You Say Tomato; We Say Tom-Auto: Ford and Heinz Collaborate on Sustainable Materials for Vehicles

- Ford and H.J. Heinz Company explore the use of tomato fiber to develop a more sustainable bio-plastic material for vehicles
- Ford researchers are testing the material’s durability for potential use in vehicle wiring brackets and storage bins
- Success in developing a new more sustainable composite could reduce the use of petrochemicals in manufacturing and reduce the impact of vehicles on the environment

INFOGRAPHIC

It might seem that tomatoes and cars have nothing in common. But researchers at Ford Motor Company and H.J. Heinz Company see the possibility of an innovative union.

Researchers at Ford and Heinz are investigating the use of tomato fibers in developing sustainable, composite materials for use in vehicle manufacturing. Specifically, dried tomato skins could become the wiring brackets in a Ford vehicle or the storage bin a Ford customer uses to hold coins and other small objects.

“We are exploring whether this food processing byproduct makes sense for an automotive application,” said Ellen Lee, plastics research technical specialist for Ford. “Our goal is to develop a strong, lightweight material that meets our vehicle requirements, while at the same time reducing our overall environmental impact.”

Nearly two years ago, Ford began collaborating with Heinz, The Coca-Cola Company, Nike Inc. and Procter & Gamble to accelerate development of a 100 percent plant-based plastic to be used to make everything from fabric to packaging and with a lower environmental impact than petroleum-based packaging materials currently in use.

At Heinz, researchers were looking for innovative ways to recycle and repurpose peels, stems and seeds from the more than two million tons of tomatoes the company uses annually to produce its best-selling product: Heinz Ketchup. Leaders at Heinz turned to Ford.

“We are delighted that the technology has been validated,” said Vidhu Nagpal, associate director, packaging R&D for Heinz. “Although we are in the very early stages of research, and many questions remain, we are excited about the possibilities this could produce for both Heinz and Ford, and the advancement of sustainable 100% plant-based plastics.”

Ford’s commitment to reduce, reuse and recycle is part of the company’s global sustainability strategy to lessen its environmental footprint while accelerating development of fuel-efficient vehicle technology worldwide. In recent years, Ford has increased its use of recycled nonmetal and bio-based materials. With cellulose fiber-reinforced console components and rice hull-filled electrical cowl brackets introduced in the last year, Ford’s bio-based portfolio now includes eight materials in production. Other examples are coconut-based composite materials, recycled cotton material for carpeting and seat fabrics, and soy foam seat cushions and head restraints.

About Ford Motor Company
Ford Motor Company is a global company based in Dearborn, Michigan. The company designs, manufactures, markets and services a full line of Ford cars, trucks, SUVs, electrified vehicles and Lincoln luxury vehicles, provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company and is pursuing leadership positions in electrification, autonomous vehicles and mobility solutions. Ford employs approximately 190,000 people worldwide. For more information regarding Ford, its products and Ford Motor Credit Company, please visit corporate.ford.com.

About H.J. Heinz Company

H.J. Heinz Company, offering “Good Food Every Day”™ is one of the world’s leading marketers and producers of healthy, convenient and affordable foods specializing in ketchup, sauces, meals, soups, snacks and infant nutrition. Heinz provides superior quality, taste and nutrition for all eating occasions whether in the home, restaurants, the office or “on-the-go.” Heinz is a global family of leading branded products, including Heinz® Ketchup, sauces, soups, beans, pasta and infant foods (representing over one third of Heinz’s total sales), Ore-Ida® potato products, Weight Watchers® Smart Ones® entrees, T.G.I. Friday’s® snacks, and Plasmon infant nutrition. Heinz is famous for its iconic brands on six continents, showcased by Heinz® Ketchup, The World’s Favorite Ketchup®.