

# Meet SA's pioneer of biodegradable food packaging



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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As the founder of Green Home, South Africa's first completely compostable food packaging company, Catherine Morris wants to make plant-based packaging the norm.



Catherine Morris

Established in 2007, the business is driven by the belief that if food packaging is truly necessary, it should be made from annually renewable resources and should last only as long as it's needed.

Green Home supplies the takeaway food industry, a key contributor of single-use plastic waste, with a range of biodegradable packaging made from raw plant materials that are sustainable, non-toxic and have a lower environmental footprint.

Here, Morris shares more about her business journey, Africa's progress on eliminating plastic waste, and how Green Home is transforming the way our food is served on the go.

***Tell us a bit about your background, and what led you to start Green Home.***

Early on in my working life I realised I'm not a very good employee. After a few short jobs, I started a small video production company - with a focus on outdoor and environment content, and documentary making. But when I

came across the idea of plant-based compostable food packaging I felt very inspired to start something bigger that I'd want to see grow.

## ***How has the business grown since its humble beginnings?***

I started Green Home 11 years ago in my garage - with just me and an idea. But it was an idea that I wholeheartedly resonated with. It was a big idea. I wanted to see plant-based food packaging become the norm.

I'd say we've done well in educating people about the concept and the need to move away from single-use plastics. The idea of it being the norm is approaching faster than we thought, with big chain stores making various claims to reduce the amount of plastic in their offering. Green Home currently supplies nationally and internationally and has 30 permanent employees.



■ ***What inspires you, personally and professionally?***

Circular systems inspire me. When something comes to the end of its life, and I'm able to put it in the compost heap, it gives me a strange excited feeling.

Being outside and feeling part of an amazing ecological system inspires me. I trail run quite a bit and spend most of my spare time in the mountains.

■ ***As South Africa's first fully compostable packaging company, what do you believe the main barriers are to the adoption of plant-based packaging solutions?***

I'd say creativity before I'd say price. There are many creative ways to avoid plastic food packaging. However, people become used to doing things in a certain way and if there is no push or pull to do something differently then they'll continue doing things that way - despite the environmental impact of it.

In October 2017 Zimbabwe's Environment Management Agency enforced a ban on polystyrene food packaging. Zimbabwe food vendors were forced to think about affordable creative solutions quickly - and they did!



■ ***Can you tell us a bit about the materials that go into Green Home's packaging?***

Green Home uses renewable plant-based materials for all its food packaging. These materials include sugarcane waste, wood fibre, wood cellulose, bamboo, plant-based starch which forms bioplastic.

■ ***What are your thoughts on the progress South Africa is making in terms of eliminating single-use plastics in exchange for more sustainable alternatives?***

There are many African countries that have made huge progress. Here is a list of African countries that have put bans on single use plastic:

- In 2005 Eritrea banned plastic bags
- In 2006 Tanzania introduce a nationwide ban on plastic bags
- In 2008 Rwanda completely banned plastic bags
- In 2013 Mauritania banned the use, manufacture and import of plastic bags
- In 2016 Morocco, Africa's second largest consumer of plastic bags, banned the use of plastic bags
- In March 2017 Tunisia introduced a ban on plastic bag distribution in supermarkets
- In Aug 2017 Kenya put a total ban on all plastic bags

Comparatively, South Africa has made considerably little progress in eliminating or dis-incentivising the use of single-use plastics.

However, there is a recent ban on organics to landfill in the Western Cape which will be enforced in the next few years. This is an incredible move by the Western Cape government.

Currently 40% of household waste is organic waste. Green Home compostable packaging falls into the same category as organic waste. We hope to see the growth of the composting industry on a governmental level in the Western Cape and then throughout SA.



■ ***What were the biggest challenges you faced along your startup journey?***

Funding. Funding a startup is not fun. You have to have to work really hard to present your ideas to people, and you have to show a lot of skin in the game by risking all you have. However once the business side of things had been started enough to get things moving, selling the product itself was not hard as it served a need which people had.

🍷 ***If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of business advice, what would it be?***

Work hard and keep focused but don't stress as much. There is a certain kind of stress which is damaging and not helpful to what you're trying to achieve. I've had to learn this over the years.

For more information on Green Home visit [the website](#), and connect with the brand on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

## ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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