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Organic has environmentally-friendly packaging in the (ideas) bag

As global and domestic concern over landfill and waste management increases, Australian organic retailers and producers lead the charge in exploring innovative new methods of packaging, according to Australian biodegradable packaging suppliers.

Richard Fine is the CEO of *BioPak*, a company that sells biodegradable film for storing fast-moving-consumer-goods.

Packaging is derived from natural starch (such as corn or potato) and allows for immediate breakdown when treated in a composting system.

Mr. Fine says interest in biodegradable products has increased due to burgeoning environmental awareness from consumers, and a rise in the cost of crude oil in petrochemical-based plastics, but that interest from some conventional business has lagged.

"The market wants to protect the environment, but not at any cost," says Mr. Fine.

"The organic industry is undoubtedly the sector we see the most interest from. Organic producers and their consumers have a vested interest in sustainability and a greater level of environmental awareness.

"The organic sector is currently the primary source of our sales to retailers who are essential to the growth of the industry - we supply them with biodegradable trays and film for their fresh organic produce."

Steve Skopilianos, General Manager of BFA/ACO certified organic business *Ladybird Organics* packages his salads and vegetables in biodegradable film.

He launched his business six months ago and attributes its success in part to his packaging choices and the ethical value they add.

"To me, organic and biodegradable packaging goes hand in hand" he says.

"Approximately 95% of our produce is packaged in biodegradable material, it's increased its shelf life by 30%, we continue to add to our environmental integrity – a primary reason for organic production - and the response from our customers is unbelievably positive."

Neil Thomson, Director of biodegradable packaging company *Ausasia*, says they registered for organic certification to better cater to organic farmers.

"Our biodegradable agricultural mulch film [which also exists in a smaller variety for home gardens] is registered as an allowed input making it highly attractive option to sustainable farmers," he says. *(BFA allowed inputs are another growth industry supplying agricultural products with guaranteed compliance to organic standards for use in organic farming systems.)*

"It solves the problem of disposing of soiled plastic film – you can just till any remaining pieces into the soil and there is no waste problem after ploughing," says Mr. Thomson.

Ausasia also produces a range of biodegradable doggy-bags, providing dog walkers with an eco-friendly solution to dog litter.

"This is particularly useful in areas of environmental sensitivity – for example, along the coast. Our dog-bags will biodegrade in water and are digestible by marine creatures," he says.

Dr. Andrew Monk, Standards Chair of BFA says under organic standards all packaging that reduces environmental impact – be it recycled materials, biodegradable, compostable - is encouraged.

"We always welcome, and in future will be making mandatory, leading packaging solutions such as biodegradable and compostable packaging that delivers reduction of the environmental footprint of organics" he says.

Mr. Fine says for the full environmental benefits of biodegradable packaging to be realised, the growth of industrial compost facilities is necessary and requires local authority participation.

Facts on biodegradable and plastic packaging:

- In 2005, Australians used 3.92 billion lightweight single use high density polyethylene (HDPE) bags, 2.14 billion of which came from supermarkets (1)



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- Of the total waste generated in Australia in 2002–03 (32.4 million tonnes), more than half (54%) of waste is disposed to landfill (2)
- Biodegradable packaging remains around 2-4 times more expensive than conventional plastic counterparts but material prices are decreasing as more industries adopt (3)
- The Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts has listed areas of opportunity for biodegradable materials in: shopping bags; food waste film and bags; consumer packaging materials; loose fill packaging; food preparation gloves; cling wrap; agricultural mulch film and landfill cover film; and others (3)

The BFA has a vision for the organic industry in Australia - to grow organic food sales to 10 per cent of the food market in Australia by 2020. Packaging awareness is one good reason to buy organic and assist the organic industry to achieve its goal. More information is available at http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260.

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**Links: *Biopak* <http://www.biopak.com.au/>
Ausasia <http://www.ausasialink.com/>**

- (1) Data: *Plastic Retail Carry Bag Use: 2002-2005 Consumption - 2005 end of year report (Hyder Consulting)*, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts: <http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/plastic-bags/index.html>
- (2) Data: ABS 4602.0 - Environmental Issues: People's Views and Practices, Mar 2006 (waste management) <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyCatalogue/DD0E6A0CFF90D1BECA25722C007E358D?OpenDocument>
- (3) Data: Interview *BioPak* <http://www.biopak.com.au/>
- (4) Data: *Biodegradable Plastics - Developments and Environmental Impacts*, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts: <http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/publications/waste/degradables/biodegradable/chapter5.html>



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