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Recycler turns used silage wrap into 'plywood'

A new Auckland processing plant is turning waste silage wrap into UV-resistant plastic plywood.

Last year plastics recycler Astron Plastics installed equipment that shreds, dry cleans and pelletizes used silage wrap. Astron then uses the pellets to make Tuffboard, a plywood replacement product that has a variety of uses on farms.

New Zealand's nation-wide on farm recycling scheme, Plasback, provides the silage wrap that Astron reprocesses. Plasback then completes the loop by marketing the Tuffboard that Astron produces from it.

Astron Plastics business manager Steve Mead says the cost of installing the dry cleaning machinery needed to recycle silage wrap was about \$1 million dollars, and it would not have been possible without a significant grant from the Ministry for the Environment's Waste Minimisation Fund.

Plasback worked closely with Astron to secure the grant from the Ministry, and Steve Mead says Plasback's support was a catalyst for the project.

"The dry cleaner uses heat, centrifugal and mechanical action to clean the shredded plastic. Once it has been cleaned it is turned into pellets, which can be used to produce a variety of products. We are now mainly extruding it into the sheets, which Plasback markets as Tuffboard."

Steve Mead says the plant dedicated to waste silage wrap has the capacity to process 2000 tonnes a year. In the initial stage, production will be limited to about 200 tonnes of silage wrap a year and the balance will be other hard to recycle soft plastics such as used shopping bags and milk powder bags.

Plasback manager Chris Hartshorne says he is very pleased with the new processing plant, which means more of the waste plastic generated on New Zealand farms is processed here rather than sent overseas.

"We are very grateful for the continuing financial support the Ministry for the Environment has provided to develop the capacity to recycle New Zealand's plastic waste," Chris Hartshorne says.

“At this point we plan to supply all of the silage wrap that Astron will process with its new equipment from our Northland collection scheme. The volumes we are collecting from Northland have jumped in the past two years, and farmers in the region are to be applauded for their efforts to be more responsible for their waste.”

Chris Hartshorne says another benefit of the Astron plant is that it reduces the cost of collecting silage wrap. To ship waste silage wrap overseas, Plasback has to bale it and then containerise it. To supply Astron, the collection bags full of silage wrap are put into 40ft containers and trucked to Auckland without baling.

Farmers can buy the Tuffboard that Astron produces from recycled silage wrap direct from Plasback or through rural retail suppliers.

Canterbury pig farmer Simon Oxby uses Tuffboard to build all the sow stalls and fences on his property. Simon Oxby says Tuffboard is easy to clean, and whilst pigs will literally eat wooden plywood they leave Tuffboard alone. It is also UV stabilised so it will not break down over time.

Recycling silage wrap is the latest chapter in Astron’s extensive history of recycling New Zealand’s used plastic.

Steve Mead says the company has been at the forefront of plastic recycling in New Zealand for 40 years. Astron Plastics has recycling plants in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane as well as Auckland. It is a subsidiary of the multinational, publically-owned plastics company the PACT Group.

“Our plant in East Tamaki is a 24/7 operation with 80 staff. We specialise in producing recycled HDPE, LDPE and polypropylene.

“Along with recycling consumer plastics, we recycle hard plastic agrichemical containers. These include those from AgPro and Ecolab, which Plasback collects and sends to our sister company Auckland Drum for washing and granulation prior to recycling.

“We are very excited to be working more closely with Plasback on this new venture. The partnership we have established has the potential to grow significantly in years to come,” Steve Mead says.

For further information contact Plasback’s Chris Hartshorne on 03 338 2400 or chartshorne@agpac.co.nz or Astron Plastic’s Steve Mead on 09 273 1160 or Steve.Mead@astronplastics.co.nz.

Captions

Astron 1 --- Used silage wrap on the conveyor into the dry cleaner.



Astron 2 --- After it is cleaned the silage wrap is turned into pellets.



Astron 3 --- The pellets of waste plastic are extruded into sheets of Tuffboard.

