

Plantic proves its bio business case

Australian bioplastic developer and manufacturer Plantic has shown that biopolymer-based packaging need not compromise the traditional functions of packaging and can do so cost-effectively as well. **Roland Tellzen** talks to Plantic CEO and managing director **Brendan Morris** about the company's recipe for bioplastics success.



When retail giant Coles announced earlier this year that it had adopted an eco plastic tray from local bioplastics specialist Plantic for its fresh food lines, it marked an important milestone in the commercialisation of bioplastics in general and Plantic's product in particular, according to Plantic's managing director and chief executive officer Brendan Morris.

Coles' very public endorsement of the trays, together with deals before and since in countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and the United States, have proved the Plantic eco Plastic was more than just a 'feel good' green gesture, Morris tells *PKN*. It demonstrated that products such as Plantic eco Plastic could present a strong and viable business case to retailers, and even bring benefits offered by conventional plastic trays and wraps.

"The future of bioplastics is about producing materials from renewable resources that are better than those currently available," Morris says. "In

the past, bioplastics were marketed as good for the environment, but not quite up to the same grade and capabilities when compared to the properties of traditional plastics.

Packaging is there for a reason. Morris explains, and it needs to extend shelf life, prevent food waste, enable goods to be transported and make it convenient for the consumer to use. It also needs to fulfill a business case, not just be a feel good value proposition, he adds.

"If you can improve the shelf life of a product, and reduce food waste,

you can have an enormous impact on reducing the effects of climate change. But the industry has to develop materials that are better than those that come from non-renewable resources, and do it cost competitively. And that is what Plantic does, we deliver superior performance, cost competitiveness, and our material is derived from a renewable source."

Plantic was founded in 2003 to commercialise technology developed by The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for International Food Manufacture and Packaging Science. It has now become one of the most significant players in the local bioplastics industry, having made great strides in the past few years in the market acceptance of its eco plastics made from corn, a speciality industrial starch. Its products are made from 80 per cent renewable resources.

As well as for the Coles meat tray, the company's bioplastics are used by such retailers as Marks & Spencers in the UK for a range of products, a large meat processor in Switzerland, a supplier of fish products in the Netherlands, and more recently, a significant supplier of fresh pasta to the US market.

Asked to put his finger on the chief reason for these successes, Morris says it is because the company has been able to demonstrate the technology is now offering significant benefits over traditional plastics made from non-renewable sources.

In particular, he says, the company has been able to point to gas barrier properties above and beyond those of traditional plastics, giving the Plantic technology a value proposition beyond 'mere' green benefits.

"The breakthrough for Plantic that



ABOVE: Coles has adopted Plantic eco Plastic for its fresh food products.

LEFT: Plantic's eco plastics have also proved a success in markets such as confectionery products.

has happened in the past few years is that we have commercialised an eco plastic that can extend shelf life by drawing on a key performance benefit, which is the barrier technology," he explains. "Basically, it means the plastic is akin to glass, it stops gasses going through.

"Our material has ten times better oxygen barrier performance than the next best on the market, in both traditional plastics or bioplastics.

"I really believe Plantic eco Plastic is this generation's barrier material – it is better than traditional plastics.

"It's the performance of the materials that is winning customers. The environmental aspects are very important, but the reality is there is no other plastic with the same barrier performance and that is why it is being adopted so broadly and so quickly."

Morris also points out the company is able to supply a range of bioplastic materials now, from rigid and flexible materials through to bioplastic shrink wraps sourced through overseas partners.



The company is also seeking to improve the performance and renewable properties of its materials.

Earlier this year, for example, it entered into a partnership with Brazilian company Braskem, a global leader in biopolymers. This will lead to the use of Braskem's green polyethylene, derived from sugar cane starch, in the Plantic materials to

LEFT: Plantic CEO Brendan Morris shows off the company's eco plastic trays used by Coles.

produce packaging made from more than 90 per cent renewable resources.

"We are also looking for the next generation of raw ingredients from new sources," Morris says.

The company's recent growth has also led it to expand its manufacturing capabilities. Earlier this year it quadrupled capacity by expanding its plant in the Melbourne suburb of Altona.

And the company is poised to announce the establishment of an offshore manufacturing facility to service its clients and meet growing demand for its products in the North American and European markets.

"It's been a terrific past 18 months for us," says Morris. "The company has really transformed, but the key now is managing the manufacturing footprint.

"Our manufacturing facilities will enormously help us in how we go about supplying our existing customers and our expected growth in customer base over the coming years."