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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLASTICS INDUSTRY /
IN COSTA RICA /

by

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HISTORY

Costa Rica was discovered by Christophorus Columbus in the early beginnings of the 16th century during his fourth visit to America.

This zone was scarcely inhabited by indians but they exhibited such a quantity of golden jewels that spaniards thought it was the richest part of the new continent.

They began to call it Costa Rica which means rich coast.

It formed part of the Spanish Kingdom until 1821. In this time, Costa Rica became independent and a democratic republic. Since then it has been a very peaceful country with no army at all and whose main goal is "more teachers than soldiers".

GEOGRAPHY

Costa Rica is located in Central America and is bordering on Nicaragua and Panama's north and south as well as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans east and west.

It occupies an area of 50,000 km.

Due to the increase of European immigration and the reduced native population, today 90 percent of its people have European characteristics with customs inherited from Spain, i.e. language, religion and traditions.

Today, its population is 1,300,000. Sixty percent of it live in a central plateau, 1,200 m high, surrounded by big mountains. Here, the weather is very pleasant: temperatures from 13 to 30°C all year round, the soil is very rich and there is enough water to make agriculture and cattle raising its main activities.

The traditional products for exportation have been coffee, bananas, sugar, cocoa, vegetables and flowers; beef and shrimps.

Now, manufactured goods are being exported also and it is very interesting to remark that plastics are in the first lines.

In 1970 the income per capita was \$572 per year.

SITUATION OF PLASTIC INDUSTRY IN COSTA RICA

The plastic industry of Costa Rica was born to fulfil some of the modern requirements for protection, handling and packaging of the agricultural products, mainly bananas.

Today, it is very well diversified but production for agricultural purposes is still the most important field.

The following areas are already covered in Costa Rica:

<u>Process and/or articles produced</u>	<u>No. of factories</u>
Acrylic and polystyrene sheet extrusion	1
Polyethylene blowing film extrusion	6
Injected and blow moulded containers	3
Expanded polyurethane sheets	2
Vacuum formed disposable containers	2
Injected toys	3
Rigid PVC pipe and conduits	3
Polypropylene woven bags	1
Acrylics goods	1
Injected shoes	2
Flexible hoses	1
Synthetic leather	1
Electric wires and cables	1
Reinforced plastic: furniture and boats	3
Illuminated displays and signposts made of acrylic	2

Acrylic and polystyrene sheets are mainly used for production of lamp diffusers (2 factories) and refrigerators, freezers and washing machines (2 factories).

Decorative, embossed acrylic sheets have been introduced in the market six months ago and have a prominent future for building purposes. PVC pipe has been officially accepted by the Government and it is very popular in diameters up to 3". Polyethylene pipe is just beginning in our market. We are expecting to introduce the drip irrigation system and we need technical assistance to promote its use.

PVC profiles for windows are not used in Costa Rica because wood is very cheap but in the near future can be expected a great market for this features.

PVC flooring is not popular in Costa Rica and there is no factory to produce it, but as wood is becoming scarce and expensive it will be necessary to substitute it.

Polyethylene film has given excellent results in the growing of tobacco, strawberries, mushrooms and other crops which need a special control of the moisture of the soil.

It prevents fungus formations mostly when polyethylene has been previously mixed with disinfectants like methyl-bromide.

