

The bottle that heralds a plastic revolution

By Martin Hickman

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It is the container that could launch a revolution. The first biodegradable bottle has gone on sale in Britain, raising hopes we may one day stop adding to the mountain of plastic packaging accumulating in shopping baskets and landfill sites.

The plastic water bottle – from a new company committed to environmental production, Belu – is made of corn and decomposes in home compost in months. Its launch is an attempt to stem the tide of plastic wrappers, tubs, trays and bottles that threatens to engulf landfill sites in the UK.

People in Britain throw away their body weight in rubbish every seven weeks. A growing consumer reaction against the growth in packaging has prompted businesses to explore greener alternatives.

Belu insists that its bottle, whose profits go to the charity WaterAid, which builds wells in developing countries, will stimulate consumer demand for biodegradable products. "Think about it – plastic made from corn. What potential!" said Belu's Mai Simonsen.

But although welcomed by environmental groups, such little by little moves may not have enough impact to turn back the tide of rubbish in an incurable throwaway society.

Many environmentalists are questioning whether we need to be buying so many products in the first place, and say bottled water is a case in point. One recent study by the US-based Earth Policy Institute estimated that bottled water is 10,000 times more environmentally damaging than tap water

because of the effort involved in extraction, packaging and transportation. The US's second most imported brand, Fiji, is shipped around the world from the middle of the South Pacific. Yet global sales of bottled water have leapt by 57 per cent in a decade, to 154 billion litres in 2004.

Norman Baker MP, chair of the All-Party Environment Group, said: "It's admirable to try to help WaterAid, but increasing sales of bottled water is not the way to do it. Bottled water is extremely damaging for the environment; the best thing to do is to drink tap water. Biodegradable materials are better than non-biodegradable materials but there's no substitute for proper environmental action. People should be minimising their waste."

British families are estimated to be unintentionally paying out £460 a year on food packaging, which includes such seemingly absurd examples as shrink-wrapped coconuts.

Belu executives insist that people will always demand drinks on the go and say the potential from introducing biodegradable bottles is "enormous".

Reed Paget, managing director of the company, said: "Hopefully, our bottle will kick-start the market and consumers will say 'we really like this idea' and encourage bigger companies."

The bottle retails for about 45p. The purchase of one bottle will, the company says, fund clean drinking water for one person in India or Africa for a month.

Preberite besedilo The bottle that heralds a plastic revolution in odgovorite na spodnja vprašanja s kratkimi odgovori. Odgovore v angleškem jeziku napišite na črte pod vprašanji.

Example: 0. Who is the author of the article? Martin Hickman.

1. Which biodegradable material is the "green" bottle made of?

2. How much trash per person is disposed of in Britain every seven weeks?

3. Who else beside Belu will benefit from the new type of bottle?

4. What kind of water is more earth-friendly?

5. How much bottled water was drunk in the world in 2004?

6. What does Mr Baker advise people to reduce?

7. How much money does a British family spend annually on food wrapping?

8. Do the Belu executives agree with Mr Norman Baker?
