

Delta Plastics' tractor trailers travel to 2,500 rural locations across the region to pick up discarded poly pipe irrigation and haul it back to its Stuttgart plant for recycling. The free pick-up service saves farmers from dealing with disposal, and ultimately helps Delta Plastics keep its waste out of landfills.



PHOTO BY DERO SANFORD

# STARTING A REVOLUTION

COMPANY'S UNIQUE  
RECYCLING PLAN TURNS  
ITS TRASH INTO TREASURE

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Delta Plastics of the South LLC has worked for 15 years to build a corporate legacy of turning waste into fiscal treasure. The Little Rock manufacturer stepped up that effort with the launch of its Revolution Bag subsidiary in 2011.

The green venture is touted as the first company to provide a complete line of EPA-compliant trash can liners. Revolution Bag's trash bags are made from recycled polyethylene goods collected by its parent company, and then sold to companies and distributors.

"We target large consumers looking for LEED points and tax credits, such as universities and schools, hospitals and government agencies," said Dhu Thompson, president of Delta Plastics. "Everything we make is EPA-compliant," which means that the product contains a minimum of 10 percent post-consumer recovered resin.

The recycled material is most often poly pipe irrigation tubing made by Delta Plastics and used in row-crop fields on farms in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Colorado, Missouri and Texas. The collapsible conduit, sold in quarter-mile sections, is deployed each growing season by farmers and collected after the harvest.

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Delta Plastics operates 20 specially equipped tractor-trailers that travel to 2,500 rural pick-up points across the region to load up the used poly products and haul the material back to its 27,000-SF Stuttgart plant for recycling back into pellets.

Delta Plastics used to sell the pellets to other companies, but with the launch of Revolution Bag it funnels its waste stream directly into a new, high-demand product that uses more recycled content and generates less waste than many similar bags.

“The initial philosophy made so much sense to be able to produce a product that was beneficial to the agricultural industry... and then to be able to reclaim that product back out of the environment and put it into another purposeful use,” Thompson said.

In 2007, Delta Plastics expanded its recycling collections beyond poly pipe. Hefty rolls of greenhouse film from Tennessee, drip tape from south Texas vegetable farms and pit liner from the Fayetteville Shale fields are also now converted to pellets of post-consumer resin and transported from the Stuttgart plant to the Little Rock plant, where it's transformed into trash bags. The introduction of these heavier plastics into the recycled material creates a stronger bag.

Mastering the efficiencies of collecting, cleaning and reprocessing the material into new product has been a historical test for the company's bottom line though.

Finding a cost-effective way to remove caked-on soil and vegetable matter from the poly pipe after months in the field remained the big problem for Thompson to overcome to make the recycling component profitable.

“That was the challenge to it, cleaning the material enough to make it financially doable,” Thompson said.

