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# Brand new bag: Maine oyster farmers offer compostable bags made from beechwood

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By Lauren Kramer

**In the last year, use of Ocean Harvest compostable bags has replaced approximately 56 miles of plastic packaging**



Ocean Farm Supply says compostable bags made from beechwood cellulose fiber are a more responsible alternative to plastics used for harvesting. Images courtesy of Ocean Farm Supply.

When Erin Adams, Eric Oransky and Willy Leathers opened their oyster farm, Maine Ocean Farms, in Freeport in 2017, the trio began searching for an alternative to the plastic mesh packaging traditionally used to contain harvested oysters.

But they came up emptyhanded. Still determined to reduce packaging pollution, they located an Austrian-based manufacturer who could create biodegradable, compostable bags made from beechwood cellulose fiber. In 2020, Adams co-founded **Ocean Farm Supply** (<https://maineoceanfarms.com/index.php>) in Brunswick, Maine, to distribute these products.

“When we were harvesting oysters, we didn’t want to put this premium product into a plastic bag, but we couldn’t find any alternatives on the market that suited our needs,” said Adams, the company’s CEO. “We created Ocean Harvest bags to provide a solution and share it with others in the industry. Our goal is to remove single-use plastics from shellfish harvesting and distribution.”

Adams estimated that in 2019, the sale of 88 million pounds of clams, mussels and oysters generated 1,400 miles of mesh pollution.



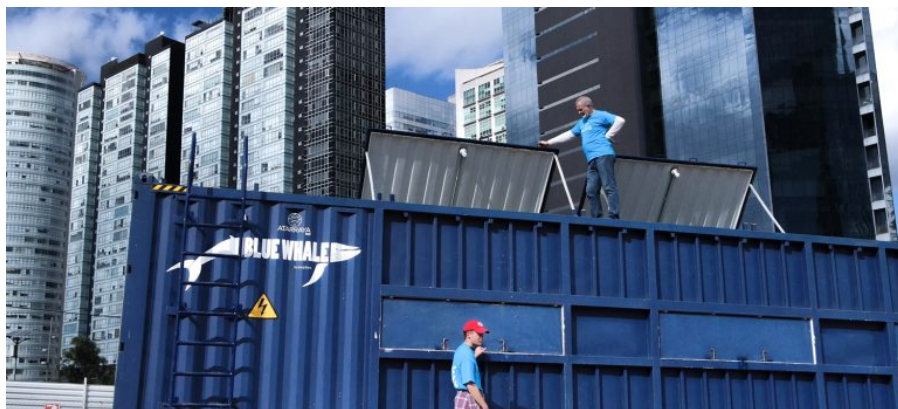
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“That’s a conservative estimate, if every piece of shellfish was put into a plastic bag,” she said.



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Primarily targeting the produce industry, Austrian manufacturer Packnatur® was happy to use its fiber to create a similar but stronger mesh specifically for shellfish like oysters, which often have sharp edges. The fiber, extracted from beechwood grown in Austrian forests, is spun into a strong, all-natural yarn that decomposes in a typical home compost in just 12 weeks.

Ocean Harvest bags cost \$0.29 per foot while plastic harvest bags cost between \$0.16 and \$0.20 per foot. The biodegradable bags are sold in 140-meter sleeves and customers cut them to the lengths they need and seal each end after the bags are filled. Pre-cut and custom-length bags are also available.

To date, the company has sole distribution rights in the United States and Canada, and has gained around 60 customers, half in New England and the other half stretching from Alaska to the Southeast. Customer feedback has been extremely positive, Adams said.



“We’re encouraged that a number of businesses have sustainability targets and are actively looking for bags with a composting element,” said Erin Adams, CEO of Ocean Farm Supply.

“We hear that our product works well on retail counters and for customers who supply directly to consumers,” she said. “People appreciate that the bags are home-compostable and we have many repeat customers.”

Her goal is to ultimately bring the weaving machinery to the United States and use fiber from Maine trees to manufacture the bags. But that’s 10 to 15 years away. “Right now, we’re just trying to build the market, and it makes the most sense to import the bags,” she said.

***The aquaculture industry is so forward-thinking,  
and we’re hoping it will embrace this solution.***

In the last year, use of Ocean Harvest bags has replaced approximately 56 miles of plastic packaging and Adams said the company is just scratching the surface with plastic-free solutions.

“The three of us want to leave things a little better than the way we found them,” she added. “We’re encouraged that a number of businesses have sustainability targets and are actively looking for bags with a composting element. Ideally, our bags end up in compost, but even if they don’t, their production still results in lower emissions than plastic or cotton bags, making Ocean Harvest bags a smarter, more sustainable choice. The aquaculture industry is so forward-thinking, and we’re hoping it will embrace this solution.”

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Vancouver-based correspondent Lauren Kramer has written about the seafood industry for the past 15 years.

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