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Green alternative to plastic produce bags

ISN'T IT ODD that we're encouraged to bring reusable shopping bags from home to the grocery store, but there aren't any alternatives to all those plastic bags in the produce department or the bulk bin section? Marin native Andrea Vincent thought so, too, so she came up with an alternative and it debuts at all Mollie Stone's markets next week.

"Ripping off a new plastic bag every time I bought fruits or veggies made me sick, but I felt like I just didn't have a choice," the Cotati resident says. "Then I saw Oprah's Earth Day special about the 'garbage patch' in the Pacific, and I knew I had to do something to help reduce plastic pollution," she says.

Joining forces with Carlos Leet of Petaluma, the two came up with The Veggie Bed, a reusable nonwoven polypropylene divided tote bag, with two smaller, removable, "Pod" bags inside to hold produce and bulk items. The Veggie Bed fits in the child seat of the shopping cart and costs \$4. Additional "Pod" bags in two-packs cost \$2.

The Veggie Bed relies on the removable "Pods" that go from shopping to checkout to crisper drawer, but it can be used for other purposes such as tools, gardening implements and art supplies.

Coming up with the bag was one thing; figuring out a way to please the Bureau of Weights and Measures was another. "Even if you told (the checkout clerk) you didn't care if they charged you for the weight of the bag along with your produce, a store couldn't do it," says Scott Barrett, a Fairfax resident and vice president of sales and marketing for The Veggie Bed. "It's illegal." But, Leet, a patent attorney, figured out a way for the bag system to comply with the Bureau of Weights and Measures regulations.

"Our challenge was to create a solution that allowed the grocer to remove the weight of our bag from the transaction," Leet says. And, to do it, Leet had "to develop three patent-pending business methods to accomplish this, the simplest of which is a bar code scan, which requires no additional keystrokes by the checker."

That's good news for grocers, including Dave Bennett of Mollie Stone's, who are looking for an alternative to those rolls of plastic bags in their produce and bulk sections.

"The Veggie Bed is a win-win solution," he says. "It helps us to reduce plastic use, while maintaining food safety and compliance with Weights and Measures regulations, and it helps us meet the growing demand from our customers for green and healthy lifestyle choices."

For more information, call 707-303-5338 or go to www.theveggiebed.com.

