

Biodegradable packaging alternatives come at a cost

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The state's plastic ban doesn't cover packaging used at the manufacturing stage as cost-efficient biodegradable alternatives are not immediately available, say experts. Packaging used for FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) like snacks, drinks and milk products involves multilayer (laminated) material.

For example, milk tetra-packs are usually made of layers of plastic, paper and metal foil, and snack packets typically use material made of plastic and foil layers.

Sanjay Chattopadhyay from the Indian Institute of Packaging says that even if scientists succeed in molding biopolymer (derived from corn) into bottles and multilayer packs in, say, two or three years, such products will cost at least four times more than existing bottles and packets. Ultimately, it is the consumer who may have to bear this cost as companies are likely to pass it on to them or risk lower margins.

At present, partially biodegradable plastic is compostable up to 35%, though a few companies claim that their bottles and packets are completely compostable. Efforts are on to increase the quantity of bio-additives in plastic to achieve 70-80% biodegradability (within a period of 45-90 days). Ideally, 90% of the organic part in biodegradable plastic should compost within 180 days to make it a healthy biodegradable material, but that is not the case with any bottle or laminated packs used in FMCG as yet.