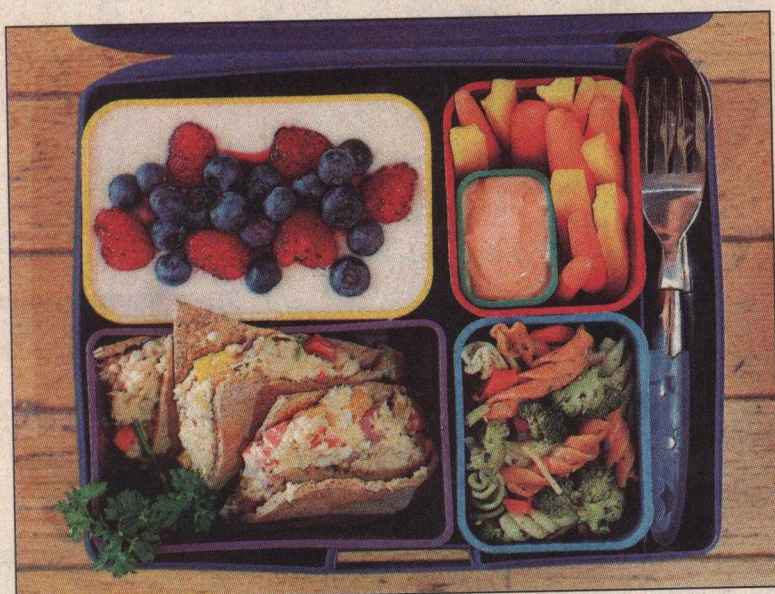


MOMS SAVING THE PLANET, ONE CHILD'S MEAL AT A TIME



The bento-style "Laptop Lunch" lunch box is a way for children to take healthy food to school in environment-friendly reusable containers.



EUGENE H. LOUIE — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Santa Cruz mothers Tammy Pelstring, left, and Amy Hemmert are selling their plastic lunch boxes on the Web and in local stores for \$19.99 each.

'Laptop Lunch' feeds good eating habits

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I don't know why yogurt tastes better squeezed out of a small plastic tube, but I'm not 5.

Riley is 5. And because children now tell their parents what to do, instead of the other way around, her mother and I dutifully pack her lunch with Go-GURT or Yo-Yum or whatever they call the tubed treat. Same for apple-sauce (preferably blue apple-sauce) and pudding, which are always better in the single-serving cups.

Then there's the packet of chews or Fruit-by-the-Foot, which is, well, if you don't know, you



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don't want to know. And the juice box, diabolically designed to go off like a golf-course sprinkler with the slightest squeeze. And daughter Bailey's lunch? The same.

We try to be good parents, Alice and I, but we are not. Not when it comes to school lunches and teaching our children to be responsible citizens of the planet.

Now Tammy Pelstring and Amy Hemmert want to help us. They want to help you, too.

The two Santa Cruz women

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have come up with the Laptop Lunch container, complete with user's guide. Yes, *user's guide*. The two businesswomen and moms call their product a "lunch system."

They've started a company, Obentec, and are selling their lunch boxes for

\$19.99 on the Web (www.laptoplunches.com) and in local stores. Essentially, they've invented a plastic bento box with adjustable compartments and an airtight lid. The compartments can be arranged to fit sandwiches, leftovers, soup, condiments, vegetables. (Yes. Vegetables.)

The idea is to make it easier for parents to pack healthier food bought in bulk, rather than popular food bought in tubes and small containers. It means lower cost, better nutrition and less trash headed for the landfill.

The inspiration struck Pelstring, 37, and Hemmert, 41, last year at a time when they were volunteering in their kids' classrooms and talking

about going back to work.

"We'd work in the classrooms," says Pelstring, "and the kids would be out eating their lunches. We'd see all the waste."

Cups, baggies, juice boxes, wrappers for Go-GURT. (Are you listening, Riley?) And food. Once you open one of those

handy single-serving containers, there's no way you're going to close it up again. And so, leftovers? Into the trash.

Pelstring and Hemmert would tweak their idea and their business plan on morning

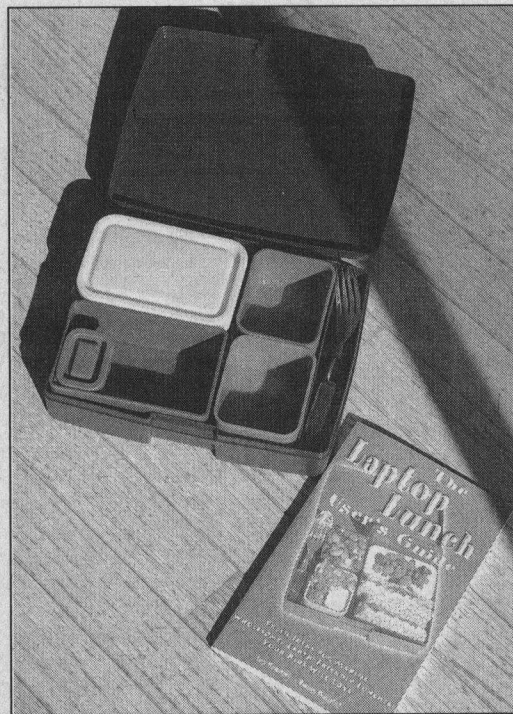
jogs. The more they thought about the idea, the more they liked it.

"I tell you," says Pelstring, "it's one of those inventions of necessity."

These mothers of invention are brave women. They're convinced they can roll back a marketing juggernaut that tells our kids good things come in small packages. And while it's cute, the way they've likened the lunch box to a laptop, it's no Barbie, Pokémon, Powerpuff Girls or Winnie the



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A user's guide helps parents make the most of the Japanese-style "Laptop Lunch" box and its plastic divided containers. The system lets children take small servings of healthy food to school, rather than food bought in planet-unfriendly tubes and single-serving containers.

EUGENE H. LOUIE —
MERCURY NEWS

Pooh lunch box, which all the kids have. (OK, our kids have.)

Which is not to say Pelstring and Hemmert are not on the side of right. And who knows? Maybe it's time Alice and I take charge and see to it our kids eat healthier lunches. Maybe it's time for them to take Laptop Lunch boxes to

school *and like it*.

I'm just wondering one thing: Anybody out there want to break it to Riley?

Hey! Have an only-in-Silicon Valley story? Contact Mike Cassidy at mcassidy@sjmercury.com or (408) 920-5536.