

# Planetpro

NESTLÉ PROFESSIONAL SUSTAINABILITY MAGAZINE

Embracing  
the circular  
economy

Making  
informed  
choices

Simple steps  
you can take  
today



## Keep Packaging in the Loop



# PACKAGING IS INDISPENSABLE

In many ways, our modern food system wouldn't be possible without packaging.

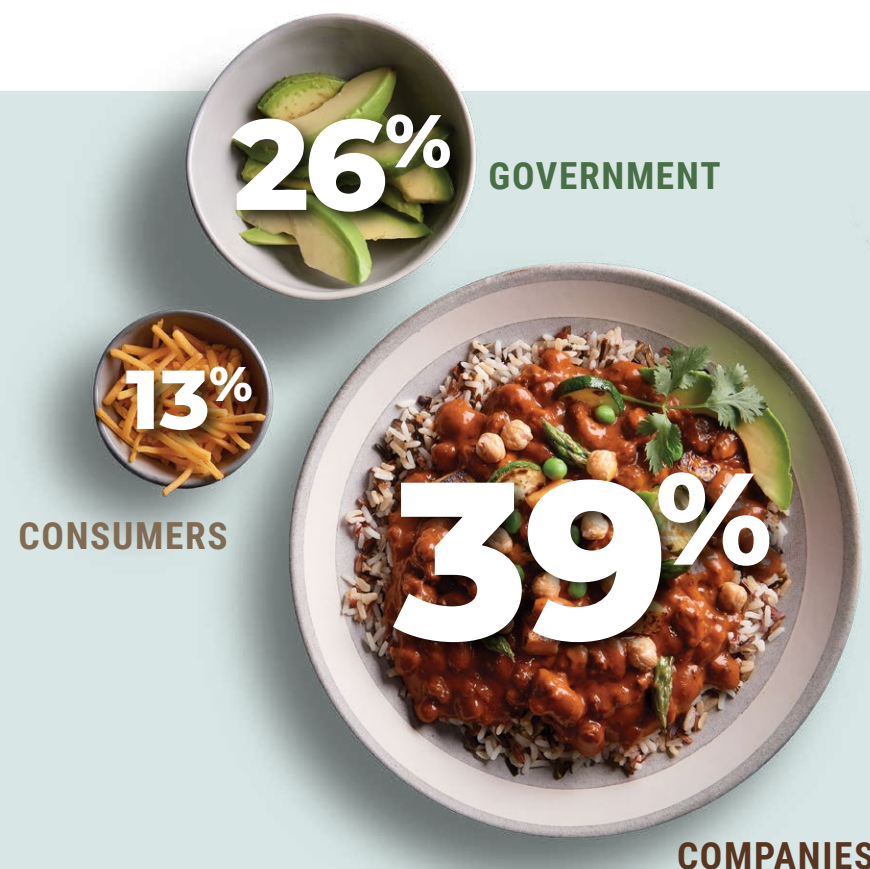
We ask a lot of the containers that hold our foods and beverages. They protect food from damage and spills during transportation and storage. They also provide a barrier against physical or microbial contamination, tampering, and oxidation that can impact flavour, freshness, and quality.<sup>1</sup> Both of these functions are critical for maintaining the safety and quality of food, extending its shelf life, and preventing unnecessary food waste.

Packaging is also an important way to share information. From ingredients and nutrition labels to crucial messages about how to prepare and store the contents, packaging labels share important details with everyone who encounters them. And packages can even help with practical functions like portioning and point-of-sale display.<sup>1</sup>

For all these reasons, some form of packaging is essential. While too many packages are thrown away after a single use instead of being reused or recycled, there would be still more waste generated from food if it were shipped and stored unprotected. In this issue, we'll evaluate some common packaging materials and consider how manufacturers, food service operators, and consumers could work together to help packaging protect food while minimizing its impact on the planet.

## WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Even though governments own post-consumer waste and regulate waste management systems, the results of a survey\* showed that 39% of consumers believed companies have a strong role to play in the end of life of consumer products. Collaboration is needed between governments, consumers and companies.<sup>2</sup>

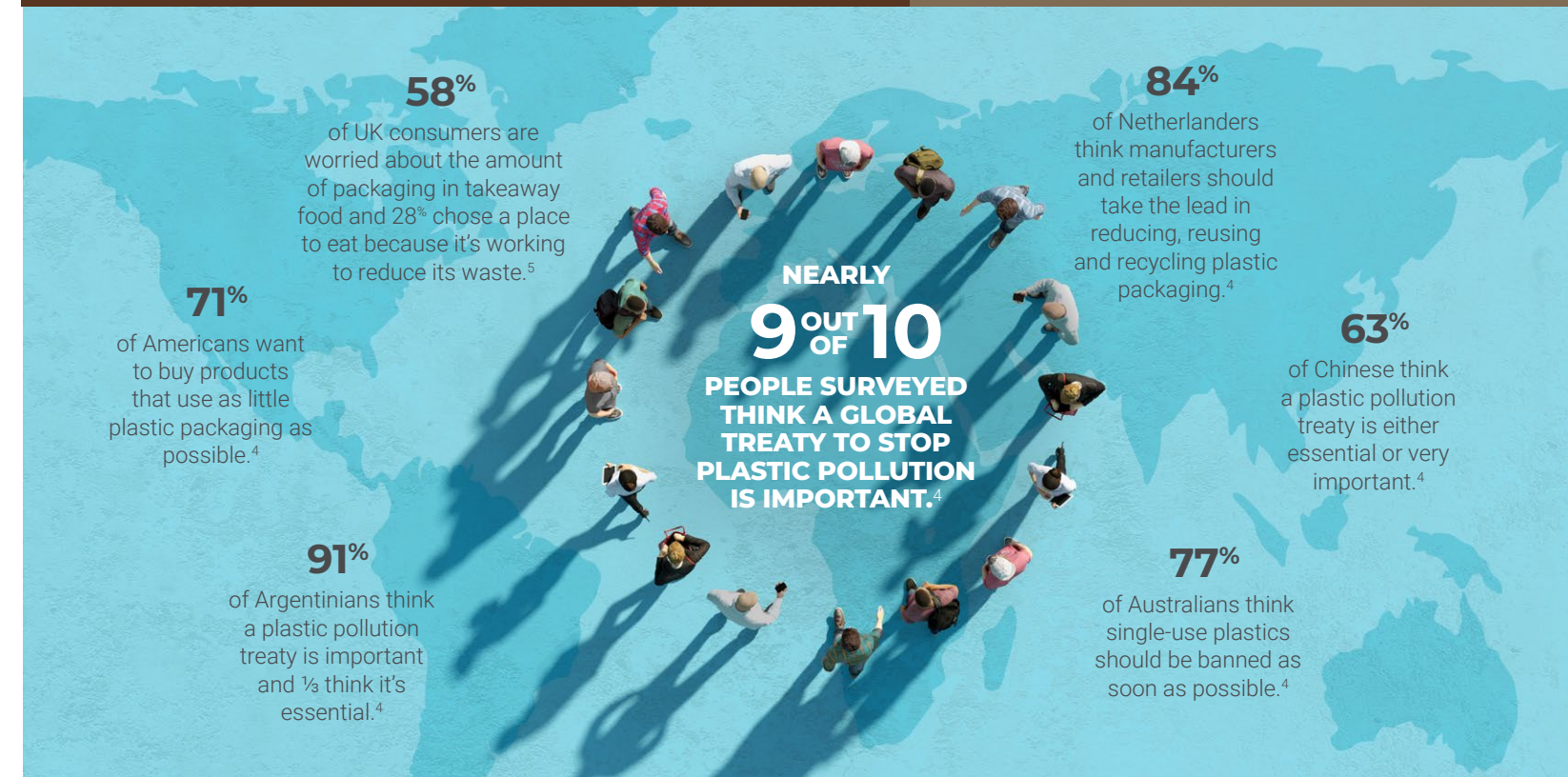


Around the world, people are paying more attention to packaging and the ways we interact with it.

## A NEW PRIORITY



CONSUMERS WOULD PAY MORE FOR "ECO-FRIENDLY" PACKAGING<sup>3</sup>



## CONSUMER PERCEPTION

*Does it match reality?*



A recent survey of consumers in 10 countries shows how sustainable they think various packaging materials are, revealing some gaps between their understanding and what's actually being recycled.<sup>6</sup>

**Glass and PET** are ranked as "very sustainable" by consumers and indeed both materials generally have higher recycling rates than other materials.

