

DIPPED PRODUCTS GIVES THE WORLD ITS FIRST 'FAIR TRADE' RUBBER GLOVE

Dipped Products PLC's (DPL) unique 'Firstlight' initiative integrates sustainable sourcing with CSR programmes for Sri Lanka's rubber smallholders.

A home-grown sourcing initiative rooted in empowering smallholder rubber farmers has resulted in DPL giving the world its first 'Fair Trade' rubber gloves.

'Firstlight,' a multi-faceted programme pays a fair price for rubber latex direct to farmers. It also offers technical assistance, provides material and implements and helps in building the capacities of their communities. This initiative benefits some five hundred smallholder farmers and their families, and accounts for 30 per cent of the total latex needs of the globally-significant hand protection company of the Hayleys Group.

Consequently, several styles of natural rubber gloves supplied in DPL's own brands and gloves made in Sri Lanka by DPL for 'Traidcraft,' UK's leading Fair Trade organisation, are now reaching many countries as Fair Trade gloves, representing a First in the rubber gloves sector worldwide.

Under Firstlight, DPL guarantees Sri Lankan rubber smallholders a price indexed to RSS1 (the highest grade of the most consumed form of raw rubber) for their field latex. It also contributes half a US Cent (about 58

cents LKR at current exchange rates) for every pair of gloves sold with the Firstlight endorsement. The monies are utilised by the Firstlight Foundation on projects that empower smallholders in their work and day-to-day lives.

Dipped Products currently consumes 6 per cent of Sri Lanka's rubber production. The Group's requirements for manufacturing in Sri Lanka predominantly come from 3,000 smallholder farmers, most of them owning less than two hectares.

"Our objective is to ultimately bring 100 per cent of the latex bought from smallholders under the Firstlight programme," Dipped Products Managing Director J. A. G. Anandarajah said. "In its own way, Firstlight makes it viable for small farmers to earn a living from rubber, and contributes to another of our larger goals, the sustainable development of land under rubber cultivation."

"Firstlight is also a Green initiative, as it helps to sustain rubber lands, commonly regarded as man-made forests."

Mr. B K Pathirage, General Manager, Operations added that the programme has already transformed several smallholder communities by educating and enabling farmers to maximise their incomes by the use of best practices in planting, field management and harvesting, and by providing implements and input material to

protect and augment crops. It also invests in the development of their communities through capacity building.

"Our relationship with these smallholder farmers goes back 30 years, to 1979, when Dipped Products, then a fledgling company, set up its own centrifuging unit and started buying field latex," Mr. Anandarajah recalled. "Today, we are transforming this relationship into a long term business sustainability initiative. Firstlight is evolving into an exciting cause-related marketing programme that advances the concept of ethical or fair trade based production in the rubber gloves industry."

Among the projects already executed under Firstlight are regular farmer training programmes on topics such as soil preparation, planting methods, tapping techniques, field upkeep and disease prevention. Firstlight has provided special collection cups and high quality tapping knives, materials for plant nurseries and also publishes a quarterly newsletter. In addition, health camps, provision of educational materials and recreational facilities to schools, installation of potable water facilities and development of other infrastructure facilities have been undertaken. Firstlight also supports cultural events in villages and distributes Life and Medical insurance policies to

farmers.

The Firstlight logo of a stylised sun resembling a hand symbolises the dawn of a new day, the best time for tapping rubber. It signals a fresh start, new opportunities and hope for a brighter future.

Dipped Products was established in 1976 and is one of the leading non-medical rubber glove manufacturers in the world, accounting for a 5 per cent share of the global market. The company has also ventured in to the manufacture of medical examination gloves

at a production facility in Thailand. DPL's products now reach 68 countries.



A 'Firstlight' tanker of Dipped Products delivers fair trade latex to the company's factory at Kottawa.