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## **Potato starch spoons, sugarcane plates appear at Forest Service awards ceremonies**

In their push to protect the environment, a number of locations of the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Research Station (PSW) in California have replaced disposable tableware at their awards ceremonies with biobased products.

Larry Rabin, PSW coordinator of research planning and reporting, also coordinates PSW's efforts to green their operations. Larry said PSW employees are exploring numerous measures to lessen their environmental impact. These efforts include increasing the use of green cleaning products, replacing regular vehicles with hybrids, using videoconferencing to reduce the need to drive vehicles, and purchasing more recycled paper products.

But it's the biobased cutlery made from potatoes and marketed appropriately as SpudWare™, and the plates from bagasse—a byproduct from sugarcane processing—that have created the biggest “buzz,” Rabin said. He has received calls from other U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel asking about PSW's experience with the biobased food ware.

The staff at PSW headquarters in Albany, Calif., had already tried corn-based cutlery, but they found the potato products hold up better.

SpudWare is imported to the United States from China where it's manufactured from 80 percent potato starch and 20 percent soy oil. The cutlery can be purchased from numerous online retailers and wholesale from Excellent Packaging & Supply, [www.excellentpackaging.com](http://www.excellentpackaging.com). Wholesale purchases require a \$350 minimum order, but smaller orders can be placed with retailers.

Rabin learned about the biobased cutlery when his wife brought home samples from the Genentech company cafeteria. At the time, his wife worked for this biotechnology company that develops cancer drugs and other new medicines. PSW staff obtained the cutlery for their awards ceremonies from Branch [www.branchhome.com](http://www.branchhome.com), an on-line store offering a wide range of sustainable products.

PSW headquarters use biobased cutlery and plates during awards ceremonies where food is served.

The Riverside Fire Laboratory in Riverside, Calif., one of PSW's eight laboratories, tried the bagasse plates and cups for the first time recently, according to Pat Winter, research social scientist, who learned about the product from a popular magazine. These facilities don't have cafeterias.



*Marilyn Burrows, retired Pacific Southwest Research Station management analyst, uses compostable cutlery at a recent awards ceremony.*

The Lab opted not to buy SpudWare because they were only able to find it packaged online in full sets of knife, fork and spoon, and employees didn't need full sets of utensils. However, Rabin has been able to negotiate directly with the supplier so he can receive individual pieces.

Winter noted the response to the biobased products has been positive; the employees are interested in learning more about them to enhance their greening efforts. The Lab staff already recycles a host of items, including batteries, computer peripherals such as mice and keyboards, and CDs.

Expense hasn't been an issue due to the small amounts being purchased, even though Rabin estimates the SpudWare forks cost about 4 cents each, compared to 2 cents for the conventional plastic version. All told, PSW headquarters will only use about 750 utensils and 500 plates during an entire year, Rabin estimated. He explains, "It's well worth the small additional expense to PSW. It demonstrates the Station's commitment to operating more sustainably and really is the right thing to do."

"This has been very positive," he said. "People don't mind using them at all.... There's lots of excitement and PSW's use of this product is expanding." At PSW's new offices in Davis, Calif. potato starch spoons and sugarcane plates are now accompanying those celebratory cakes at awards ceremonies and at other events for that office's employees.

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