

Thailand stands a good chance of becoming a leading country in the ASEAN region for the production and development of bio-plastics.

Director-General of the Office of Industrial Economics Somchai Harnhirun stated that demand for bio-plastics is on the rise in the global market because of the growing awareness of environmental protection among consumers.

Bio-plastics is a form of plastics derived from natural and renewable feedstock, such as vegetable oil, cornstarch, and pea starch, rather than petroleum, the basis of conventional plastics. This process requires low energy input and it has the potential to replace conventional plastics produced by the petrochemical industry.

Mr. Somchai said that many countries have established the policy of developing bio-plastics as the industry of the future, which will lead to the bio-economy. Thailand is now the top country in ASEAN for bio-plastics production and the industry has great potential for further growth.

According to European Bioplastics, the association representing the interests of Europe's thriving bio-plastics industry, bio-plastics production capacity in the world is expected to reach 6.2 million tons in 2017, an immense increase from 1.4 million tons in 2012.

Asia is the largest bio-plastics producer, at 45.8 percent of the global production, followed by Latin America, at 44 percent. The United States is a major user of bio-plastics, and it also has advanced technology for this industry. The European Union wants to push for the transformation of the fossil-based economy to the bio-economy by the year 2020. In Asia, Japan has launched the Biotechnology Strategic Scheme and the Biomass Nippon Strategy to promote the use of bio-plastics to replace conventional plastics.

Bio-plastics are now used mainly as a food packaging material. Regarded as one of Thailand's new wave businesses, the bio-plastics industry has received a major boost. There are currently 31 bio-plastics manufacturers in Thailand. Many of them have produced plastics bags for exports to the European Union and the United States.

The number of bio-plastics manufacturers in Thailand is still minimal, when compared with 2,378 conventional plastics producers in the country. A study is being conducted by the Office of Industrial Economics in order to cope with the growth of this industry in the future. The study involves production technology, production costs, market expansion, and various measures and regulations to help develop the industry.

The Office of Industrial Economics will organize training in bio-plastics for 100 entrepreneurs to promote bio-plastics manufacturing. This will help retain the country's status as the top bio-plastics producer in this region.