

BY S. TAMARAI CHELVI

**C**URRENTLY, Malaysians are spoiled for choice when it comes to eco-friendly straws. Varieties of straws made from paper, bamboo, metal, glass, and silicone, to name a few, are available for use. But the list does not end there.

There are also edible straws made from rice or tapioca, as well as pasta (which are also becoming popular overseas) and sugarcane straws.

However, another type of straw is raising many eyebrows. It is the Malaysian-made compostable corn starch straw manufactured by PMI Packaging Sdn Bhd in Senai, Johor, which has been in the market since 2016.

PMI's director Desmond Tan told *theSun* that it took three years to create their own formulation for the corn starch straws, specifically to strike a balance in the composition of the straw to ensure it does not get too soft or too hard.

"Biodegradable material is not necessarily compostable but a compostable material is always biodegradable," said Tan.

Compostable products are plant-based, just like PMI's corn starch straws. Tan added that the composition of the straw is corn starch, Polylactic Acid (PLA) and other renewable resources generated from the plant. "We are using (a composition of) plant extracts to produce the straw," said Tan.

"We use plant-based material to make bio-resin to create the straw. Once used or re-used, the straw can be discarded. It can be put into a compostable facility or in a landfill," he said.

The corn starch straws (which are available from Shopee) come in various sizes, including 6mm, 8mm and 12mm (for 'Boba' drinks) and are eco-friendly, chlorine-free, and most importantly, do not get soggy like other materials.

Apart from corn starch, Tan said his company is looking into making straws from oil palm waste (empty fruit pulp), which is still in the research and development stage, and other starches such as tapioca.

**Ban on straws**

On July 1, 2019, the Selangor state government imposed a ban on plastic straws in all eateries. The ban was intended to eliminate single-use plastics, which pollute the ocean and pose a danger to marine life such as turtles.

Six months later, the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan banned the use of plastic drinking straws from Jan 1, 2020 for traders and operators of food outlets. The ban is also included in the conditions for business licenses.



(left) Corn starch straws. — ASHRAF SHAMSUL/THESUN



Lau (right) showing the Tak Nak Straw logo created by her Sampah, Menyampah group. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

# 'Green' straws

Malaysians can choose from a variety of eco-friendly straws to replace those made from plastic

**Say no to straws**

"The plastic straw ban is almost a key to opening a Pandora's box of awareness for all other single-use disposals," said Carolyn Lau, the co-founder of the volunteer group Sampah, Menyampah, which started the Tak Nak Straw movement on Facebook.

"It is the simplest thing to give up. It is a good way to get people thinking about single-use disposable plastics in general," said

Lau, adding that single-use plastic cutlery and food packaging containers

are still in use.

Although there are plenty of substitutes for plastic straws, Lau feels that any replacement or substitute is equally wasteful and hazardous as plastic straws.

According to her, the kindest to the earth are natural bamboo straws.

Lau said: "When thrown out, it is compostable. It is 100% organic, it does not add any pollutants, it is made locally, is re-usable up to one to two years and has a low-carbon footprint."

Other options include compostable papaya stem straws, where the stems are cut and soaked in saltwater and kept in the refrigerator, or even lemongrass stalks, which are

also natural.

"One paper straw is harmless, but if it is coated with plastic, then it is putting plastic back into the environment," said Lau.

"It is not [really] re-usable, instead it is [best] if only used by people with illnesses, or in medical facilities."

In fact, Lau feels the public should stop using straws, altogether.

