

A Plantable Pencil?

Eco-friendly invention has recently expanded into a line of plantable makeup liners **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

The pencils work like ordinary pencils except for having a biodegradable cellulose capsule filled with seeds at the end. Once the pencil is too short to use, the stub is planted with the capsule under the soil, watered, and germinates over time.

The World's Only Plantable Pencil" is a great tagline to pique one's interest in SproutWorld.

This patented, multi-use, eco-friendly invention will attract amateur gardeners (it's easy to use), as well as makeup enthusiasts, kids and nature lovers. SproutWorld founder and CEO Michael Stausholm of Copenhagen, Denmark, "started (in 2013) by packing boxes of plantable pencils in his living room" and as of this writing said he has sold more than 85 million units in 80-plus countries.

The product was originally invented by three MIT students.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Tell us about SproutWorld products and please share a bit about your background, country of origin, etc.

Michael Stausholm (MS): I'm born and raised in Denmark. SproutWorld is headquartered in Copenhagen.

Before starting SproutWorld, I spent many years working in international sales, production and shipping—particularly in Indonesia, where I lived for 14 years. That experience gave me a strong foundation in manufacturing, logistics and supplier relationships, which became extremely valuable once we began producing and selling physical products globally.

SproutWorld holds the patent of "plantable writing instruments." Our best-known product is the plantable pencil, which contains a seed capsule instead of an eraser. When the pencil becomes too short to use, you plant it and it grows into herbs, flowers, vegetables or trees, depending on the seed.

More recently, we introduced the world's first patented, plantable makeup liners, including eyeliner and brow liner, which follow the same simple idea: use the product, plant it, and let it grow a new life: a plant.

EGT: When did you begin selling?

MS: SproutWorld was founded in 2013, and we began selling shortly after acquiring the rights to the original, plantable pencil concept and bringing it to market under the SproutWorld brand.

EGT: How did you get involved with the three MIT students? Who holds the patent?

MS: The original idea for a plantable pencil came from three MIT students who developed



Patenting “was a long, expensive and at times challenging process but absolutely essential. Protecting the core idea is what allowed us to build a sustainable business and defend it against copycats.” —MICHAEL STAUSHOLM



the concept as part of a sustainability project. They launched it on Kickstarter with a provisional patent (application). I discovered the project online, immediately saw its potential and acquired the intellectual property rights from them.

EGT: How do the pencils and makeup liners work?

MS: All our products follow the same basic principle: use, plant, grow. The pencils work like ordinary pencils, but instead of an eraser, they have a biodegradable cellulose capsule filled with seeds. Once the pencil is too short to use, you plant the stub with the capsule under the soil, water it, and with light and time it germinates.

A major part of our business is B2B. The plantable pencils can be fully customized with logos, colors and messages, and they are widely used by other companies as sustainable giveaways for conferences, campaigns, trade fairs and internal communication.

Brands such as Coca-Cola, Marriott, Pandora, IKEA and Porsche have used SproutWorld pencils as a way to share their message as something meaningful and environmentally positive.

Our makeup liners work exactly in the same way as the pencils. They're used like standard eyeliners or brow liners, and when only the stub remains, you plant it. The seed capsule then grows into wildflowers designed to support bees and other pollinators.

EGT: Is any type of soil required?

MS: No special soil is required. Regular potting soil works perfectly well. We recommend

planting the stub so the capsule is covered with soil, using a pot with drainage, and placing it somewhere with natural light and regular watering.

EGT: How many different products are you selling, and what is the pricing for the U.S. market?

MS: We sell a range of plantable pencils in different editions, colors and pack sizes, as well as plantable makeup liners and related accessories. In the U.S. consumer market, plantable pencil packs with five pieces typically start around \$13.

We also work extensively in the promotional and corporate gifting market, where pricing depends on volume and customization.

EGT: How long did it take for the SproutWorld patents, and in which countries were they obtained? Was the process difficult?

MS: The patent process took several years and involved filings in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, China and parts of Asia. It was a long, expensive and at times challenging process but absolutely essential. Protecting the core idea is what allowed us to build a sustainable business and defend it against copycats.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing, and how did you locate a reputable supplier?

MS: Today, all SproutWorld products are manufactured in Poland. We previously had production in Minnesota for the North American market, but rising costs made it too expensive to maintain, and that production was discontinued in 2024.



The pencils are part of SproutWorld's international, eco-friendly mission.

Finding the right manufacturing partner required extensive vetting, factory audits and long-term relationship building. Quality, consistency, ethical standards and reliability were non-negotiable from the beginning.

EGT: Did you experience any quality control issues early?

MS: Quality control is always an ongoing focus when producing physical products, at scale. As we grew, we continuously refined materials, processes and testing procedures, working closely with our suppliers to ensure consistent quality across all markets.

EGT: Because the seeds turn into edible products, is there any government safety testing required for U.S. markets?

MS: There are two main regulatory considerations. Seeds and planting materials are subject to U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations related to plant health and import controls. Cosmetics, such as our makeup liners, fall under U.S. FDA (Food and Drug Administration) cosmetic regulations, which focus on product safety, labeling and compliance.

While the products themselves are not food, we take materials safety and regulatory

compliance very seriously in every market we operate in.

EGT: Do you have a presence in the USA?

MS: While we no longer maintain a physical office in the United States, we continue to operate through our SproutWorld USA company and work closely with U.S. partners, distributors and retailers. And through Amazon.

EGT: What are your next plans for SproutWorld? Are you working on new products?

MS: Our focus is on continuing to develop second-life products—everyday items that don't end up as waste but instead turn into something living. We're exploring new product categories while strengthening our existing lines and continuing to protect our intellectual property globally.

EGT: What guidance do you have for novice inventors developing a food or plant-based product, especially for exporting to the U.S.?

MS: My biggest advice is to protect your idea early and thoroughly. Patents are expensive and time-consuming, but they're critical if your concept is truly unique. At the same time, keep the product simple and intuitive: People should understand it instantly.

When exporting to the U.S., it's essential to understand regulatory requirements, whether that involves USDA rules for seeds or FDA regulations for cosmetics and consumer goods. Working with experts and planning for compliance from the very beginning can save a tremendous amount of time and cost later on.

Protecting your patent once you hold it is also crucial. We use an AI-based software called RedPoints to detect illegal copies online, which is highly efficient and saves both time and money. 🌱

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