**Compostable plastics** are generally considered "extremely sustainable" solutions. In reality, industrial composting systems' availability is locally specific today.

**Metal** is ranked low by consumers, but aluminium and steel can be easily recycled into new packing or products.



# Embracing a Circular ECONOMY

## Making the most of valuable resources

For decades, the world has operated according to the linear economy model, which is based on the assumption that natural resources are abundant, easy to source, and cheap to discard.<sup>7</sup>

However, this approach is unsustainable, so many around the world are striving to achieve a circular economy instead. The circular model aims to maintain the utility of things we make, keeping materials in the loop instead of continuing to take-make-and-waste.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of packaging, the circular approach recognizes that every box, can, and jar we use is made from valuable resources. By reusing or recycling these materials, we can extend that value, putting them back to use while minimizing the environmental pressures involved in extracting resources, decreasing fossil fuels and emissions used in manufacturing, and reducing the amount of trash that ends up in landfills or the ocean.

It's important to note that the circular economy model is a means to an end, not an end in itself. By evaluating the life cycle of this approach, we can learn more about the consequences of implementing this model and determine which measures will lead to better environmental outcomes.

## *Solutions from every angle*

Evolving our approach to packaging is a combined effort, involving everything from educating consumers to expanding infrastructure to specifying how the materials in a product should be returned to the circular economy after use.<sup>9</sup>

### FIVE STEPS TOWARD KEEPING MATERIALS IN THE LOOP

#### LESS PACKAGING



#### Reduce

Reducing use of packaging material in general, and virgin in particular, while maintaining adequate protection.



#### Reuse & Refill

Scaling reusable and refillable systems to eliminate the need for disposable packaging

#### BETTER PACKAGING



#### Redesign

Pioneering alternative packaging materials to facilitate recycling

#### BETTER SYSTEMS



#### Recycle

Supporting infrastructure that helps shape a waste-free future



#### Rethink Behaviours

Driving new behaviours of companies, organisations and consumers

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The circular economy could yield up to \$4.5 trillion in economic benefits by 2030.<sup>10</sup> It could also reduce 80% of end-of-life plastic disposal by 2050 compared to today.<sup>11</sup>

Each of these steps can go a long way toward preventing waste, but to capture the full value of the materials we use, we'll need everyone to commit to meeting these goals.



# material WORLD

## Communicate, Educate & Advocate

If you're new to recycling, a great place to start is by checking your local regulations, guidelines, and infrastructure to see what kinds of materials you can and can't recycle. Then you can train your staff accordingly to help minimize waste in your day-to-day operations.

In many cases, you can also find partners to help you accomplish your goals. Try searching for local groups, industry networks, or NGOs that are focused on sustainability, and ask your suppliers and other food industry workers to share their ideas. If you want a deep dive into plastics, see the credible additional resources on page 11.

## INFORMED CHOICES

Food and beverage packaging comes in many materials and formats, and most of them can be recycled to some degree subject to local conditions.



### PAPER/ CARDBOARD

Fresh produce,  
outer packs



### LAMINATED CARTON

Dairy, juices,  
soups



### GLASS

Beverages,  
condiments,  
produce



### STEEL

Fruits and  
vegetables,  
ready-to-eat  
meals, sauces



### ALUMINIUM

Prepared meals



### RIGID PLASTICS

Sauces,  
beverages



### PLASTIC BOTTLES

Water, beverages



### MONOMATERIAL PLASTICS

Snacks

## HARD TO RECYCLE

Some materials are easier to recycle than others. The Golden Design Rules<sup>12</sup> have the goal of providing guidance to packaging manufacturers to increase the circularity of their packaging and create significant value for the industry and wider system.

Each rule proposed by the Golden Rules is aligned to a specific objective, such as the elimination of problematic or unnecessary packaging.

The rules encourage, where possible, avoiding the use of PVC, PVDC, and PS as they can contain problematic elements that can disrupt the recycling of some other plastics. It is also recommended that excessive head-space in flexible packaging be reduced along with overwraps. These reduction efforts, along with others, can help minimise the demand of virgin plastics and the amount of plastic placed on the market.

## *Actions you can take:*

Governments around the world are enacting bans, taxes and laws related to packaging every year, but you can be proactive to anticipate these coming issues.

