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Starbucks coffee grounds, unsold food to become laundry detergent

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By Tiffany Hsu
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Rather than dump its coffee grounds and unsold baked goods into landfills or incinerators, Starbucks is trying to be more productive with its food waste – by transforming it into plastic and laundry detergent.

At a biorefinery set up by the City University of Hong Kong, scientists are testing some of the 4,500 tons of stale pastries and coffee bean bits produced annually by Starbucks Hong Kong, [according to the American Chemical Society](#).

The organic matter is blended with a mixture of fungi, where enzymes break down carbohydrates in the food into simple sugars. The concoction is then sent to a fermenter, where bacteria convert the sugars into succinic acid – a material that can then be formulated into a range of products -- including detergent.

A presentation at the chemical group's national convention in Philadelphia this month argued that diverting some of the 1.3 billion tons of food trashed worldwide each year is good for the environment ([hat tip to the New York Daily News](#)).

And using waste food to create bio-based fuels, plastics and other products is preferable to using crops such as corn, which could lead to rising food prices and shortages, researchers said.

The re-use and re-work ethos has gained traction recently in corporate America. Companies including beer brewer Anheuser-Busch InBev, hardware chain Lowe's, mega-retailer Wal-Mart and more brag about their recycling prowess.

Coca-Cola recently paired with Black Eyed Peas star Will.i.am to promote a line of high-end headphones, hats and more products made of recycled materials. Reality television alum Lauren Conrad recently began offering totes and fashion accessories made from Repreve, a fabric made from recycled bottles.