



GUIDE TO ADVERTISING THE PLASTICS USED IN COMPOSTABLE PRODUCTS AND PACKAGING

As the backlash against single use plastic grows, some advertising of compostable plastic products is creating consumer confusion. Several compostable plastics are being advertised as being 'plastic free', while other compostable products are being advertised as 'plant-based' when they are predominantly fossil fuel based.

This Q&A sheet provides guidance to producers and retailers on how to advertise the plastics used in compostable products and packaging in a manner that is in line with the requirements of the Fair Trading Act 1986 (bit.ly/FTA1986) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Code (bit.ly/ASAcodes). To avoid falling foul of the Fair Trading Act and the ASA Code, producers and retailers must be able to back up any claims made and avoid misleading the consumer.

For more information on terms used to advertise plastic packaging such as "compostable", "biodegradable" and "degradable", WasteMINZ has developed consumer and producer guidelines on the advertising, certification and end of life disposal for compostable products and packaging. View them at bit.ly/WM-compack.

Q Can compostable plastics be advertised as "plastic free"?

▲ No. Plastics NZ states that: "Plastic is a material made from very long molecule chains called 'polymers' and can be moulded into shape and then set." If a product or packaging is made with mouldable polymers (including fully plant-based/bio-based polymers) it is a plastic.

RECOMMENDATION: Advertising should avoid making claims such as "plastic free" or "I'm not plastic" on

products that are made from any form of plastic (including bio-based/plant-based) as this is misleading to consumers.

Q Can plastic products be advertised as "plant-based" or "bio-based" (or as bioplastic) if they also contain fossil fuels?

▲ Yes, if the polymer is partially derived from a plant such as corn, sugarcane, or microorganisms ("bio-based"), as opposed to fully made from fossil fuel. However, it is essential that the percentage of plant-based/bio-based materials contained in the product is specified so that the addition of fossil fuel is obvious to the customer, otherwise this wording could be deemed to be misleading.

RECOMMENDATION: Advertising should specify the percentage of plant-based/bio-based materials contained in the product, (i.e. 30% plant-based, or 50% bio-based). Advertising should also state whether the packaging has attained a compostability standard. If a product is made from cornstarch it is also recommended that advertising states whether the material is GMO-free or not (see the GMO-free question below for more detail).

The following international certifications verify the percentage of material that is bio-based and producers are encouraged to have their product verified if relevant:

CERTIFYING BODY LOGO |
BIO-BASED OPTIONS



- ★ 20-40%
- ★★ 40-60%
- ★★★ 60-80%
- ★★★★ 80%



Label specifies bio-based content per product



- 20-50%
- 50-85%
- >85%

Q Can I claim that a partially bio-based plastic is made from renewable resources?

A No. If a plastic product is claimed to be made from renewable resources the polymer should be bio-based only, which can be reproduced in a very short timeframe, as opposed to a polymer made from fossil fuel, which took millions of years to create and is finite.

RECOMMENDATION: Any plastic that contains a percentage of fossil fuel should not be claimed to be "renewable" or made from "renewable resources" because this cannot be backed up with a standard. However, a bio-based or plant-based claim that details the percentage of bio-based/plant-based content can be used instead.

Q Are all plastics that biodegrade in compost (i.e. home or commercially/industrially compostable) bio-based?

A No. Some plastics made from fossil fuel can be certified as biodegradable in composting environments, for example, PBAT.

RECOMMENDATION: Advertising should specify if the product or packaging is certified home or commercially (industrially) compostable and which standard it has attained, as well as the origin of the packaging material (fully or partially bio-based or fossil fuel based). These should be presented adjacent to each other so that the consumer does not confuse material origin (i.e. bio-based) and end of life (i.e. home compostable).

Q How should I advertise a certified home compostable product that is, for example, 20% bio-based and 80% PBAT (fossil fuel based)?

A See example of advertisement (online or in catalogue) below:



HOME COMPOSTABLE FOOD CADDY LINERS

- ★ Certified to Standard AS 5810 by the Australasian Bioplastics Association which means at least 90% of the carbon in this product biodegrades within 365 days in home composting conditions.
- ★ Made from cornstarch (10%), PLA (10%), and fossil fuel based PBAT (80%).

END OF LIFE DISPOSAL

- ★ In home compost. Product may need to be cut up or moistened to help it break down. **These bags cannot be recycled.**

Q Are all bio-based plastics biodegradable in compost (i.e. home or commercially/industrially compostable)?

A No. Some fully bio-based (including plant-based) plastics are not biodegradable and therefore cannot be certified as compostable.

RECOMMENDATION: Advertising should specify that the product is bio-based and specify how it should be disposed of. If it is recyclable, then the plastic identification symbol should be used and/or the Australasian Recycling Label should be utilised.

Q Are all bio-based plastics sold in New Zealand GMO-free?

A No. Some plastics derived from cornstarch that are sold in New Zealand are made from genetically modified corn grown overseas.

RECOMMENDATION: While not widely used in Aotearoa, certification does exist to verify the non-GMO status of products. If this is not an option, advertisers should state whether the starch is GMO-free or not, and be able to back up this claim if asked to produce substantiation.

Further information on bioplastics can be found on the WasteMINZ and Plastics NZ websites.

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