- ☐ Connect with the organization that handles your local collection.
- ☐ Learn about what can be recycled locally.
- ☐ Review your current collection system at your facilities and provide separate bins to match your collection and the local waste collection system
- ☐ Talk to your local business associations about hosting educational trainings on waste management and circular economy legislation.
- ☐ Encourage suppliers to offer alternatives with reusable packaging or bulk dispensing.





# TAKING *action*

As a food service provider, you have many opportunities to address packaging sustainability. Whether you're partnering with vendors, taking deliveries, preparing food, serving it or packing it for delivery, here are some more sustainable options to consider.

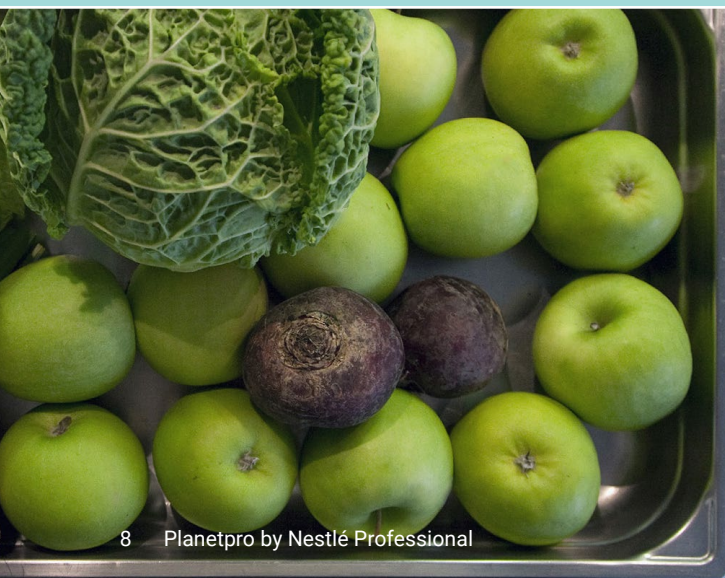


## DINING ROOM

- Label bins according to the sorting guidelines of local collection systems.
- Offer only reusable or paper straws.
- Use empty jars to hold fresh cut flowers or candles on tables.
- Replace disposables with ceramic mugs, plates and cutlery that can be washed and reused.
- Provide collection bins at convenient points with instructions for customers.

## LOADING DOCK & ORDERING

- Ask vendors to optimise plastic pallet wrapping.
- Suggest reusable plastic or wooden pallets or trays to transport and store.
- Offer to return pallets/containers to be refilled/reused/recycled.
- Try to encourage suppliers to use minimal packaging or containers that fit your local recycling guidelines.
- Opt for local produce using less protection to travel.
- When possible, try to order in bulk to minimize packaging (as long as you can use it all in time to prevent spoilage and food waste).
- Ask your suppliers about the availability of reuse systems or bulk dispensers.



## KITCHEN PREP

- Reuse containers you usually have in the kitchen.
- Flatten cardboard/paper before recycling it.
- Ensure that there's no food left in empty containers.
- Take plastic bags/film to a local facility that accepts them.
- Don't wrap items in plastic before placing them in recycling bin.

## TAKEAWAY AND DELIVERY

- Encourage consumers to bring their own reusable cups or containers for takeaways.
- Offer multiple-use cups or containers and a refill discount for using them.
- Choose recyclable or recycled content items when multiple-use items are not feasible.
- Provide napkins, portioned condiments, cutlery, cup lids and sugar sachets only upon request.
- Include a card or sticker with delivery to explain how to recycle containers.
- Partner with a third party to reuse/recycle containers.
- Use paper instead of plastic bags for carry-out and invite customers to use their own totes.



# Everyday

## Q&A

### Are recyclable and recycled the same thing?

No. “Recyclable” is a characteristic of a product, packaging or associated component that can be diverted from the waste stream through available processes and programs and can be collected, processed and returned to use in the form of raw materials or products. On the other hand, “recycled material” means that something has been reprocessed from recovered material through a manufacturing process and made into a final product or component for incorporation into a product.<sup>13</sup>

### Is compostable plastic the answer?

It depends. Compostable plastic can be a solution for certain types of plastic packaging materials which have a high level of food residue that would hamper recycling, and industrial composting can be an alternative recovery pathway for certain types of plastic packaging materials which require specific industrially managed conditions to break down. Although this option has potential, industrial composting infrastructure is not yet widespread globally and, nowadays, the majority of composters do not accept compostable packaging. Check with your local government office, or their waste management partner to confirm if any compostables beyond food waste are accepted in your area. Locally applicable laws, regulations, standards and conditions must be checked by every country.

