



# SOCIETY

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## Turning passion into a sustainable venture

Rhea Singhal's company makes 100 per cent biodegradable tableware from plant biomass

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Image Credit: Virendra Saklani/Gulf News

Rhea Singhal has set up two manufacturing units in India that use plant biomass as the raw material for tableware that turns to compost within 90 days of being added to soil.

PUBLISHED: 15:09 JUNE 5, 2015

BY SUCHITRA BAJPAI CHAUDHARY, SENIOR REPORTER

**GULF NEWS**

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Dubai: For Rhea Singhal, the benefits of a healthy meal are negated if it is packaged in something that is harmful to both the environment and the human body.

Singhal, 34, who developed a passion for environmental issues while growing up in Dubai, gave up a lucrative career in a pharmaceutical company in the UK to set up Ecoware in India in 2009.

Moving to India after getting married, Singhal turned her passion into a sustainable venture, and today is promoting 100 per cent biodegradable tableware - food plates, bowls and other food containers - made of plant biomass. At the Commonwealth Games held in India in 2010, international

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biomass. At the Commonwealth Games held in India in 2010, international athletes used Ecoware plates and containers.

Now, she plans to bring the concept to the UAE.

Speaking to *Gulf News* on World Environment Day, June 5, Singhal, a mother of two, gave her reasons for exploring the UAE market: "Dubai has always been my home as I spent my childhood and adolescence here and continue to visit it as my parents live here. I moved to India in 2009 and was keen to start my own eco venture. What bothered me often was that most people I came across talked about healthy [food] and [the] safety [aspect] of food, but [did it while] ignoring the packaging from which they were eating that very same food. For me, all [the] benefits of a healthy meal can easily be negated if the serving dish has not been cleaned properly, is reused, or contains chemical additives that are harmful to human consumption."

Current disposables made from thermocol, styrofoam or petroleum-based plastics are carcinogenic and pose serious health and eco problems. Sensing a need to reduce the carbon footprint created by these products, Singhal came up with a durable product made from plant biomass, which is 100 per cent biodegradable.

Now she has set up two manufacturing units in India and obtains plant biomass pulp to manufacture her products. Singhal explained: "We source our plant biomass within [a] 250km radius of our plant. The products are manufactured by high temperature moulding of the biomass into the desired shape and size using precise design moulds. The heat-induced pressing gives structural strength to the product, and the inter-fibre bonding gives it water and oil resistance."

Strict quality control is observed at her plant, she said, to ensure that no chemicals or pesticides are retained in the biomass. She also sends random samples to a nationally recognised laboratory in India to test in order to maintain the stringent standards.

Discarded containers turn to compost within 90 days of being added to soil.

"My products have been certified by the US department of Agriculture. They have no binders, additives, coatings or fillers, [are] non toxic, [have] no wax lining or pesticide or chemical residues, do not impart colour, odour or taste to

## Vasudevan wrote:

So long as the pots do not fall off, this is a ridiculous complaint about water drops. Can someone...

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food and can be used in the refrigerator, or [used in] microwave ovens. Biomass products have an estimated shelf life of one year. Products should be stored in a cool, dry area to achieve maximum life expectancy,” she added.

In this age of overconsumption, Singhal feels adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle will help communities move towards healthier living and thus contribute to sustainability and renewability.

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