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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Recycling Coalition Calls for Moratorium on PLA Bottles**

A coalition of citizen and recycling organizations and local recyclers, today challenged NatureWorks' plans to push its new bio-based plastic, polylactic acid or PLA, in bottles. It called on NatureWorks to agree to a moratorium on any further expansion of PLA in bottles until the bio-resin's recyclability has been demonstrated.

The members of the coalition are Eco-Cycle (CO), Eureka Recycling (MN), Ecology Center (CA), The Plastic Redesign Project (multi-state), the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (DC), the Center for a Competitive Waste Industry (WI), and the GrassRoots Recycling Network (CA).

NatureWorks, a subsidiary of Cargill, has commercialized a new type of plastic resin made from corn, and claims PLA has preferable end-of-life advantages because, being bio-based, it is compostable. NatureWorks also claims that PLA can be physically recycled or chemically converted back into PLA. The coalition emphasized its support for bio-based resins for compostable food serviceware. However, it questioned the economic viability of recycling or composting PLA bottles. The coalition also raised concerns about PLA bottles in large numbers harming the economics of PET bottle recycling.

According to Brenda Platt of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, "No recycling infrastructure exists for plastic cutlery, plates, and cups. We want biobased companies to focus on replacing nonrecyclable disposable plastic products such as polystyrene. Stay away from bottles, which have a well-established recycling system."

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Some coalition members first raised concerns about PLA bottles displacing recyclable PET bottles with NatureWorks 18 months ago. Susan Hubbard of Eureka Recycling, the recycling contractor for St. Paul, MN, and serving the eastern twincities area summarized the concerns: “We earn 15 or more cents per pound for our PET bottles. Any PLA bottles coming into our facility today have nowhere to go but the garbage, costing us money. No compost operation will pay me for PLA. No facility accepts post-consumer PLA for recycling. In fact there is no cost effective way to sort it out, so it contaminates the bottles that do have a value. We cannot afford to lose this revenue and I doubt we are the only facility in this position.”

Tom Padia, from Alameda County's StopWaste.Org, speaking as a member of the Plastic Redesign Project's PLA Committee, said the groups had three core questions that NatureWorks needs to adequately address before PLA bottles should be made:

- 1. Can PLA be economically depolymerized and recycled, including for food grade bottles?**
- 2. Can PLA alternatively be technically and economically mechanically recycled, including into food grade bottles?**
- 3. Can PLA in volume be adequately sorted from PET to enable high-end markets for the PET?**

The coalition discounted as not economically sustainable, the option to offer a buyback price for PLA bottles. According to Peter Anderson, Executive Director of the Center for a Competitive Waste Industry, “Like one-month free loan advertisements, these temporary loss-leader offers bear no relationship to the ultimate economic viability of PLA recycling. Recyclers have already been severely abused by this sort of approach in the past.” He pointed to OxyChem’s 10 cent per pound buyback offer for PVC bottles, which quietly ended immediately after the threat of legislative bans had waned.

If NatureWorks does not work cooperatively with recyclers to ensure the economics of existing recycling programs are not undermined, Eric Lombardi, President of the Grassroots Recycling Network, said that “We will educate the public to avoid products bottled in PLA.” GRRN is the organization whose citizen campaign created enough public pressure to convince Coca-Cola to use recycled content in their PET bottles in 2001.