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 Scholemeyer, 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 oil 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.

Scholemeyer 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,” Scholemeyer 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

Swine fever poses ongoing risk

Control measures appear to have temporarily halted the spread of a recent outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in Ukraine. Ukraine responded quickly, implementing sanitary measures, destroying affected pigs and imposing a quarantine zone around the village where the outbreaks occurred.

However, the disease has established a firm foothold in the Caucasus and poses an ongoing risk to neighbouring areas such as Moldova, Kazakhstan and Latvia, which have large pig populations but often weak biosecurity protocols, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said. National and local authorities should scale up their prevention measures and be ready to respond in case of further outbreaks, it said.

In 2011, up to 300,000 pigs died or were destroyed as a result of ASF outbreaks in Russia, incurring an estimated R1,9 billion (US$240 million) in economic losses. – Staff reporter

Small-scale farmers invest in irrigation

Smallholder water management innovations could boost crop yields and household revenue in sub-Saharan Africa by billions of rand, according to a report by the International Water Management Institute. It said supporting farmer-driven investments in agricultural water management would expand the use of smallholder water management techniques and could increase yields by up to 300%. Farmers in the developing world are already relying on and benefiting from small-scale, locally relevant water solutions, said institute director-general Colin Chartres.

The AgWater Solutions Research Initiative showed for the first time how much enterprises smallholder farmers are using their own resources rather than waiting for water to be delivered.

“We were amazed at the scale of what is going on,” said initiative co-ordinator Meredith Giordano. “Despite constraints, such as high upfront costs and poorly developed supply chains, small-scale farmers across Africa and Asia are using their own resources to finance and install irrigation technologies. It’s clear that farmers are driving this trend.” – Alan Harman