

"COMPOSTABLE" PLASTIC

(Sometimes known as "bioplastic" "bio-based" "crop-based" or "biodegradable" plastic)



1. This is often described as "compostable" but this is misleading. An ordinary person would think that it converts into compost, but the Standards for this type of plastic (ASTM D6400, EN13432, Australian 4736) require it to convert into CO₂ gas within six months. You **cannot therefore make compost from it** – only greenhouse gas. This process contributes to climate change but does nothing for the soil, and it cannot be described as organic recycling, or "recovery."



2. It does not address the problem of plastic **litter in the open environment** because the original vegetable materials have been polymerised and have become plastic. It is designed to be taken to an industrial composting or anaerobic digestion unit, and to biodegrade in the special conditions found in those industrial processes, not in the open environment, where it would create microplastics.



3. It cannot be **recycled** with ordinary plastics because it would contaminate the recyclate and make it useless, so anyone who is in favour of recycling should be against it. Even if intended for industrial composting, some of this plastic will likely get into the oil-based plastic recycling stream and contaminate it.



4. By reason of points 1 and 3 above, compostable plastic is **not part of a circular economy.**

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5. It is not suitable for **home-composting**. The conditions necessary for biodegradation cannot always be maintained by industrial composters, and are very unlikely to be maintained by ordinary householders. They would therefore create microplastics, which could get into the food chain. In any event home-composting is only possible for people who live in houses, not apartments, and they would take their kitchen waste to the compost heap in a bucket – they would not need to buy an expensive plastic bag.



6. There is no need to use scarce **land and water resources** to grow crops to make plastic, when it can be made from a by-product of refining oil for fuels. Those resources should be used to produce food for the people in the world who do not have enough to eat. The European Parliament has resolved not to encourage the use of land and water resources for producing bio-fuels (and the same reasoning applies to bio-plastics). The UN issued a report to the same effect on 31st March 2014.

Nestlé believes that allocating agricultural land and water to biofuel production will severely impact food and water security. In their view "Forecasts of food production suggest that significant challenges exist for the world to feed future generations... Even a small percentage of energy from crop based biofuels has a devastating effect on the food market."

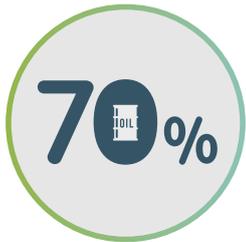


7. It cannot be made by existing plastics factories without making changes to their machinery or buying new machinery, and retraining their workforce.

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8. It is **not "renewable"** as it can contain up to 60% oil-based material. Consider also, the non-renewable fossil fuels consumed and CO₂ and other pollutants emitted by the machines used to clear the land, plough the land, harrow the land, sow the seed, make the fertilisers and pesticides and bring them to the farm, spray the crops, harvest the crops, take the crops to a polymerisation factory, and operate the autoclaves.



9. The world currently uses 320 million tonnes of plastic per year. There is **not enough available arable land and water** to grow crops to make anything like enough crop-based plastic to replace ordinary plastic.



10. It is **too expensive** for everyday use – costing up to 400% more than ordinary plastic. Even if this cost were substantially reduced in the future it is far too expensive for ordinary people and there is no justification for subsidising it out of taxpayers' money.



11. It **should not be described as "biodegradable"** because although it will fragment in the open environment it is tested for biodegradation only in the special conditions found in industrial composting or anaerobic digestion.

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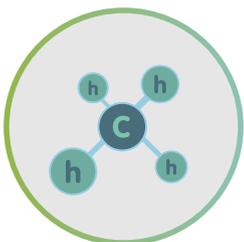
12. It is not as good as ordinary or d₂w plastic for shopper bags. They need to be strong and inexpensive, and to be capable of re-use many times before final disposal.



13. It is **not suitable for agricultural mulch films**, because (unlike d₂w plastic) the degradation time cannot be controlled in line with the growing cycle.



14. It is often **thicker and heavier** for the same strength, so it needs more trucks to transport it, using more road space, consuming more fuel, and emitting more CO₂ and other forms of pollution to atmosphere.



15. Deep in landfill it can **generate methane**, which is a greenhouse gas even more powerful than CO₂.

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16. It is sometimes claimed that the crops being grown to make crop-based plastics will **absorb CO₂**, but that would be true of the vegetation which was there before.



17. It will **not comply with the laws** of the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain and other countries which require short-life plastic goods and packaging made in or exported to those countries to comply with ASTM D6954 or a similar local Standard.



18. An LCA by Intertek, published by the UK Government in 2011 and a further LCA by Intertek in 2012 found that ordinary plastic and oxo-bio plastic **have a better LCA** than crop-based plastic or paper bags.

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19. A consortium consisting of Friends of the Earth, Surfrider Foundation, Zero Waste Europe, Ecos, and the European Environmental Bureau published a paper in 2017 in which they say "The bioplastics industry use their green-sounding credentials to position themselves as helping to speed the reduction in fossil fuel use and solving the ever-growing plastic pollution and marine litter issues. However, there is clear evidence that **bioplastics do not solve many of these problems** and in fact may create new ones."



20. If composting is seen as a way to dispose of plastic instead of sending it to landfill, **this is wasteful**, as it creates nothing but CO₂. Plastic which is not worth recycling should be sent to a modern non-polluting incinerator, where the calorific value can be used to generate electricity.



21. Industrial composters do not want it. See:
<https://bioplasticsnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Oregon-composters-dont-want-Compostable-Packagine.pdf>

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