

Ocean Spray launches effort to cut all plastic waste by 2025

By Ann Parson
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

As COVID-19 continues, the scourge of plastic waste worsens. Bangkok reportedly used 60 percent more plastic in April than the year before, mostly due to disposable food containers. It could have been Boston.

The public outcry over our plastic crisis is putting more and more pressure on companies to reduce or eliminate their plastic footprint, and in response, Ocean Spray Cranberries, headquartered in Lakeville, has said that its packaging will be 100 percent recyclable, reusable, compostable, or biodegradable by 2025. Similar pledges by Procter & Gamble, PepsiCo, Kellogg's, and numerous other corporate titans indicate their readiness to take responsibility for their packaging.

But will they? As a Frontline report last March made clear, over the years many big companies have set ambitious goals for recycling and creating more sustainable packaging, only to backslide or make no progress at all.

"With COVID, and more waste, more plastic, it has reached a boiling point," said Scott Cassel, CEO and founder of the Product Stewardship Institute, a Boston-based nonprofit working to reduce packaging and other waste. For centuries, manufacturers have left consumers and municipalities downstream to deal with their packaging waste. "We can no longer continue on this path. We need producer responsibility," said Cassel.

In September, Ocean Spray

launched an interesting new partnership with TerraCycle, the New Jersey waste management company, which, fingers crossed, should keep Ocean Spray on track toward achieving its 2025 pledge.

Anyone purchasing Ocean Spray's plastic pouches of Craisins dried cranberries can collect these wrappings in a box, and, after printing out a free UPS shipping label, send it to TerraCycle, where the plastic is cleaned, melted, and turned into new products for retailers, such as garden benches and picnic tables. For each shipment, participants in this free program will earn points that add up to donations to a nonprofit or school of their choice.

For the environment, it's a definite win. Flexible packaging, such as plastic food pouches, wraps, and bags, doesn't belong in your recycling bin. "Most are blends of two or more resins and difficult to recycle," noted Karl Schoettle, a consultant for the packaging/printing industries. "They usually end up in landfills, incineration, or processed into an aggregate material."

TerraCycle's R&D team has "developed innovative solutions that allow us to recycle typically unrecyclable items like flexible plastic packaging and divert it from the landfill," said Sue Kauffman at TerraCycle.

Ocean Spray is also developing a program with TerraCycle's subsidiary Loop that would convert their juice bottles into sturdy packaging that can be refilled and reused repeatedly, the hallmark of a circular economy.



Flexible plastic packaging can be cleaned and turned into other products, such as picnic tables.

"In this system," said Eric Rosen, Loop publicist, "the customer is only purchasing the product. The company owns the package."

Loop's online stores carry 80 brands and 400 products, some made by large companies such as Unilever, Pantene, and Seventh Generation, others from local businesses. All Loop products pass standards for sustainability and health, examples being Hellman's vegan mayonnaise and Tide's plant-based detergent.

Say you order Häagen-Dazs ice cream from Loopstore.com. The package is delivered to your doorstep in a Loop tote, and when the container is empty, you put it back in the tote and

send it to Loop (using a prepaid UPS label) for cleaning and sanitizing, whereupon it travels back to Häagen-Dazs for refilling. TerraCycle worked with the ice-cream maker to find a design sturdy enough for repeated uses, ending up with a handsome double-walled stainless-steel container that keeps ice cream frozen for hours. As for spent containers, TerraCycle removes them from circulation and recasts them into another product.

"One of the ideas behind Loop is to make it as easy for a consumer as possible, without having to change much of their behavior," noted Rosen. "People are already used to dropping their recyclable container into their blue bin, and now, instead, you're dropping it into your tote." Ultimately, said Rosen, Loop, which TerraCycle started in 2019, will be available online and in retail locations. It is already integrated into the websites of Walgreen and Kroger stores, and will begin an in-store presence in 2021. Loop is available in France and the UK, as well as in the United States, with launches planned for Canada, Japan, Australia, and Germany next year.

Since Loop's strategy is relatively new and untested, it remains to be seen how its "milkman model" will fare, a throwback to the days when a milk delivery person left and picked up bottles at your front door. Then, too, the milk company sold the milk but owned the bottles and was responsible for keeping them clean.

"One problem with the milkman

approach is the price of the driver, the fuel, and the truck," noted Schoettle.

Meanwhile, Ocean Spray's recycling team continues to work to make its packaging more sustainable. According to the company, more than 90 percent of all of its packaging, by weight, is recyclable. A redesign of its 25-pound dried cranberry boxes has led to reductions in forest fiber and plastic film packaging, and the company's paper and cardboard comes from sustainable and recycled-content sources.

Noted Cassel, "Ideally, for all materials, we're looking to recycle them back into the same products or better; or reuse them, or reduce them; or take the material and grind it into pellets for other products. We want to try to avoid downcycling, the disposing of a product after one or two cycles."

Last August, Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico and Representative Alan Lowenthal of California, authors of the federal bill Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, which remains under review, shared their perspective in a letter to the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

"According to a recently released report by the Pew Center, a strategy focused solely on recycling would still result in 18 million metric tons of plastic flowing into the ocean each year by 2040. . . . A multi-pronged approach that focuses on limiting all aspects of plastic and packaging pollution and a transition to a truly circular economy is the only solution."

Earnest Drinks makes an earnest go of it in Kendall Square

By Kara Baskin
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Kendall Square is a bit of a whistling ghost town at the moment, but there's a bright spot in one quiet corner: Earnest Drinks, a new restaurant-coffee shop-ice cream stand-bar from Aaron Cohen, who also runs Gracie's Ice Cream in Union Square. Both shops are named for his kids.

