

Evonik builds world's first industrial-scale production plant for rhamnolipids

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- Forward-looking, triple-digit million investment in Slovakia
- Strategic partnership with Unilever
- Innovation for sustainability: fermentation of sugar replaces petrochemical raw materials

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Essen, Germany. Evonik is investing a three-digit million-euro sum in the construction of a new production plant for bio-based and fully biodegradable rhamnolipids. The decision to build the plant follows a breakthrough in Evonik's research and development. Rhamnolipids are biosurfactants and serve as active ingredients in shower gels and detergents. Demand for environmentally friendly surfactants is growing rapidly worldwide.

The investment at the Slovenská Lupča site in Slovakia strengthens Evonik's partnership with the consumer goods group Unilever, which began in 2019. At the same time the investment allows Evonik to further expand its own market position in the growth market for biosurfactants. The new plant is scheduled to come on stream in two years.

"We invest more than €400 million a year in our research and development," says Harald Schwager, Evonik's Chief Innovation Officer. "The journey of rhamnolipids from the initial idea to the finished product has been long, but it is worth it. This partnership with Unilever is a result of our expertise in biotechnology. "

"Rhamnolipids are an important part of our Clean Future initiative which has set the goal to replace fossil carbon in all cleaning products by 2030. We want to make sustainability easy for everyone that uses our products. The partnership with Evonik helps move our brands away from fossil fuels without compromising on performance or affordability." says Peter Dekkers, Executive Vice President Middle Europe, Unilever.

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Rhamnolipids are produced by fermentation of sugar. Fossil carbon and tropical fats, which have so far been used to produce conventional surfactants, are therefore superfluous. The biodegradation of rhamnolipids makes them a sustainable alternative that also offers excellent foaming properties and is gentle on the skin. Applications are diverse and extend beyond cleaning agents to personal care.

"With the construction of the world's first industrial-scale production facility, we can supply this rapidly growing market with excellent quality," says Johann-Caspar Gammelín, Head of the Nutrition & Care division. "At the same time, we are further expanding the share of system solutions in Nutrition & Care."

Evonik's life sciences division Nutrition & Care has set itself the goal of increasing its share of system solutions from 20 percent today to more than 50 percent by 2030.

Over the past 25 years, Evonik's site in Slovakia has developed into a strategic center for biotechnology with a team of highly qualified experts.

Company information

Evonik is one of the world leaders in specialty chemicals. The company is active in more than 100 countries around the world and generated sales of €12.2 billion and an operating profit (adjusted EBITDA) of €1.91 billion in 2020. Evonik goes far beyond chemistry to create innovative, profitable, and sustainable solutions for customers. About 33,000 employees work together for a common purpose: We want to improve life today and tomorrow.

About Nutrition & Care

The focus of the business of the Nutrition & Care division is on health and quality of life. It develops differentiated solutions for active pharmaceutical ingredients, medical devices, nutrition for humans and animals, personal care, cosmetics, and household cleaning. In these resilient end markets, the division generated sales of around three billion euros in 2020 with about 5,300 employees.

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