

## RUBBER LATEX COLLECTION MODELLED ON 'AMUL'

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In order to relieve the rubber small holders from the cumbersome post harvest technology, involved in processing natural rubber latex to ribbed smoked sheets, the Rubber Board has fielded a massive programme for organising Rubber Latex Collection centres in rural areas modelled on the AMUL pattern successfully practiced at Anand in Gujarat. Unlike other agricultural crops, processing of rubber latex into sheets is highly complex, time consuming, expensive and strenuous. In conventional processing the latex collected after tapping the rubber trees has to be brought to the farm house, bulked and strained through metal sieves to remove dirt and foreign particles. Then it is diluted adding double the quantity of water. The latex so

diluted is transferred to Aluminium pans and treated with acid. It is kept for half a day or full day as the case may be to form into a coagulum. The coagulum is then pressed between plain and grooved rollers and spread into sheets. These sheets are shade dried for a few hours and then transferred to the smoke house where it is subjected to controlled smoking by burning fire wood procured at high prices. The sheets will be kept in the smoke house for 4-5 days and then sent to the market. It is anybody's guess as to how complex and tiring this whole exercise is. With the escalation in the cost of processing materials and equipments, small holders are finding it extremely difficult to get this technology going.

It is estimated that to process a Kg of rubber sheet in this fashion it would cost around Paise 80. This is in addition to the energy and time spent for it.

Fully convinced of the hardship suffered by small growers of rubber, the Rubber Board has decided to organise Rural Rubber Latex Collection Centres in villages to be fully managed by the rubber producers themselves. The whole idea is to buy rubber from small growers as latex and pay for the dry rubber contained in it at the rate of lot sheet prices prevailing in leading markets. These centres would later be converted to tiny Cooperatives of small holders and linked to one of the larger Marketing Cooperatives operating within the area.





### Structure of a centre

A latex collection centre would be economically viable only if it is able to collect around 600 Kg of latex (3 drums) containing about 200 Kg of dry rubber, from 50-60 rubber producers within a radius of one to two kilometers. Producers selling latex to a collection centre should organise themselves in the form of a Farmers' Forum and take up the management of the centre by hiring the services of an educated youngster as latex collection agent, preferably nailing from a farm family of the locality. He could be given a remuneration of 15 Ps. per Kg. of dry rubber, he collects every day.

### Estimation of Dry rubber content (DRC)

A sample of 20 gms of latex is drawn from the quantity of crop brought to the centre by each producer and each sample transferred to a crucible. This is treated with one or two drops of acid, coagulated and dried in an electric oven. Then it is weighed in a sensitive balance. If it weighs 7 gms the DRC of that sample could be estimated as 35%.

### Equipments

The essential equipments required in a latex collection centre are platform scale, sensitive balance, Ammonia Cylinder, Drums, Sieves, buckets, crucibles, Acid, Electric oven and furniture. These equipments together would cost around Rs. 12500/-. Out of this the Rubber Board will pay Rs. 10000/-. The remaining Rs. 2500/- will have to be raised by the producer members of the society by subscribing at the rate of Rs. 50/per head.

The latex collected in each centre will be arranged to be sold to the nearest group processing unit by the Rubber Board.

### Pricing System

The latex brought to a centre by the producer is at first weighed and entered in a Pass Book given to him from the centre. The weight of the Dry Rubber Content in the latex brought by each producer is estimated the same day, but entered in the Pass Book only the next day against the previous days' crop. Payment of the price to the producers is effected at the end of the week

based on the DRC contained in the latex sold by them and at the average price of lot rubber prevalent in major markets during the previous week. Since such a norm is followed, the price paid to the producers would invariably reflect the favourable and unfavourable trends exhibited by the market mechanism.

### Future of the centres

The Latex Collection Centres primarily organised for procuring natural rubber latex from small holders, are proposed to be converted later into Small Holder Development Centres, which would render a package of techno-economic services to the producer members of the centre including delivery of inputs and appropriate technology. In a traditional rubber growing region like Kerala a facility of this type would ensure individual attention to each rubber producer enabling the adoption of intensive cultivation practices and resultant upgradation of the productivity from his holdings. More so, because scarcity of land imposes constraints for extending rubber to more areas in Kerala. □