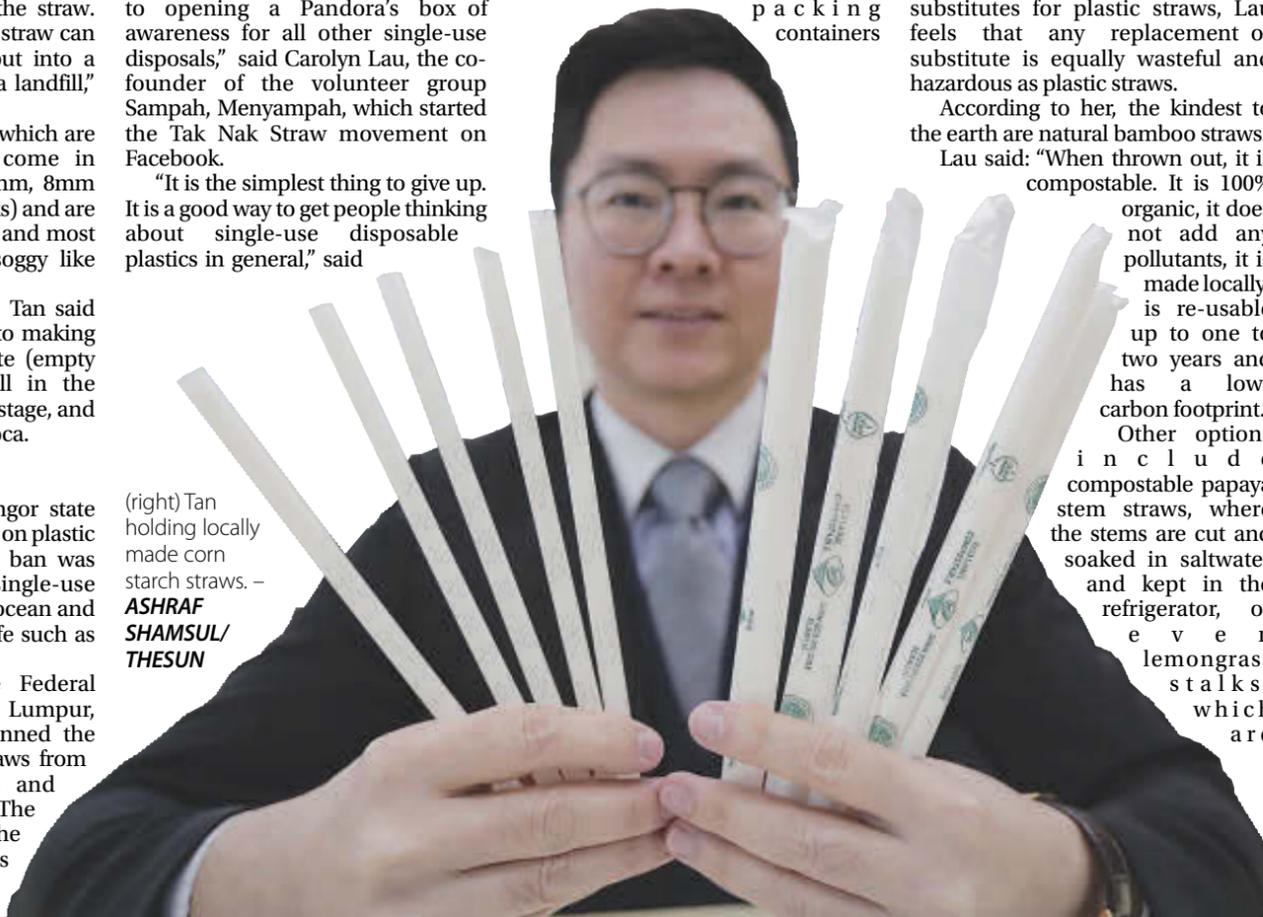
"We don't need the straw. We can put the technology into other important matters," Lau said, adding that single-use plastic straws cannot be seen as an isolated problem, instead it is best to look at their environmental impact on the planet as a whole.

For example, Lau said cutting down trees to make paper, and the process of making paper straws or even manufacturing steel straws result in a bigger carbon footprint.

Hence, Lau opined that cutting out straws altogether is better for the environment.

As for the amount of energy and resources needed for making straws, Lau feels that changing perceptions is better.

Lau explained: "The perception is that using a straw is clean. If the hygiene of the rim of a cup is a concern for a person, (some people do not want to touch the rim of a cup), how can you be sure that the inside of the cup is clean?"



(right) Tan holding locally made corn starch straws. — ASHRAF SHAMSUL/THESUN

## Millennial and Generation Z shoppers embrace sustainability

**SOME** 52% of shoppers aged 25-34 have purchased second-hand clothing in the last year, Mintel consumer research has found, compared to an average of 43%.

And the trend isn't just about spending money, but also making it: 50% of shoppers in the same age group also said they had sold their unwanted clothes in the last year, compared to 35% of consumers as a whole.

In a sign of changing attitudes towards fashion sustainability, 50% of the 25-34-year-olds surveyed also claimed to have repaired clothes during the same time frame, while 75% of 16-24-year-olds (Generation Z) surveyed said they had swapped or would be interested in swapping clothes with other people.

Fashion rental services are also proving popular among young people in Britain, with 54% of Generation Z

respondents saying they have rented or would be interested in renting clothes.

Some 68% of shoppers in this age group are also making a conscious effort to make more ethical fashion purchases now than they did in the last 12 months, the report found, compared to an average of 57% across British shoppers of all age groups.

"The idea of 'reusing, reducing and recycling' has the potential to be a big disruptor in the fashion industry," said Chana Baram, Mintel Retail Analyst, in a statement.

"Young shoppers seem to be emulating their grandparents, who were forced to 'make do and mend' during World War II.

As the climate crisis continues to gain headlines, consumers' perspectives are shifting. It's no longer enough for

clothing to be priced well, or to reference the latest trends; fashion brands and retailers also have to think about working towards a goal of providing more sustainable options."

Fashion rental services have become increasingly common over the past few years, with retailers such as Urban Outfitters, Bloomingdale's, Banana Republic and H&M incorporating the concept into their business models in 2019.

The H&M Group also acquired an approximate 70% stake in the re-commerce platform Sellpy, which specialises in selling second-hand clothing, last year, while luxury fashion retailers Farfetch and Burberry unveiled initiatives designed to encourage customers to consign pre-loved items. — AFP-Relaxnews



Thrifting is becoming a major trend among Millennial shoppers in the UK, according to new research. — AFP