

Industry narrative on packaging & plastics

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The production, use, and disposal of packaging, and in particular plastic packaging, are having a real and growing impact on our global environment.

This is particularly so when plastic packaging finds its way into the environment, as litter for example, rather than being disposed of responsibly and kept in the circular economy.

The UK food and drink manufacturing industry acknowledges its share of the responsibility for the impact of packaging on the environment, alongside our value chain partners and other stakeholders including Governments and consumers. We strongly believe that a joined-up, collaborative approach involving all stakeholders will be needed to deliver the best outcomes for the UK. This will need to be underpinned by governments providing a cohesive policy framework and consumers recycling and disposing of their waste responsibly.

The industry **uses packaging primarily to protect products and ensure they are delivered safely and in good condition from the point of production to the point of consumption.** In a circular economy, packaging ensures the food or drink it contains remains in optimal condition, thereby helping to ensure it is consumed, and not wasted.

There are many factors which influence the use, choice and format of food and drink packaging. These include cost, intended use, suitability of materials available, and legislation, as well as:

- environmental (recyclability, potential for littering at end of life)
- commercial (avoiding waste of product and therefore cost, fulfilling consumer demand),
- technical (barrier properties, flexibility, temperature-resistance, and other unique properties),
- and policy (Government policy to promote “light-weighting” of packaging drove the adoption of light, flexible plastics).

These multiple factors also contribute to the **challenge of identifying and implementing meaningful change** to packaging systems. Issues include:

- required authorisations for recycled material in food packaging,
- the unique and varied properties of certain packaging materials such as plastic,
- understanding the different environmental impacts and unintended consequences of different packaging materials including in respect of transport emissions, their fate in the environment, and impact on food waste

Recognising the importance and urgency of making changes to the current system, the industry is engaging with Government and a range of stakeholders on the following initiatives:

- **improving packaging design** (including through increasing recyclability and use of recycled content),
- **supporting research and innovation** (collaborating across the value chain on the development of innovative materials and advanced recycling technologies),

- **contributing to citizen engagement and consumer insights** (FDF is a founding signatory of the UK Plastics Pact and contributed to the Fresher for Longer update),
- **supporting improved collections and recycling** (industry contribution to current PRN system and commitment to significantly increase this going forward to help councils fund the collection of a core set of packaging materials for recycling)
- supporting Government proposals to introduce a **UK wide recyclability labelling scheme and associated national communications** along with collaborating with the waste management industry
- **supporting improvements in UK reprocessing capacity** (collaborating with reprocessors to improve availability of food grade recycle).

In order to deliver the changes that we know are necessary, we need support from UK policy makers in a number of specific areas in addition to a cohesive policy framework; the correct sequencing of interventions will also be critical for success.

- It is essential that the Government delivers on its promise for **all local authorities in England** (harmonised with the other UK nations) **to collect a core set of packaging materials for recycling**. It is only through increasing the quantity and quality of material collected that we can generate the investment needed in the UK's reprocessing capacity.
- We would also like to see a greater understanding of the specific constraints placed upon the sector and the complexity of approval process in using **recycled materials in contact with food** along with a wider recognition that **many applications are currently effectively prohibited**.
- We see a clear role for regulators and Government **in providing guidance on these processes for business**, and **delivering a holistic approach to shape legislation and guidance** that simultaneously supports innovation, food safety, and standards.
- It is important that the reforms to the packaging producer responsibility system and the other interventions being considered, including a plastics tax, take full account of the need to **ensure that the additional costs on business, local authorities, consumers remain proportionate and fair** given the need to mitigate the impact on food prices.

We, the UK food and drink manufacturing sector call upon all parts of the packaging value chain, Governments and consumers to work together to transform recycling in the UK and build a truly circular economy for packaging.