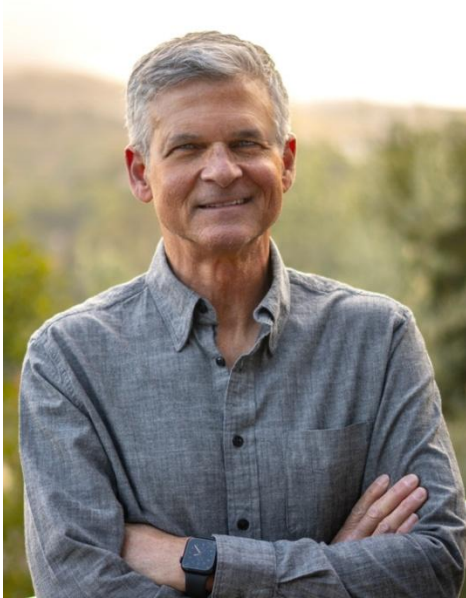


## Better Earth – Focused on Making Food Packaging Truly Certified Compostable, Regenerative and Aligned with a Circular Economy



**Mark Marinozzi**  
VP Mktg/Partnership Development

**Better Earth**

**Interview conducted by:**  
**Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor**  
**CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO: *Mr. Marinozzi, what is the idea behind Better Earth and your focus today?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** Better Earth has a vision to create a world where food service packaging is not only functional but also regenerative. What I mean by that is it is working with the planet's natural systems rather than against and depleting them. Better Earth is involved in primarily manufacturing and distributing food service packaging but we do a lot more than that.

Typically the focus today is leading the food service industry towards better answers for compostable sustainable solutions. All of those solutions are aligned with circular economy principles. A linear economy is when you consume something and you take the remaining waste and it goes into a landfill and sits there forever, as opposed to a circular economy where you consume something and it has the capability of being broken down into a useful thing.

In our case that can be put into agricultural fields or in landscaping beside freeways, or raised beds through retail compost. It can become something else again and the circle keeps going.

**CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example of one or two of your products and how that process works?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** We have a line of products called Farmers Fiber. It is a line of molded fiber, food service clamshells, and plates and bolts. Those products are produced by using fibers primarily miscanthus and sorghum that are grown in Tennessee by over fifty farmers. Those farmers are using regenerative practices which mean they are not using synthetic inputs for herbicides, pesticides, or fungicides, they are using techniques where you are not constantly tilling the soil which kicks off the topsoil and goes into the atmosphere and goes away. You are occasionally rewilding the acreage you have grown on so that it brings wildlife back and it is allowed to settle and materials compost by themselves.

Ultimately the miscanthus and sorghum that has grown on that is cut down multiple times so that you don't get a one-and-done like you get with corn or soybeans, you get it multiple times out of one field. That fiber is cut and brought to a nearby facility so that it minimizes the carbon footprint of transport. It is turned into pulp that is used to produce the plates, bowls, and clamshells. That then goes to a restaurant or a healthcare cafeteria or a college university café and the food is eaten in it. When it is done, you have composting nearby and it can get composted along with the food scraps both the consumer's food scraps and the back-of-the-house food scraps. That turns into compost and then that is put into the fields to go into the landscape in the college or for another useful purpose. That is where the circular economy piece comes in. Farmer's fiber is also certified compostable.

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We don't just make that claim; it is actually certified by BPI (Biodegradable Products Institute), which is one of the primary certifiers in North America for compostability. It has to comply with ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) standards which are internationally recognized. BPI confirms and certifies it and allows you to use their symbol. Anytime you see a product with the BPI symbol you know that is a seal of trust that that product actually can compost in a commercial facility. That is an example where we are supporting advanced regenerative agricultural practices and infrastructure that makes composting practical and scalable. We are delighting customers with a great product that is US-made and produced in a way that has a low carbon footprint.

