

Green + Businessweek

# A Crowd-Funded Startup Is Making a Coffee Cup That Can Be Eaten

Australia's Good-Edi is betting on an edible container to combat all the polyethylene-lined disposables that end up in landfills.



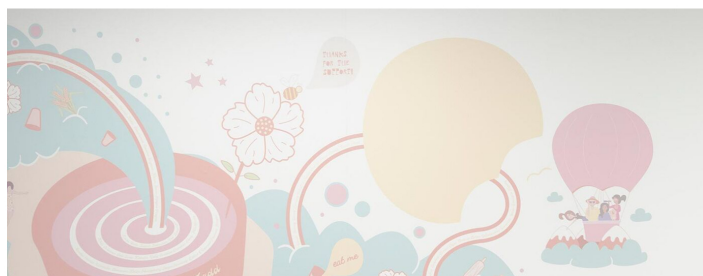
A Good-Edi employee checks over finished cups. Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek

By Aaron Clark and Keira Wright  
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A trash can overflowing with disposable drink cups is an all-too-familiar sight outside any high-traffic café or fast-food joint. It was during a lunch-time walk in Melbourne that colleagues Aniyo Rahebi and Catherine Hutchins passed by several such eyesores and decided to combat the piles of waste. A few months later they arrived at an idea: a to-go cup that can be eaten.

After hundreds of hours in the kitchen refining their concept, the duo took it to market. Their startup Good-Edi now offers an edible, biodegradable, plastic-free alternative to the standard polyethylene-lined paper cups used for coffee that largely end up in landfills or gets incinerated.

The company raised about A\$148,000 (\$98,000) through a crowd-funding site in 2021, and its baking team currently produces about 500 cups a day for clients across Australia, including coffee shops, roasteries and concert venues, from a facility in a suburb of Melbourne. Good-Edi aims to boost output and expand sales internationally this year.



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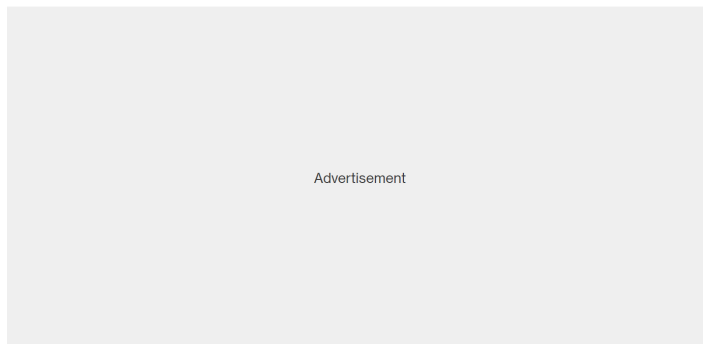
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Co-founders Aniyu Rahebi and Catherine Hutchins, in front the Good-Edi mural in their Melbourne office and processing plant. *Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek*

The world goes through more than 250 billion plastic-lined paper drink cups every year, according to the United Nations Environment Programme. Only about 1% of those cups are recycled. Good-Edi says about 2.7 million disposable cups find their way to landfills each day in Australia.



Good-Edi's product works for both for hot drinks like coffee and tea as well as cold drinks. After about 250 recipe adjustments, the founders settled on a blend of rye flour, wheat bran, oat bran, sugar, salt, coconut oil and water. They say their container stays crispy holding a hot cup of joe for about 40 minutes and won't leak a cold beverage for about eight hours.





Locally sourced oats and grains are ground and prepared to make the dough for the cups. *Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek*

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“There isn’t a guidebook on how to make an edible cup so it was a big challenge,” says Hutchins. During the testing phase, “we had lots and lots of leaking cups.”

For Hutchins and Rahebi, who have a combined 20 years experience in the food-processing and packaging sectors, Good-Edi is still a side hustle. They are banking on shifting consumer sentiment and a beverage industry under pressure to offer more sustainable to-go options to drive sales and compensate for the fact that their containers can increase the cost of a cup of takeaway coffee by A\$1.

When a *Bloomberg Businessweek* reporter recently tried a Good-Edi cup, it tasted like an unsweetened wheat biscuit, making her wonder, “Will coffee drinkers be keen to gobble up the company’s innovation, if it doesn’t feel like a treat?”



A Good-Edi worker measures and rolls each ball of dough before it can be pressed and baked. *Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek*

Hutchins says that while some people would prefer the cup to be sweeter, it depends on the palate of each individual. “We deliberately didn’t make it sweet because we didn’t want to impact the flavor of the coffee,” says Hutchins. Good-Edi also offers a cup coated in chocolate, and plans to soon roll out more options with a wider variety of flavors.

The startup’s sales pitch is primarily about sustainability, and Good-Edi says its offering is better for the environment than a plastic-lined paper cup even if it isn’t eaten. The edible container is compostable at home, and if tossed in the garbage, it can break down in two to six weeks, according to the company. Good-Edi says one of its cups, which are made from locally sourced ingredients, generates 0.08 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent over its lifetime—a

measurement used to compare various greenhouse gases. That's about 27% lower than the 0.11 kilograms produced from a standard paper cup imported from overseas, the company says, based on its own analysis.

It's tough to compare the environmental impact of products, and there can often be unintended consequences. For instance, food that enters landfills generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas responsible for about 30% of the rise in global temperatures. Agriculture, fossil fuels and waste are major sources of methane from human activity.



Good-Edi custom made machinery used for pressing and baking the dough balls into edible cups. *Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek*

Without a rigorous full life-cycle assessment that accounts for the social, economic and a wide range of environmental factors from sourcing to end of life, there's no way to know if the edible coffee cups are better than disposable paper ones, Rachel Meidl, a fellow in energy and environment at Rice University's Baker Institute, said in an email. "Sustainability is a balance between the economics and the least energy and resource-intensive pathways and the best environmental performance and social outcomes across life cycles and throughout supply chains," said Meidl.

Those values often conflict with convenience, which drives much of the food and beverage trends so crucial to profits for major fast-food brands. The use of plastic-lined hot beverage paper cups is set to grow more than 9% in the three years to 2025, by which time

consumption will reach 166 billion units per annum, according to [Ismail Sutaria](#), a consultant with Future Market Insights Inc., who is based in Pune, India.

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But major brands are also cognizant of increasing pressure from consumers to make products that have a lower impact on the planet. Starbucks Corp. [said](#) last year that it's aiming to reduce waste 50% by the end of this decade and is shifting away from single-use plastics and testing reusable cup programs in six regional markets. McDonald's Corp. is also testing containers made from a mix of post-consumer plastic and bio-based materials.



Good-Edi cups, formed and trimmed, ready to be packed in paper sleeves at the Good-Edi processing plant in Melbourne, Australia. *Photographer: Sarah Pannell for Bloomberg Businessweek*

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Good-Edi isn't the only startup making edible containers. A Latvian startup offers several different flavors of edible cups, as well as spoons made from oat fibers and cocoa husks and straws made from pasta, while Bulgaria-based Cupffee while began industrial production of its edible containers designed to hold coffee or tea in 2018.

Edible cups offer a partial solution to the environmental impact of

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plastic-lined paper containers by reducing waste and providing a biodegradable alternative, Sutaria said in an email. “However, their practicality, scalability, cost-effectiveness, regulatory compliance and consumer acceptance are important factors to consider for their overall sustainability and viability as a solution.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-05-19/edible-coffee-cups-from-good-edi-could-cut-environmental-waste?srd=premium&sref=IAKGq1HO>