He admits that now is not an ideal time to open a new business.

"We obviously would love more customers than we've had. The building we're in is about a quarter full, so that's not great," Cohen admits. "There's not a lot of foot traffic, especially on this corner."

Happily, he has attracted fans who enjoy his ice cream in Somerville. The quiet debut has also allowed him and chef James Lavigne (Barbara Lynch's Stir) to get creative and experiment.

"The menu philosophy is a little bit chaotic. We can try a lot more stuff than if we'd been busier from day one, and the menu is big for such a small

WHAT SHE'S HAVING

space," he says.

Ergo, a roster of dishes that read like a friend is enthusiastically chatting with you about his latest great invention in a college dorm room.

A mixed green salad is "the second healthiest thing on the menu right behind ice cream, and the most vegan." A Southern cheese dog slathered with pimento? Well, "You can put any kind of cheese on a hot dog, but Chef James thinks house-made pimento is how to do it best, and he's got the knives, so we kind of just go with it." And a meatloaf burger comes with the helpful reminder that Earnest also validates parking. Non-sequiturs are big here, and that's part of the charm.

There is no rhyme or reason to the menu, but that's OK, just go with it and have fun. This is the kind of place where you'll find pickles cured in Kool-Aid, lending them a faint neon pink

glow, and cheese dip alongside Bugles. Hey, when's the last time you had Bugles?

Gracie's ice cream is on offer, of course, with the same wacky flavors as at the Somerville original — Twinkies and jam, salty Oreo, fruity pebbles. Get a virgin frappe or spike it with alcohol. A word about the alcohol: Cocktails are strong. Try a margarita or Mai Tai to go, but don't make plans later. (If you do need a jolt, coffee is from the North Shore's Atomic Coffee Roasters.) There are also plastic yard flamingos for sale, because these are strange times.

For now, Earnest is open for patio dining and takeout, and you can't go inside except to use the bathroom. Naturally, there's a cheeky flow chart on the door explaining the set-up.

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PHOTOS BY SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Earnest Drinks co-owner Aaron Cohen (left) and chef James Lavigne, wearing blankets they will give to customers at their Cambridge restaurant. Top: pork three-way sandwich and Jinx Removing cocktail.

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ELLEN BHANG FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Tested by wildfires, these Ore. winemakers are staying the course

By Ellen Bhang
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

If your sense of fortitude these days is more ebb than flow, look to two winemaking couples in Oregon for inspiration. These duos personify grit and resilience, having been literally tested by fire.

Jim Fischer and Jenny Mosbacher of Fossil & Fawn insist they are not "outdoorsy" people. That might come as a surprise if you met them this season. "During the peak insanity of harvest, we were sleeping at the winery in a tent," shares Fischer.

Mosbacher explains the reason for camping at their facility west of Portland. "As part of COVID precautions, we all — leading up to harvest — had to make a very strong agreement with one another that this was going to be the plan," she says. The other wine-

making couple with whom they co-lease space also lived temporarily on-site.

Sleeping under the stars turned out to be the easy part. Fischer and Mosbacher were already anticipating smaller-than-usual yields given that fruit set — where a vine's flowers turn into clusters of berries — appeared poor across Willamette Valley. But nothing could prepare them for early September, when wildfire smoke, driven by unusual winds from the east, turned skies an ominous orange. "The smoke billowed into the valley within just a few hours, and would not leave for over a week," recalls Fischer.

Those hazy skies prompted Brad Ford, winemaker at Illahe Vineyards and Winery, situated west of Salem, to remember an event from 40 years ago. "It did remind me a lot of when Mount St. Helens erupted," he says, recalling

how lingering ash clouds obscured the daylight. Brad's wife, Bethany Ford, Illahe's vice president of sales and marketing, talks about the relief she felt last month when precipitation finally arrived, washing the grapes and cleaning the air. "We were all dancing in the rain," she recalls.

The fires of 2020, especially those that burned forested land, will be part of the winery's story. "We live among forests, and it's a particular year," says Brad Ford, underscoring that "terroir" describes the sum total of factors impacting a vintage. "It's going to be a particular type of wine, just based on the vagaries of this year."

Both producers remain vigilant about potential smoke taint. The fruit that they themselves grew, and that which they sourced from other growers, seemed sound; even so, they are monitoring the wine for unwanted flavors or aromas. They are pressing fruit softly, since smoke compounds can cling to grape skins. They are also fermenting pressings separately, which will allow them to assess individual batches over time.

Both couples are forging ahead in an extraordinary year.

"We could panic and live in fear

right now, but making wine is our creative outlet," says Fischer. "So we have just proceeded with our plan, adhering to it confidently."

Fossil & Fawn Pinot Gris 2019 This ruddy pour takes a white grape and ferments it as a red, reminding us that pinot gris skins contain pigment. This beauty expresses fresh cranberries, lemon pith, and saltiness. 12.2 percent alcohol by volume (ABV). High-\$20s to low-\$30s. Distributed by Oz Wine Company. At The Spirited Gourmet, Belmont, 617-489-9463; Social Wines, South Boston, 617-268-2974.

Illahe Vineyards and Winery, Estate Pinot Noir 2018 Year after year, this pinot noir blooms with sunny clarity, bright with cherry, umami, and forest-floor leafiness. 14 percent ABV. Mid- to high-\$20s. Distributed by Oz Wine Company. At Pemberton Farms, Cambridge, 617-491-2244; Blanchards Wines & Spirits, Jamaica Plain, 617-522-9300.

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