A New Zealand Invention Wins a Prestigious European Innovation Award

From the left: *Chris Smith, Editor and Conference Manager European Plastics News (EPN) and Steve Crowhurst, Publishing Director EPN*

A novel low density foam using a biobased plastic (polylactic acid or PLA) has won the "Best Innovation in Bioplastics" category at the Bioplastics Awards in Europe. These awards are sponsored by European Plastic News, Europe's leading pan European plastics magazine.

Developed by the Biopolymer Network Ltd, a venture between Scion, Agresearch and Plant and Food Research, and supported by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, the innovation enables low density foams to be produced from PLA and makes such products competitive with petroleum based materials such as expanded polystyrene foam.

According to Sarah Heine, the Acting CEO of the Biopolymer Network Ltd, PLA is rapidly emerging as the worlds leading bioplastic. Now we can make low density foams from this product we can compete with non-sustainable petroleum based products. Such products are extensively used in applications such as packaging and insulation where environmental credentials are increasingly important.

Sarah credits Scion scientists, Samir Shah, Kate Parker and Alan Fernyhough and former Scion scientist Michael Witt, with the invention. The process uses carbon dioxide as the blowing agent and has been successfully tested on a commercial polystyrene moulding plant in New Zealand. The combination of a "green" blowing agent along with the use of a bio based product derived from plants means the final product has a very low carbon footprint.

Scion Scientists Kate Parker and Samir Shah holding an example of the environmentally friendly biofoam