

Talking Biotech: Key Gene CEO Arjen van Tunen talks weed crisis; Curt Hannah on corn; Folta on Borlaug award

Could the lowly dandelion solve a crisis? If [Key Gene CEO Dr. Arjen van Tunen](#) and his fellow scientists are correct, this yard pest may be the basis of sustainable and highly profitable rubber production. A growing middle class worldwide has produced a need for high-quality rubber, mostly for tires. Rubber tree (the genus *Hevea*) plantations in Southeast Asia are threatened by climate change, disease, and sustainable harvesting is costly and labor intensive. However, the dandelion produces latex, just not in huge amounts.

KeyGene has identified a high production version in Kazakhstan and combined its genetics with those of the larger, common dandelion. The result is a plant that could revolutionize the rubber industry and provide a new high-value, easy-to-grow crop for farmers. Environmental impacts are also discussed. In the process, the scientists at KeyGene also identified genes related to apomixis, the ability to produce seeds without fertilization, essentially clones of the parent. Understanding these genes could dramatically change agriculture, as any plant could potentially be made to produce clonal seeds from the mother plant.



Click image for larger version.

In the second part of the podcast, correspondent Vern Blazek—a pseudonym for Kevin Folta—talks to University of Florida geneticist Curt Hannah, who answers a listener question about corn varieties and just how much genetic variation there is in modern modern hybrids.

Plus some thoughts by Folta on the Borlaug CAST Agriculture Communications Award

[The audio at the end can be found here, along with a corresponding video.](#)

[Stitcher](#) | [iTunes](#) | [Player FM](#) | [TuneIn](#)

https://geneticliteracyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/033_vantunen_dandelion.mp3

Visit Kevin Folta's [Talking Biotech](#)