

# Packaging



## Analysis

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# Industry workhorse

**In an increasingly regulated environment, food and drink packaging is required to meet multiple demands and functions, from food safety to marketing to expectations on recyclability, so how is it stacking up?**



Amid an increasingly regulatory environment, the food and drink packaging industry is having to answer changing retail and consumer demands with a suite of innovative solutions that protect consumables along the supply chain, optimise their attractiveness at point of purchase and deliver the goods on sustainability. That's a pretty tall order for any industry to achieve, and the added complexities imposed by increased legislative costs to food and drink manufacturers – and their subsequent demands on packaging suppliers – are piling on the pressure.

Yet packaging manufacturers are a hardy bunch and appear to be embracing the multiple challenges set before them with some considerable relish and a keen eye on innovation.

Packaging is evolving as brands respond to tighter regulation, cost pressures and changing consumer expectations, says Liz Manuvelpillai, UK&I sales, marketing and innovation director at DS Smith. “With shoppers seeking more sustainable packaging choices, retailers and brands are rethinking formats and materials,” she notes. “There’s a clear trend towards more compact designs that reduce material use while improving efficiency across the supply chain. We’ve partnered with brands on fibre-based innovations for confectionery and soft drinks, including paper tubs, improved bag-in-box formats, alternatives to plastic shrink wrap, and optimised shelf-ready packaging, supporting the shift towards more circular and efficient packaging solutions.”

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Flexible packaging continues to grow in pet food, driven by convenience, innovation and brands' sustainability goals, says Madalina Mitru, marketing director, pet care, coffee and specialties at Amcor. "The pet food market represents around 29.3bn units, with flexible packaging accounting for 63% of the segment<sup>1</sup>," she says. "At Amcor, we've focused on solutions that combine performance with circularity."

Meanwhile, transport packaging is increasingly being recognised as strategic supply chain infrastructure rather than a simple cost item, reports Adrian Fleming, managing director – Northern Europe at Tosca. "Pressures from automation, sustainability targets and regulation are accelerating the shift from single-use packaging to reusable, pooled systems that improve

consistency and efficiency," he says. "Our innovation has included durable, automation-ready, reusable plastic packaging assets designed for high-rotation FMCG supply chains."

Corrugated packaging is increasingly viewed as part of grocery supply chain infrastructure rather than simply a transport pack, notes Adam Platts, sales & marketing director at VPK Packaging UK & Ireland. "Over the past year we've seen strong growth in shelf-ready packaging (SRP), single-piece pack formats developed to reduce complexity in the supply chain, right-sized e-commerce formats and pallet-optimised transit cases designed to improve retail logistics efficiency," he says. "At the same time, the shift away from complex multi-material packs is accelerating interest in fibre-

based packaging. Corrugated board is widely recycled across the UK and Europe, making it a practical option for brands looking to improve recyclability without disrupting operations.

Innovation is now focused less on new materials and more on structural design, using logistics simulation tools to optimise supply chain efficiency."

From the consumer perspective, No More Lids MD Christopher Brown is focused on the increased interest in the ability to recycle or compost, as well as a rise in awareness of both greenwashing and the "more ambiguous or unsubstantiated" terminology used by some brands. "Customers are also more aware of the flaws in the current cup recycling solutions where your takeaway cup is literally taken away from the venue that offers the specialist collection, rendering your PE/PLA lined cup unrecyclable at home," he says. "We utilise an aqueous coating within The Good Cup which is certified as recyclable in the normal paper stream."

### Regulatory environment

The last year has seen major developments in the packaging sector, as the entire value chain responds to the demands of legislative change, such as Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR), says OPRL MD Jude Allan. "OPRL works with brands across all packaging categories, and our members have reported challenges around both the collection of data and classification of components under the RAM (Recyclability Assessment Methodology)," she reveals. "As well as providing OPRL's recycling labels... the last year has been all about helping our existing and new members to navigate the complex and often confusing regulations impacting packaging. For example, our Recyclability Assessment Tool enables members to assess their packaging under the RAM. This has been used extensively by brands to support their pEPR data reporting."

From a waste sector perspective, 2026 is the year packaging ambition finally collides with system reality, says Roger Wright, waste strategy & packaging manager at Biffa. "Retailers are moving fast on design, materials and claims, but what matters now is whether packaging actually works in the real world of collection, sorting and reprocessing," he notes. "On regulation, we are seeing customers actively align

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UK EPR and EU PPWR strategies rather than treating them separately. That is sensible. The direction of travel is the same: less material, simpler formats, higher recyclability and better data. Waiting for perfect clarity is no longer an option. Businesses that standardise materials, avoid unnecessary complexity, and design for real recycling infrastructure will avoid expensive redesign cycles later.”

“EPR is already changing the conversation,” says Tosca’s Fleming. “As the cost of single-use packaging becomes clearer, many businesses are looking at how to reduce the amount of packaging they place on the market altogether. This is accelerating interest in reusable transport packaging and pooling systems, particularly in sectors like fresh produce, meat and retail logistics. Companies are increasingly evaluating packaging through a total cost and regulatory lens.”

EPR is already influencing packaging decisions, agrees DS Smith’s Manuvelpillai. “With fees being modulated based on recyclability, brands are placing greater focus on packaging that can be easily recycled,” she says. “In food and drink, this means leveraging the strength of fibre-based solutions and pushing the boundaries of conventional packaging, from material and board grades to shapes and dimensions.”

