

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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The Waste Reduction Store

How often do we think about what happens to take-out containers, Styrofoam cups, plastic cutlery, and plastic plates once they are used? The reality is that many of these disposable items are not generally reused, and end up in a landfill shortly after their purpose is served.

This became a real and unavoidable question for The Waste Reduction Store founder Kathleen Boylan when she lived steps away from a burgeoning landfill in Swaziland, watching a large hole in the earth getting filled with garbage. She wondered, however, what would happen if the waste generated from take-away meals and picnics was compostable, and could be used to nourish the earth it came from?

When it began in 2006, The Waste Reduction Store (TWRS) was the first Canadian company to specialize in the sourcing and distribution of certified compostable foodware, as well as the promotion of composting as the most local and green solution for managing industrial food related waste. In four years, TWRS has helped and supported numerous

institutions, communities and businesses in Canada and across North America launch composting programs.

TWRS' vision is to reverse the trends of human-imposed environmental degradation so that future generations may enjoy the beauty of the planet. They believe that all efforts, big and small, are meaningful, because "we have fresh water to protect, dry soil to regenerate, compost to make and rich ecosystems to hold dear." Fittingly, their tagline is "Foodware with a Future."

For Kathleen and her family, the sale of a compostable coffee cup made entirely from plants, or a sugarcane clamshell, represents an opportunity for a business to help change the world. In terms of educating people to change their behaviours, providing food in compostable containers is an opportunity to teach the public, and inspire people, businesses and communities to start composting. With the right knowledge, tools and resources, composting is an easy and practical step: compost can be made locally in any climate and in any size of community.

In addition to the diversion of waste from landfills, the environmental benefits of generating and →

→ using compost are enormous. Compost can be used to replace chemical fertilizers, regenerate top soil to grow food, decrease soil erosion, increase water retention of soil, and increase crop yields.

TWRS commitment to the environment is strong. They source certified compostable food ware and diligently review the certification documents and claims against the products they receive. TWRS has also provided a great deal of in-kind consulting to compost facilities to assist them in understanding the certification and international standards for 'green' products flooding the market with various claims. A previous high school teacher and public speaker, owner Kathleen Boylan often donates her time speaking to community groups and students to help them make sense of green marketing claims and certification processes and standards for products.

TWRS vets their suppliers, stays informed on the latest 'green' options on the market, and even tests products. An example of this involves recent testing of forks, which were supposedly made from plant starch. As their website states:

"We discontinued sourcing plant starch based cutlery after testing a competitor's cutlery marked 'compostable' on the forks, knives and spoons. Their cutlery was determined to contain mostly plastic. This led us to also scrutinize other suppliers."

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As a result, TWRS decided it best to distance themselves from anything marked PCM. Though they were confident in their supplier, they wanted their cutlery to be distinguishable from competitors at the compost facility and at the restaurants they dealt with. They now offer wooden cutlery and Crystalized PLA cutlery.

As TWRS grows as a business, its commitment to the environment and public education remains strong. TWRS is not only committed to selling greener products, it is also committed to working with customers who are serious about reducing their carbon footprint. They communicate via Facebook and Twitter regarding issues such as "green-washed" products and green practices and products, and include a "Frequently Asked Questions" page on their web site. In 2010, they will assist customers in quantifying the carbon credits associated with their efforts.

While privately owned, this community business is certainly making a difference in Winnipeg and beyond through a solid commitment to ecologically sound practices as well as societal change through education and market influence.