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Green bags: When there's no such thing as a free bag

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Darrell Costello, grocery sales manager at Roplast Industries Inc., of Oroville shows off shopping bags made of polyethylene recycled agricultural products. (Ty Barbour/Staff Photo) All Chico E-R photos are available here. OROVILLE -- Green and sustainable have become buzzwords for products made from recycled materials that preserve natural resources, but Oroville's Roplast Industries manufactured plastic bags from recycled materials long before it was fashionable.

"We've been using recycled materials for bags for more than 20 years — way before it became trendy," said Darrell Costello, grocery sales manager at Roplast.

Now, most companies embrace some form of green policy and are taking steps to reduce their "carbon footprints" to conserve natural resources, Costello said.

Recently, the plastic bag manufacturer at 3155 S. Fifth Ave. started making reusable bags from recycled irrigation products like drip irrigation line and plastic film used in strawberry fields.

The resin pellets used to manufacture the bags come from California recycled ag products, and the bags are manufactured in the state, Costello said. Using local products that aren't shipped long distance conserves fossil fuels and decreases greenhouse gases.

The reusable bags can also be recycled at the end of their life span.

The bags can be reused up to 100 times to bring home groceries from the supermarket or clothes from the shopping center. That's just an estimate, as Costello said they haven't maxed out the bags yet during testing.

The ag bags are black with bright colored graphics and lettering like "Keep California Beautiful."

The most popular style of bag is the Wave Top, made of 100 percent recycled materials

"Most of the reusable bags out there aren't recyclable at the end of their life span," Costello said. "This bag isn't going into the landfill."

Roplast also manufactures products with a biodegradable or compostable film that is water resistant and durable, but it breaks down by microbial action when exposed to organic material, heat or moisture.

One film is made from 60 percent recycled chalk. Other films are made from recycled materials used in industry and by consumers.

All the bags are custom made for many different stores. Costello said they often work with graphic designers and advertisers for months to design a bag that reflects the right image for a company.

Companies want attractive bags that advertise and market their company — one that shoppers want to carry.

"They won't take just any bag to walk around at the mall," Costello said. "It has to be the best bag."

Roplast makes reusable bags for several grocery chains including Costco and SaveMart, which includes Food Maxx and Lucky's.

They also makes reusable bags for S&S Produce and Natural Foods in Chico and Wagon Wheel Market in Oroville.

Costello said legislation that started in San Francisco banning disposable plastic bags spearheaded a movement toward reusable bags.

Now grocery stores are required to have recycle stations for disposable bags and give discounts that amount to a nickel or a dime for each bag a customer brings in to reuse as a grocery bag.

And all grocery stores sell reusable bags.

Eventually, Costello predicts that disposable bags will be banned everywhere. So people who start using them now will be ahead of the curve.

"We do think this is the future of bags — a nice heavy bag that you can use over and over again and recycle at the end of the day," said Costello. "It will likely be in the near future because of legislation that there will be no free bags."

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AT A GLANCE: Roplast Industries has been manufacturing custom polyethylene-based bags in Oroville since 1990. The company's goal is to provide film and bags in an environmentally responsible manner. It has made bags from recycled material for 20 years.

WHAT'S NEW: It recently started making another reusable bag from 100 percent polyethylene recycled agricultural products, including drip irrigation line and the plastic film used to grow strawberries.

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