### What's the difference between EPR fees and taxes?

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws set out a national framework where the producer of a product or packaging is required to handle its end of life. Generally, the producer handles this obligation by paying a management fee, based on the weight of packaging materials they place on the market.

On the other hand, some countries have chosen to implement plastics taxes. The revenues from these taxes are not always earmarked for improving local waste management infrastructure. Check with your local government to see what fees are being assessed in your supply chain, so you can make an informed choice about your packaging purchases.

### What's the best choice you can make in selecting packaging materials with respect to circularity?

The best choice is to check with your local government about what's locally collected and actually recycled. You can also explore reuse systems provided by your suppliers to significantly lower the volumes of single use materials you are using. Delivery pallets, vegetable trays and water fountain jugs are great examples of reusable packaging systems today, and many more are coming due to consumer and regulatory initiatives to transform the packaging system. Remember, packaging should also deliver adequate protection to the product so it can minimize food losses and waste, as these can cause even more environmental impact than packaging itself.

### Are single-use plastics problematic for the out-of-home industry?

Yes, single-use plastic management is a serious issue that requires attention at all levels of public administration. Several governments and organizations operating on the international, regional and national level are already developing policy and actions to address the environmental impact of single-use plastics. For example, in the EU, a Single Use Plastics Directive forbids many countries from using disposable polystyrene food containers, cutlery or straws.<sup>14</sup> Also, the United National Environment Program (UNEP) is currently hosting an intergovernmental negotiation to develop a legally binding Treaty on Plastics Pollution.<sup>15</sup> Please consider that legislation and regulations are constantly changing and can vary from one country to another.<sup>16</sup> Checking with your local environment office is the best way to stay current on developments in your country.

## Sources

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4. Rising Tides: Global Opinions on Actions to stop Plastic Pollution in 28 countries (2022)
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8. SYSTEMIQ. ReShaping Plastics: Pathways to a Circular, Climate Neutral Plastics System in Europe (2022)
9. Ellen Macarthur: Circular economy introduction
10. Ellen Macarthur: The circular economy in detail
11. Ellen Macarthur, Eliminate waste and pollution
12. The Consumer Goods Forum: Golden Design Rules
13. ISO 14021:2016 - Environmental labels and declarations
14. DIRECTIVE (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment
15. UN Environment Program: Intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution
16. Addressing Single-Use Plastic Products Pollution, Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/35110>

### TAKE A DEEPER LOOK:

#### New Plastics Economy

<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics>

#### Global Plastic Action Partnership

<https://www.globalplasticaction.org/>

#### Plastics PACTS

<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-plastics-pact-network>

#### The Language of Climate Change: A Glossary of Terms

<https://www.nestleprofessional.com/news/language-climate-change-glossary-terms>



# We're in this together

Moving to a circular economy can benefit all of us, and if we hope to reach that goal, we need to act on it together. Our industry can be part of the packaging solution, and there's no time like the present to begin.

## Planetpro Issues

### No Time to Waste

*The Restaurant's Role in Reducing Trash*

### Climate Change

*How food service can contribute to the solution*

### Keep Packaging in the Loop

*Embracing a Circular Economy*



Nestlé Professional  
Société des Produits Nestlé S.A.  
Avenue Nestlé 55  
CH-1800 Vevey  
Switzerland

[www.nestleprofessional.com](http://www.nestleprofessional.com)

Printed on 100% recycled paper  
Blue Angel Certified

Planetpro is a publication by  
Nestlé Professional, © Société des  
Produits Nestlé SA 2022

Contact [planetpro@nestle.com](mailto:planetpro@nestle.com)  
for further information.

### Acknowledgements:

Christèle Bellon, Rachel Delamere,  
Julia Archutowska, Jochen Hertlein,  
Lars Lundquist, Emmanuel Maalouf

### Editorial Team:

Ana Isabel Aragón, Anna Tudela,  
Alain Contal, Jodie Roussell  
**Creative Direction:** Mr & Mrs

**Copy:** Karin Lannon

**Photography:** Yolanda Gonzalez,  
Nestlé Professional