**CEOCFO: *Are people paying attention to the certifications today?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** There are quite a few packaging products that are out there that say 'biodegradable' and it is greenwashing. Unless they have the actual certification – whether it is through BPI or another certifying organization such as TÜV Austria, or they don't have the proof through third-party independent testing that it is capable of composting in the water (CO2 and biomass) – then it is typically called biodegradable. That is a canary in the coal mine that they are greenwashing. For example, some utensils are out there being used in a lot of restaurants and operators think that they are doing the right thing because they say they are 'biodegradable'. However, 99% of the time they are only oxo-biodegradable, which often means they typically contain petroleum plastic. When combined with either bamboo fiber or wood fiber, or maybe even a bio-resin that is plant-based, they will eventually break down to a point where you can't usually see it. It is essentially contaminating the soil by having petroleum plastic break down into microplastics.

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We are all hearing about microplastic right now. That is one of the primary ways that microplastics enter into our environment, our food chain, and our bodies when you have something as simple as that utensil. They use the word 'biodegradable' that everyone feels happy about but it is making things worse. Part of our job is to educate the consumers, restaurants, and other trade customers to avoid those types of things and invest in the truly certified compostable solutions that we and other companies have been generating.

**CEOCFO: *How do you help customers understand what Better Earth can do?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** We do it through education. Typically they have people on the inside who are already trying to educate their supply chains and executive teams, their franchisees in the case of restaurants. They will have green teams and corporate social possibility teams that are creating awareness telling them they need to be more mindful of what it is they are purchasing or advocating for in our operations.

It is not just in food service, there is a host of areas where that is becoming increasingly important. Foodservice is one of the biggest areas of waste globally, so it starts there. We go beyond that and give those corporate teams' social responsibility teams of green teams the support that they need through educational materials and webinars. We go in and do presentations or we have independent materials that we produce. We have LinkedIn for example where we are constantly putting social media posts. We call people to the carpet when they are claiming that something is green or environmentally responsible. In the case of some of the recent things that have happened over the past few months major companies in our industry merging and they carry divisions that are certified compostable products but they are beholden to larger companies that are creating huge waste in petroleum-based plastic, so they are just a drop in the bucket. Our company and others like us have not gone down that path.

We are committed to staying true to our north star which is to advocate and train people in the circular economy practices and utilizing our food service packaging is one means to do that. You cannot have a company that competes with us and at the same time be part of a parent company that has a vast amount of linear economy of solutions for packaging; it just does not make sense.

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**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the acquisition of Betterbin and is that somewhat typical for you; do you do many acquisitions?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** No, we do not. Better Earth started as a merger of two companies several years ago. Our CEO and Founder Joseph Bild, merged two companies and reformed them into Better Earth. That has been his primary focus since then. However, Joseph is also the leader of a private equity group called Bild Bai Corp., and that entity invests in sustainably focused companies. They have for some time been looking at the Betterbin app and trying to determine what could be the long-term usefulness of that app. Right now you can download that app and put in your zip code and it will show you where some local composters and recyclers are available and where you can bring your recycling and composting. Joseph had the vision of going way beyond that.

We are in the process of developing Betterbin 2.0. In the next couple of months, we are going to be announcing where that 2.0 is going. It will be light years beyond where the tool is now. Why would we invest in that? We invest in that because our goal is to create a circular economy. Through Betterbin it is our hope through the technology that we will help trade customers both big and small to be better connected to support a circular economy. That way the things they buy from us and the things they buy from other people whether it is food, sanitation materials, you name it, that they get properly disposed of and into the proper waste stream. Therefore, they will not contaminate other streams, and ultimately we can support circular economy practices.

**"Farmer's fiber is also certified compostable... We don't just make that claim; it is actually certified by BPI (Biodegradable Products Institute), which is one of the primary certifiers in North America for compostability." Mark Marinozzi**

**CEOCFO: *What products get the most attention and which products are not getting the attention they deserve?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** The products that are used the most are the most basic ones, the plates, the bowls and the clamshells. They are so huge to the point of being commoditized. One of the things that we strive towards is the quality and performance of those products. We are always trying to meet and achieve our customers' expectations in terms of durability, and that is the challenge because if you want something like compost, you have to find a balance between robust durability and compostability. You have to do that increasingly in the absence of harmful chemicals. The industry has gotten rid of PFAs (Polyfluoroalkyl substances) for example. We have gotten rid of PFAs and have for years. However, PFAs were there for oil and grease resistance. That is why you have to come up with other ways to do that are going to get you past BPI certification. We were one of the early adopters of that direction. I am sure you have done take-out with a compostable clamshell; well there are problems with those clamshells with cheaper models. They have big gaps where the hinges are and they have tabs in the front that lock the lid to the base and those fail a lot of times because they have gotten cheap on the thickness of the molded fiber. You wouldn't think that something as seemingly simple as that there is such complex engineering behind it but there is.

