

ling & Distributing

Aug 2/2010

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THE PACKER

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Courtesy Earthcycle Packaging

Earthcycle's palm fiber-based packaging helps absorb excess moisture in Ponderosa Mushrooms' packs, says Joe Salvo, president of Ponderosa.

Earthcycle packs extend shelf life of mushrooms

By David Mitchell
Special to The Packer

Joe Salvo gave Earthcycle Packaging a second look, and he's glad he did.

"With Earthcycle, we're not having any condensation issues whatsoever," said Salvo, president of Port Coquitlam, British Columbia-based Ponderosa Mushrooms. "Any moisture is being absorbed by the packaging, and that makes a difference for us."

Ponderosa tried Earthcycle's palm fiber-based, compostable packaging a few years ago, but Salvo said the company had moisture problems with Earthcycle in the cooler and switched back to Styrofoam packaging.

However, he said Earthcycle solved the problem last year, and Ponderosa switched packaging again.

"Since they made improvements, we've been using it," he

said. "It helps absorb excess moisture when there's a temperature change."

Salvo said condensation can occur on film when a package experiences a temperature change. He said that with Styrofoam that moisture often pools on the bottom of the container.

"That's not the best scenario," he said.

Shannon Boase, founder and chief executive officer of Earthcycle Packaging Ltd., Vancouver, British Columbia, said Styrofoam is "dirt cheap" but is "difficult if not impossible to recycle nor is it biodegradable or compostable."

"It is also lightweight, so it gets carried by weather to pollute our waterways and oceans," she said.

"Unfortunately, there is nothing that any environmentally responsible packaging material can do to be (price) competitive with Styrofoam, which is one

reason why many states are mandating against the use of Styrofoam."

Salvo said the higher cost of Earthcycle's packaging, which is backyard compostable, hasn't been a problem.

"With the high value of our wild, exotic and value-added products, our high-end retailers and even mainstream retailers are willing to pay a few extra pennies for the compostable packaging," he said. "Our product looks better in their packaging than it did in Styrofoam."

Ponderosa's mushrooms also now carry Earthcycle stickers that tout the company's sustainability message.

"We make sure we put that on every single package," Salvo said. "We've had favorable response from retailers, who've had feedback from their customers."

Earthcycle launched a merchandising program for retailers

in the spring. It includes shelf talkers, labels and in-store signs, Boase said.

"By creating a well integrated merchandising program, our goal is to strengthen and substantiate the retailer's commitment to sustainability and their ability to create a measurable reduction in petroleum-based plastics through their use of Earthcycle products," Boase said.

Earthcycle also launched a consumer-targeted blog — <http://earthcycle.com/blog/> — earlier this year.

"We believe that there is a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding about green claims and standards," Boase said, "so we developed our blog to help educate the end consumer on their choices. Our intention is that with better information, the consumers can start to influence their retailers and ultimately the supply chain."