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International Year of Natural Fibres Coordinating Unit
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To raise awareness of natural fibres, to promote efficiency and sustainability of the natural fibres, and to foster an effective international partnership among the various natural fibres industries

Why an International Year of Natural Fibres?

Since the 1960s, the use of synthetic fibres has increased, and natural fibres have lost a lot of their market share. The main objective of the International Year of Natural Fibres is to raise the profile of these fibres, to emphasise their value to consumers while helping to sustain the incomes of the farmers. Promoting measures to improve the efficiency and sustainability of production is also an important aspect of the Year.

What are Natural Fibres?

Natural fibres may be defined as “those renewable fibres from plants or animals which can be easily transformed into a yarn for textiles”. Animal fibres are largely those which cover mammals such as sheep, goats and rabbits, but include also the cocoon of the silk-worm. Vegetable fibres are derived from the stem, leaf or seed of various plants. Close to 30 million tonnes of natural fibres are produced annually in the world, of which cotton is dominant with 20 million tonnes, wool and jute each around 2 to 3 million tonnes followed by a number of others.

What are Natural Fibres used for?

Natural fibres form an important component of clothing, upholstery and other textiles for consumers, and many of them also have industrial uses in packaging, papermaking and in composite materials with many uses, including automobiles.

Why are Natural Fibres important?

Apart from their importance to the consumer and in their various industrial uses, natural fibres are an important source of income for the farmers who produce them. In some cases they are produced on large farms in developed countries, but in many developing and least developed countries proceeds from the sale and export of natural fibres contribute significantly to the income and food security of poor farmers and workers in fibre industries. For some developing countries natural fibres are of major economic importance, for example, cotton in some west African countries, jute in Bangladesh and sisal in Tanzania. In other cases these fibres are of less significance at the national level but are of major local importance, as in the case of jute in West Bengal (India) and sisal in north-east Brazil.

Who decided that 2009 would be the International Year of Natural Fibres?

The idea came from a meeting of fibre producing and consuming countries in FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. At the request of FAO, the actual declaration was made by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 December 2006.



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Who will organize the International Year?

There is a coordinating unit in FAO, but a great many other organisations and people will be involved. An International Steering Committee, with representatives from various fibre organisations, consumer bodies, and funding agencies, will meet from time-to-time to guide the programme. Most of the activities will be organized by partner organisations, some at the international level, and many more within individual countries.

What will happen in 2009?

The programme of events is now filling out. One or more large international conferences will be held. There will be displays and fashion shows and many other events in many countries, run by a variety of different national organisations. With our partner organisations we are now making plans for events in 2009:

- **22 January 2009:** Official launch of the IYNF, at FAO Rome
- **February 2009:** *Fondazione industrie cotone e lino*, with the collaboration of SMI (Sistema Moda Italia) will prepare an event promoting the IYNF during "Milano Unica", an important Textile Fair in Europe. They will distribute a new magazine "Naturalmente Tessile" with special focus to Natural Fibres
- **8-9 February 2009:** International Workshop and Exhibition on Jute, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Organized by the International Jute Study Group
- **17 February 2009:** IYNF 2009 Reception, in Brussels, organized and sponsored by IWTO for the EU Parliament/EU Commission
- **30 March-1 April 2009:** International Wood Composites Symposium, Seattle, USA
- **March/April 2009:** Natural fibres exhibition and natural fibres symposium, Beijing, China
- **7-9 April 2009:** 6th International Conference & Exhibition of the Textile Research Division (ITRD), Cairo, Egypt
- **15-17 April 2009:** Combined New Zealand and Australia conference of The Textile Institute, Dunedin, New Zealand
- **15-18 April 2009:** 2nd International Conference on Innovative Natural Fibre Composites for Industrial Applications, University of Rome "La Sapienza"
- **16-19 April 2009:** Creative Fibre Festival, Timaru, South Canterbury, New Zealand
- **16-18 April 2009:** International Seminar on "Emerging Trends in Production, Processing and Utilisation of Natural Fibres" Mumbai, India. Indian Society for Cotton Improvement, the Indian Fibre Society and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research
- **22 May 2009:** Presentation on Natural Fibres during the General Assembly of the members of the Gdynia Cotton Association, Gdynia, Poland
- **27-28 May 2009:** 6th International Conference of the European Industrial Hemp Association, (EIHA), Wesseling, Germany



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- **3-7 June 2009:** Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA) national conference and the 2nd annual world conference, fashion show: Cleveland, Ohio
- **15-18 June 2009:** 78th IWTO Wool Congress - Frankfurt, Germany, organized by International Wool Textile Organisation
- **17-18 June 2009: International Natural Fibres Congress, Frankfurt, Germany,** organized by Messe Frankfurt
- **July 2009:** San Paolo, Brazil: a technical conference
- **3-4 September 2009:** 10th International Cotton Conference, Gdynia, Poland. The conference, which will focus IYNF, will be organized by the Gdynia Cotton Association and faculty at the Technical University of Lodz
- **21-25 September 2009:** International conference "Organic and Fair Trade Cotton - From Fashion to Sustainability" - Interlaken - Switzerland. Organized by the Swiss Association for International Cooperation Helvetas in collaboration with Organic Exchange, International Trade Centre (ITC), Institute for Market Ecology (IMO) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
- **27 Sept to 2 Oct 2009:** 10th Southern Hemisphere Feltmakers Convergence, Masterton, New Zealand
- **7-11 September 2009:** International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) 68th Plenary, Capetown, South Africa will include a major component on the IYNF
- **6-8 October, 2009:** Meeting of FAO's Intergovernmental Groups on Hard Fibres and on Jute, Kenaf and Allied Fibres, Pasay City, Metro Manila, the Philippines
- **16 October 2009:** International Day at New York Sheep and Wool Festival
- **3-8 November 2009:** International mohair summit, Eastern Cape, South Africa. Organized by Mohair South Africa
- **14-15 December 2009:** Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining: Natural Fibres '09 conference, London. (Call for papers deadline 31 March)

Where will the money come from?

FAO needs funding in order to coordinate activities and to provide support to partner organizations around the world. Without this support the potential benefits of the IYNF will not be realised.

E-mail Forum

An e-mail list has been established to allow us to keep you informed of developments and for the exchange of views and information. To enrol in the email list, send an e-mail to: mailserv@mailserv.fao.org, leave the subject line blank, and put the words `subscribe IYNF-2009-L` in the body of the message.