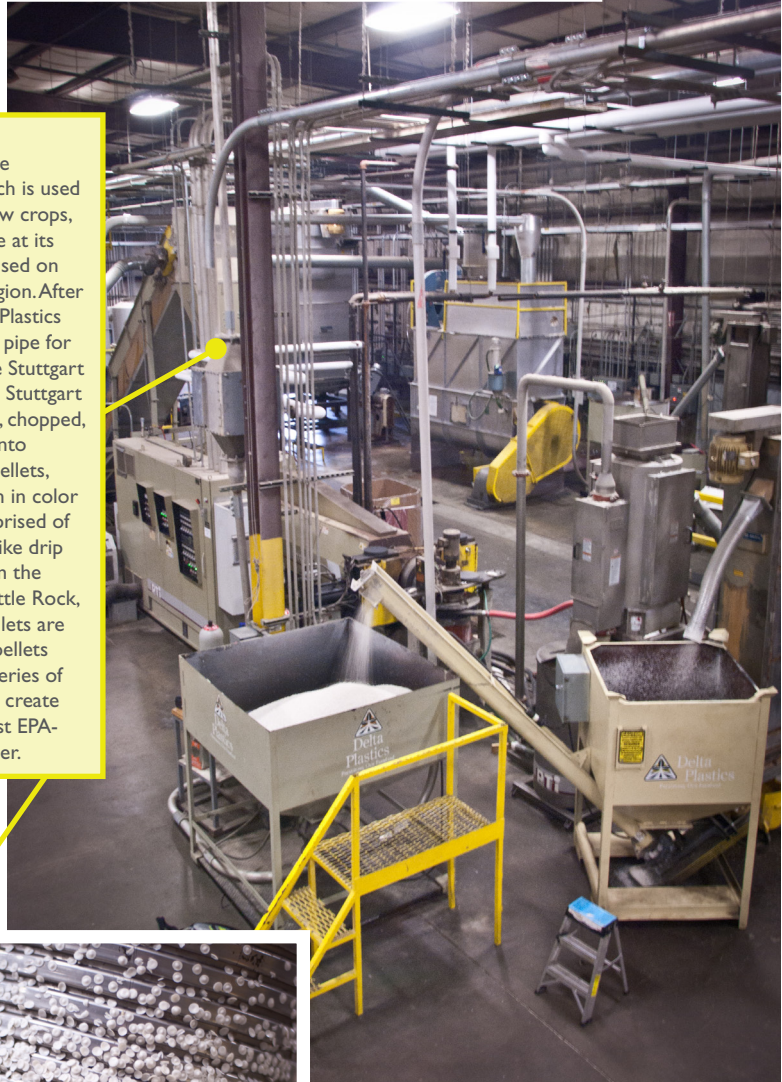
Today, the company's sophisticated cleaning system is a blend of European technology combined with repurposed equipment modified through in-house tinkering and experimentation.

The old poly products are fed into a series of guillotines and shredders, cleaned, re-melted and re-extruded into pellets for use in Revolution Bag. The seemingly endless stream of trash bag production in Little Rock, fed by the recycled resin from Stuttgart, operates 24/7 alongside a similar line of poly pipe, fed by hopper rail cars loaded with virgin resin.



**Trash to Treasure:**

Delta Plastics' poly pipe irrigation tubing – which is used on farms to irrigate row crops, like soybeans – is made at its Little Rock plant and used on farms all across the region. After growing season, Delta Plastics picks up the discarded pipe for free and takes it to the Stuttgart plant for processing. In Stuttgart the material is cleaned, chopped, melted and extruded into post-consumer resin pellets, which are often grayish in color because they are comprised of other plastics as well, like drip tape and pit liners from the Fayetteville Shale. In Little Rock, the post-consumer pellets are combined with virgin pellets and blown through a series of complex machinery to create Revolution Bag, the first EPA-compliant trash can liner.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHACH BURSEY



Revolution Bags are made using a “blown film” process. The plastic rapidly exits the extruder as one continuous hollow cylinder, or “bubble,” collapsing flat as it quickly cools. The bags are then perforated, rolled and packaged for commercial use and sold to companies with eco-conscious initiatives in place.



In 2011, the company gathered and reprocessed more than 101 million pounds of material from multiple plastics industries. Arkansas alone accounted for more than 53 million pounds of that total, making Delta Plastics the largest recycler of plastics in the state, said Thompson.

Recycling was a foundational component of the business plan for Delta Plastics. As part of its product support, the company collects the poly pipe at no charge, so farmers don't have to deal with disposal, which in the past could have

meant burying the pipe, or burning it.

Water and energy conservation will soon play a major role in Delta Plastics' sustainability initiatives, too. This year the company will unveil a software package designed to help farmers configure the most efficient irrigation system for their fields.

Developed by engineers and based on mathematical figures, the software “will tell farmers how to lay the pipe out and at what lengths to cut it to make the most efficient use of water and energy,” Thompson said, clearly excited about the new endeavor.

Jay Wisener, executive vice president of Arkansas Capital Corp., said Delta Plastics ought to appear as an entry in the dictionary under the heading “successful turnaround project.”

“Delta Plastics and Dhu Thompson and his family deserve accolades for what they have done for the state, both economically and from an environmental standpoint,” Wisener said. “You won't find a better corporate citizen.”

Learn more about Revolution Bag at [www.RevBag.com](http://www.RevBag.com). 🌱