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Wal-Mart to Roll Out Environment-Sensitive Product Packaging

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Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is moving toward more environmentally sensitive product packaging, beginning with containers of strawberries, cut fruit, herbs and Brussels sprouts that will be made from corn-based plastic instead of petroleum products, the retailer will announce this week at a forum in Philadelphia.

After a year-long test of corn-based plastic supplied by NatureWorks LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of giant food company **Cargill Inc.**, Wal-Mart will roll out the new packaging in November. A few weeks later, it also will carry cut vegetables in the new plastic and use it for bread bags and donut boxes and gift cards.

"This is the right thing to do for the environment," says Tara Stewart, a Wal-Mart spokesperson. "We are trying to figure out how we can make a lighter footprint."

Just those four products translate into 100 million plastic containers a year or the equivalent of 800,000 gallons of gasoline, according to Wal-Mart. That might sound like a lot, but consider: **Valero Energy Corp.** makes 5 million gallons of gasoline a day at its Port Arthur, Texas, plant.

Corn-based plastics decompose in 47 days and can be used for almost every food item, except those that are microwaved. The product breaks down in high heats.

Matt Kistler, vice president product development and private brands at Sam's Club, said in a statement that corn-based plastic's price stability is attractive for companies as the price of oil climbs higher and higher making it difficult to project packaging costs.