

Seaweed Plastic, Orange Peel and Xampla (FREE)

Michael Stephen, an international expert on bioplastics, shares his thoughts and opinion on important issues impacting the bioplastics industry. Today, Michael writes about plastic made from seaweed, orange peel and Xampla. This is a FREE Article.

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Plastic from Seaweed

Earlier this month I read that the Indian National Institute of Ocean Technology had developed a bio-plastic film using marine seaweed which they say could have a huge impact on limiting the usage of non-biodegradable plastics and a game-changer in the plastic industry.

As yet this is not commercial, but a French company called Eranova worked out some years ago how to make plastic from seaweed, and they are now in the pre-production stage. See Eranova Website

Making plastic from seaweed and marine algae is a much better idea than using scarce land and water resources to grow food crops like corn or potatoes to make plastic.

Orange Peel

I have just seen an advert for “compostable” plastic by an Israeli company called TIPA. It shows an orange, with quite a clever strapline “Nature’s packaging is compostable, why should ours be any different?”

The answer is that nature has designed orange peel to biodegrade in the natural environment, but plastic sold as “compostable” is designed to biodegrade in a man-made composting environment, to which it may never be taken.

As regular readers of this column will know, I think “compostable” plastic is an expensive irrelevance, for the reasons given at <https://www.biodeg.org/subjects-of-interest/composting/>

Xampla

I have just been reading about a company called Xampla, which has found a way to extract protein from soya beans or peas, and turn it into plastic. It has attracted an investment of £6million.

It is not clear whether, when the vegetables have been turned into plastic, the plastic is biodegradable and recyclable, and how its costs and availability would compare with polyethylene and polypropylene. The other problem is that soya beans and peas are food crops, which should not be diverted into making plastic. In any event there could never be enough feedstock except for niche applications.

I have never understood why people are making such efforts and spending so much money to avoid using PE and PP, which have superb properties and will for the foreseeable future be cheap and readily available.

It is true that PE and PP are made from petroleum resources, but they are made from a by-product of oil-refining which would arise whether plastics existed or not, and it used to be wasted.

I asked the OPA's scientists for their opinion about Xampla. They said "Very blue sky, and sounds like a nice way to spend a lot of capital. On the off chance that they ever go commercial, they will have a hard time competing with oxo-biodegradable PE and PP"

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