

WORLD FIRST FROM MEADOW MUSHROOMS

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Meadow Mushrooms are 100% committed to sustainability as a core value of their business, seen through their dedication to eco-friendly packaging. One of their proudest decisions was to move away from using plastic punnets to hold their mushrooms, and in doing so, were able to eliminate the equivalent of 2.5 million plastic drink bottles in just one year. The cardboard punnets currently in use are bio-degradable and compostable, much to the love of loyal mushroom purchasers.

In a world first for the food industry, Meadow Mushrooms are now creating green packaging for their products out of mushrooms. With partner the Biopolymer Network and scientists from Plant and Food Research, Meadow Mushrooms are using mushroom stalks to develop a punnet that will replace the current biodegradable punnets.

“With many crops being harvested, there is often a large volume of organic waste produced that may only currently have low-value options for disposal. Companies are keen to look for opportunities to up-value their by-products and use them in a more effective way,” says Biopolymer Network’s CEO, Sarah Heine. “Biopolymer Network has worked with the mushroom stalks for a number of years and has looked at several promising ideas, however packaging seemed like an obvious area to work on. Since then, we have been able to create products that both look good and offer functional attributes such as strength and printable surfaces.”

Prototype punnets currently being tested to offer the same or better protection and maintain the mushroom's freshness. "The mushroom stalks add extra strength to the punnet compared to the cardboard, even if it gets wet," says Melanie Rushton, the Marketing and Innovation Manager.

Mushrooms differ from regular produce in several ways – they are sensitive to moisture, can be affected by exposure to odours in the air, and are very susceptible to bruising and discolouration. Meadow Mushrooms' new punnets will be better equipped to manage the sensitivities of mushrooms.

Stalk punnets will feature a unique breathable coating and a breathable film, which will allow for an extended shelf life, both in-store and at home. Such results cannot be achieved with regular paper bags alone.

The mushroom industry is one of the lowest usage industries in New Zealand, meaning their water and power requirements are considerably lower than other forms of produce. Meadow Mushrooms also recognise the global push towards plastic reduction and are playing their part heavily in this in several ways.

Meadow Mushrooms are also currently trialling a bio-degradable film for their products, which if proven successful, will be implemented into their packaging. Such innovations in all aspects of production prove the lengths Meadow Mushrooms will go to in order to minimise their negative eco-footprint.

The company will continue to chase sustainability and innovative practices post the release of their new punnets, all the while improving the quality and shelf-life of their produce. Meadow Mushrooms see their sustainability practices as a benefit, not a burden, to their overall business, and plan to continuously seek improvement in this area.