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# Alternative packaging from biodegradable farm waste



**WASHINGTON (AFP)** — Two young American businessmen have developed a green alternative to ubiquitous polystyrene packaging — made from farm waste and mushrooms — that uses 10 times less energy to produce, and biodegrades into a natural fertilizer.  
 Called EcoCradle, the product can also be used as insulation and is grown, not manufactured, with no greenhouse gas emissions, such as CO2, as a by-product, co-inventor Eben Bayer, 24, told AFP in an interview.  
 "We have developed a platform that we think is perfect for replacing the polystyrene that is used in packaging, because ... it is biodegradable and it's created using almost no energy, almost no CO2 emissions," he added.  
 Bayer and Gavin McIntyre, classmates from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, founded Ecovative Design in 2007 to produce EcoCradle.  
 "For each unit of EcoCradle we produce, compared to the same unit or volume of polystyrene, we use ten times less energy and emit eight times less CO2 over the life of the product from

production, use and to disposal," Ecovative Design CEO Bayer said.  
 "Our long-term vision is actually to replace all plastic and foams and mitigate their environmental consequences ... and this natural platform we have discovered or invented will allow us to do that," he said.  
 EcoCradle is a patented trademark in the United States and 30 other countries, including the European Union members.  
 Currently polystyrene, a plastic, is so prevalent in the packaging industry it accounts for 30 percent of all the waste in U.S. landfills, Bayer said.  
 EcoCradle, on the other hand, degrades naturally in contact with water or moisture and has a "positive impact on the environment ... as a natural fertilizer for plants."  
 The new product is made from agricultural byproducts including cottonseed hulls, buckwheat hulls and rice husk that are mixed with a filamentous fungi — mycelium — as a bonding agent — and allowed to grow inside molds.  
 The mycelium secretes a powerful enzyme that decomposes the organic

waste as it grows. After seven days at room temperature in the dark, a compact, ultralight, malleable material is formed that can resist temperatures of up to 800 degrees Celsius (1,472 Fahrenheit), Bayer said.  
 The production cost is comparable to that of polystyrene, he added.  
 EcoCradle is planning to take on the 20-billion-dollar a year polystyrene industry dominated globally by a Dow Chemical subsidiary. At present, Ecovative Design has a factory in northern New York state, where a staff of eight churn out thousands of EcoCradle packaging for several companies.  
 "Our vision is to take the same plant we have designed and deploy it next year as a larger facility in the midwest United States, then in Europe and in Asia over the next three years," Bayer said.  
 The factories require "a fairly low capital investment, in the order of millions of dollars," he said.  
 "It's low-tech biotechnology ... it's almost closer to cooking or farming vegetables than it is to genetic manipulation."

## Friendster undergoes "green" facelift, reported close to sale

Social networking pioneer Friendster of Mountain View has given itself a makeover to appeal to more young users in Asia — and according to a published report, is preparing itself to be sold by the end of the month.  
 Friendster was long ago eclipsed in the social media world, first by MySpace and now by Facebook, but maintains a significant base in Southeast Asia. More than 75 million of its 115 million users and 90 percent of its daily traffic come from that region.  
 And 80 percent of its users from that area are in the 16-to-24 age bracket, which is why the company says it replaced its old blue Friendster logo with one that spells out its name in script inside a bright green cloud.  
 The company also introduced a new green-themed layout, which resembles Facebook, and introduced several other features, such as micropayments and a virtual gift shop. There are also virtual games, including one called "The Farmer" (FarmVille on Facebook has nearly 70 million players.)  
 "We've responded to the needs and wants of our core user base, Asian youth," said Friendster spokesman Jeff Roberto. "Friendster is dominant among the youth sector in Asia, and today, Asia represents the largest and fastest growing Internet and mobile phone user populations in the world."  
 Still, Palo Alto's version of Big Blue, Facebook, just passed the 350 million worldwide member mark and added more than 17 million users in Asia in recent weeks, especially among Friendster's target audience.  
 (Source: San Francisco Chronicle)

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