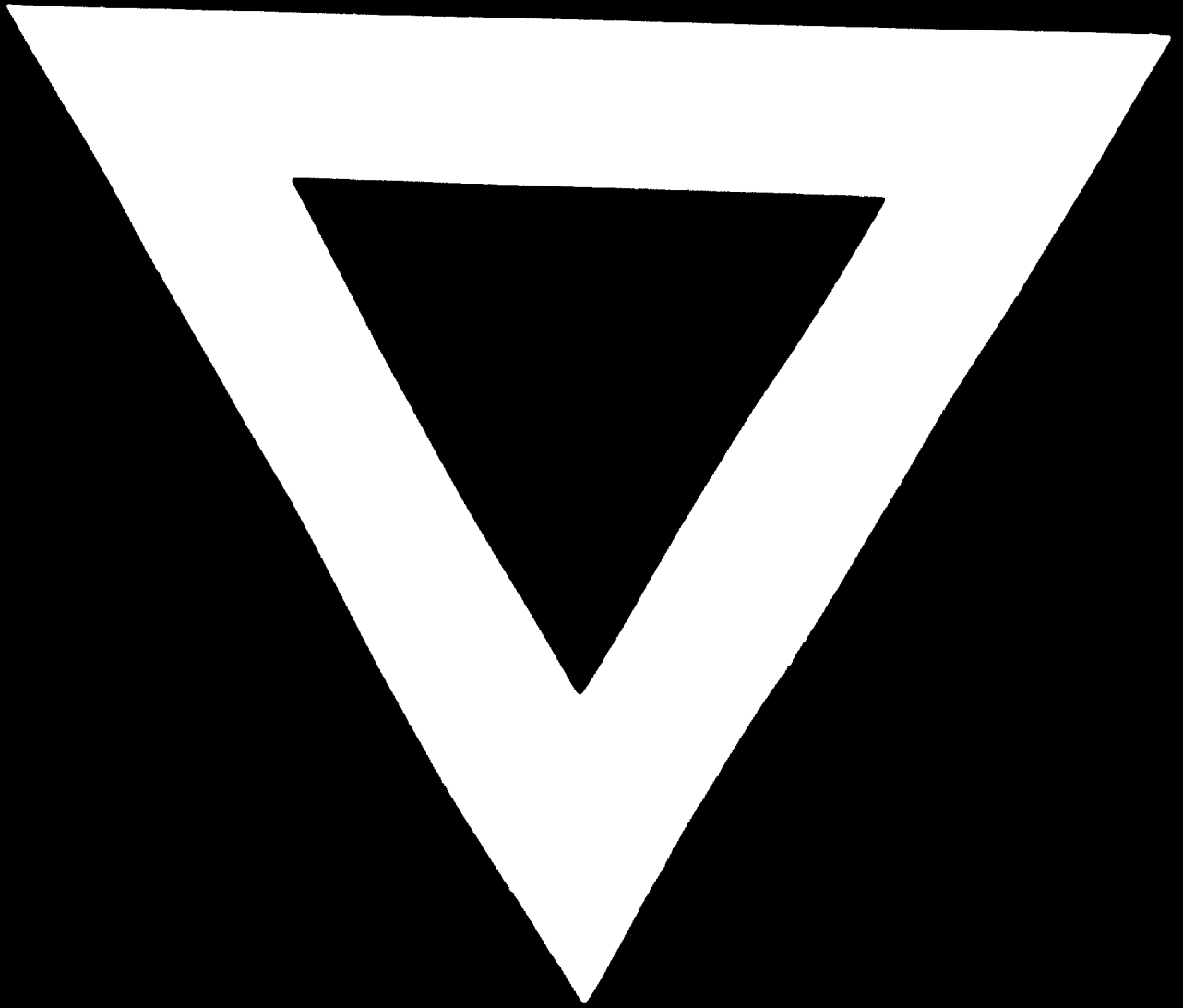
During the rainy season the annual precipitation could reach 6000 mm in some areas of Costa Rica and it is necessary to shelter the crops to protect them. Polyethylene film has been successfully used for these purposes.

Green houses are becoming very popular for massive controlled production of bulbs, flowers and vegetables. Polyethylene film with U.V. market for covering these greenhouses has grown greatly in the last years and it can be increased even more.

Plastics bags play an important role in the nursery development of coffee trees, citrus and ornamental plants. This field has been exploited since five years ago but it is not exhausted yet.

High density polyethylene bags are just beginning to enter in the sophisticated market for shops and super markets. Traditional paper bags are being substituted for this product. The total plastics production capacity installed in Costa Rica is greater than the local consumption. This situation had forced producers and Government to export to the Centro-American common market.





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