A lot of what we are doing is being so mindful of helping the trade customer by creating a better clamshell and helping the consumer and allowing them to have a more delightful experience with take-out by having something that is not going to come to them cold when they get home because the hinges have a big hole and the locking lid is not going to fall off in the car and have food all over the place. It is all those things that we are constantly thinking about. I think that is important, the engineering and how we are helping the trade customer and delighting the consumer.

We are also being innovative. This year we launched a cutlery dispenser. That dispenser does several things, it allows consumers to come up and just get the piece of cutlery that they need. You walk into a lot of restaurants and they have cups sitting there and buckets of forks, knives, and spoons and sometimes they might be wrapped but most of the time they are not. The minute you touch the top of all the cutlery you are contaminating all the handles and cutlery with your hand and God knows who else has been there before you. This dispenser allows you to only grab the individual piece that is sticking out of the dispenser and you only take what you need which also reduces waste. When you only take what you need rather than grabbing a whole bunch of them, you have to think twice. Theoretically, it reduces waste in cutlery. It also helps the cost to the trade operator at the restaurant or hospital because if you are seeing a reduction in the amount of volume of the cutlery that is being used, that is going to help you in terms of your bottom line. Our product is compostable, whereas most competitors have petroleum-based plastic cutlery that are getting pulled out of their cutlery

dispensers. The fact that ours is compostable means you can limit the number that is used, it reduces the cost to the operator, and all these factors come together, which supports our circular economy principle.

**CEOCFO: *Are you seeking funding, investment, or partnerships?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** No, we want to be stand-alone. We do not want to be saddled by having other voices that could potentially dilute or make us compromise on that North Star because it would be very easy to do that. I have seen that in other companies in our industry. When they get sold to a bigger company that has deeper pockets they have those deeper pockets because they are in Styrofoam, petroleum plastics, virgin wood fibers that are raising whole tracks of land that are in indigenous communities. All that is happening now and still happens and we don't want to be a part of that. For us to put our hand out and get that kind of money could potentially lead us to where we would be compromising our ideals.

**CEOCFO: *What does 2025 look like for Better Earth?***

**Mr. Marinozzi:** Our vision is ambitious. We continue to be focused on circular economy leadership, and sustainable packaging, and advocating for it in the food service industry and beyond. We are expanding our product lines and it will happen all across our products in food service packaging. We are going to continue to expand our support of not just utilizing regenerative Ag fibers but also supporting regenerative Ag programs. We are going to be announcing next year that we are starting a fund for regenerative Ag programs that are already ongoing out there. We not only want to help the small farmers, we want to go beyond that.

We see through Betterbin a tech-enabled growth and scaling of that portal to drive better composting compliance, education operators, optimizing the purchasing, and doing other things through tech. It is funny how many large companies need this. It was shocking to me when I learned how much of a need there was for something like what we are doing with Betterbin with not only small companies but major players. The tech-enabled growth I think is going to be important for us. The compost infrastructure scenario is that we want to continue to collaborate with composters; we have been doing that in the Southeast with Compost Now. That has been a good model; they are a great steward of composting and one of the gold stars of the industry in North America. We want to do more with them. We already have some market expansion that has happened in the Caribbean in the Bahamas. I see us going even further. We have been expanding in colleges and universities and the travel industry. Part of that is because we continue to be one of the folks holding the flag of BPI certification. Some in our industry are walking from BPI certification and saying they do not want to be hamstrung. We are going to re-double our efforts around that support.

We want to find more reusable solutions and that is an area where we are going to start developing product lines around in 2025 and 2026. We are looking at how to create a reusable product that still utilizes plant-based bio-resins and items that can be compostable and that is a huge challenge because if they are compostable they are typically meant to break down in three to six months and if you have something reusable it has to go through a commercial washing facility many times, it has to be durable and it has to be something at the end of its life that could be compostable. It is an ambitious agenda but I feel it is focused because we are trying to lead a sustainable packaging state.