Abandoned Plastics Find a Home!

Every year, tens of millions of pounds of plant nursery products are wasted. Bailing twine, flower pots, and greenhouse plastics are regularly dumped, burned, or stacked after their useful life. The agriculture industry throws away at least as much plastic as the total amount of curbside recyclables collected across the country. No gardeners reuse plastic materials due to the possibility of lingering diseases and no recyclers take them because of their difficulty to process and their low market value.

Agri-Plas, Inc. has come to the rescue! Agri-Plas, Inc. is the only agricultural plastic recycling center in the nation that collects all types of plastic—types that other recyclers won't touch, like HDPE pots, pesticide containers, and styrene trays. There are more than 2,000 nurseries in Oregon, only 50 of which send their plastic to Agri-Plas, but these alone create 80,000 pounds of waste every week for the company to clean, chip, and resell.

At Agri-Plas, Inc., plastics are fed into large machines—the granulator, aspirator, and extruder—where they are chipped and cleaned with high-pressure air. This process prevents the waste water runoff problematic to other recycling facilities. Agri-Plas, Inc. sells the clean plastic pellets to a variety of manufacturers to be melted into new products. Polypropelene from old nursery pots is melted and blended into new plant containers, reducing the need for virgin material by 10 to 20 percent. Bailing twine formerly used to hold hay is refashioned into auto parts. The plastic film used to cover greenhouses—replaced every 1 to 4 years—is turned into plastic lumber.

Recycling all types of plastic waste is a labor-intensive process that leads to high overhead costs and low profits. But the husband-wife team that owns this facility doesn't run it to make a fortune. Allen Jongsma declared: "We don't make a lot of money on this, but the overall goal is that in years from now, you won't find piles of gardening refuse in the countryside or buried or burned." Dari Jongsma makes it clear why she created this facility: "There's only so much Mother Earth has to give, and if we don't start appreciating it, we won't have anything left."

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