EPR is already changing how brands think about packaging, agrees VPK Packaging’s Platts. “Recyclability remains important, but the conversation has broadened to include pack size, material weight and the removal of unnecessary space within packaging formats,” he says. “As businesses begin to assess the potential financial implications of EPR fees, there is a stronger focus on designing packs that use materials efficiently while still protecting products and performing well in the supply chain. This is accelerating demand for simpler, recyclable fibre-based packaging and more optimised pack formats, helping brands reduce material usage, improve transport efficiency and move easily through the recycling infrastructure.”

Demand for recyclable packaging is rising, influenced by EPR and growing consumer focus on sustainability, agrees Amcor’s Mitru. “Our research shows 88% of pet parents check pack instructions at least sometimes<sup>2</sup>,



indicating strong engagement with disposal and recyclability cues,” she notes. “Across Europe, launches with sustainability claims are accelerating. Dry pet food and treats are increasingly moving toward recyclable plastics, while wet pet food is exploring alternative formats and materials as brands work to improve circularity and communicate recyclability clearly.”

Forward-thinking brands have appreciated the importance of recyclability – and of making sure that customers are given the right instructions, notes OPRL’s Allan. “But with the introduction of the Recyclability Assessment Methodology

(RAM) as part of pEPR, we are seeing an increase in queries from our members wanting to understand the impact of their packaging and where they can make improvements,” she says. “For some, this is about reducing costs; for others, the legislation has triggered opportunities to become more sustainable. Our Recyclability Assessment Tool ... helps our members to identify changes they can make to improve recyclability.”

However, without consumer buy-in, any efforts to develop a more sustainable value chain will be wasted, adds Allan. “At this critical time, with pEPR costs rising, it is more important than ever to give people every chance to make the right decisions. OPRL’s most recent research<sup>3</sup> showed that labelling remains the top driver for consumers looking to recycle packaging. With this in mind, mandatory, harmonised labelling is ... a crucial element of pEPR. It will drive recycling, and also

**“The direction of travel on EPR and PPWR is the same, and waiting for perfect clarity is no longer an option”**

# Cost pressures and material changes

Economic pressure is influencing packaging decisions, with brands increasingly evaluating total cost of ownership, including pallet density, warehouse utilisation, line performance and transport efficiency, rather than simply material cost, says VPK Packaging's Platts. "At the same time, tighter margins are encouraging brands to use packaging as an opportunity to disrupt, develop promotional formats and strengthen shelf impact, balancing operational efficiency with stronger retail visibility," he notes. "Material optimisation remains important,

but simply using less material is not always the answer. In many cases, better structural design delivers greater savings than marginal material reductions, particularly when improvements are multiplied across millions of packs."

Cost pressure is encouraging brands to optimise packaging without compromising quality, observes Amcor's Mitru. "That's accelerating lightweighting, material reduction, and efficiency-led design choices that can also support sustainability aims," she notes. Volatility remains a challenge, she adds.

"The impact is felt strongly in flexible packaging, where brands are balancing performance, cost, and the transition to more sustainable structures," she says

Tosca's Fleming agrees that material price volatility is challenging, particularly for paper and wood, where costs can fluctuate significantly. "This has highlighted the value of reusable plastic systems, where packaging costs are spread across multiple rotations rather than tied to raw material prices, helping create greater cost predictability," he says. OPRL's Allan sees

several encouraging trends that demonstrate a real shift in attitudes. "For example, packaging producers are choosing mono-materials over more difficult-to-recycle compound materials," she says. "There is also a move away from colours – for products such as bottle tops – and a greater acceptance of the less shiny appearance of recycled plastic content. Overall, these are positive developments, but we would always advise brands to consider the full impact of any changes, taking into account environmental impacts as well as cost savings."

help people to recognise the value of packaging materials."

## PPWR – impact on UK brands

The Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is set to reshape how packaging is designed, used and disposed of across the EU, comments DS Smith's Manuvelpillai. "It aims to minimise packaging waste, boost high-quality recycling, and harmonise rules around labelling, while also addressing 'void' space and strengthening requirements around recyclability. This will place greater emphasis on the value in material renewability, reduced carbon impact, and improved system efficiency," she says.

With many grocery supply chains operating across European markets, PPWR will influence packaging decisions for UK brands, says VPK Packaging's Platts. "The legislation is accelerating the move toward simpler packaging structures and

clearer recyclability communication. Corrugated packaging aligns well with many of these requirements because it is mono-material, widely recyclable and already collected at scale.

"Where the industry still faces challenges is consumer understanding," he adds. "Around 30% of recyclable packaging still ends up in general waste<sup>4</sup>, often due to confusion around labelling. Simplified, harmonised labelling across markets will be important if legislation is going to translate into real improvements in recycling behaviour."

Packaging is a global industry, so harmonisation between markets will be hugely beneficial, believes OPRL's Allan. "The EU has published proposals for waste sorting labelling under PPWR, with a final decision expected later this year," she says. "The UK is likely to align with the EU, which would lead to a changed but more harmonised labelling scheme. OPRL is

liaising with decision-making bodies and our EU equivalent organisations to make sure we are up to date and informing members on the latest developments.

At No More Lids, Brown says he increasingly sees businesses refocusing their packaging to avoid future charges and comply with PPWR. "The importance of clearer, more simplified labelling is a welcome move but, in my opinion, does not go far enough," he says. "When it comes to cups there are issues with sorting at recycling sites, with the assumption all cups container plastic linings, leading to 96% being diverted to landfill or incinerated<sup>5</sup>. If cups feature a clear colour band around the base with one colour for PE/PLA/Aqueous; this would help the public dispose of the cups more easily and could increase the volume that are correctly processed in waste streams."

Although the UK is outside the EU, many UK producers supply into

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European markets, so PPWR will still influence packaging decisions, observes Tosca's Fleming. "The regulation is a major driver behind the shift towards reuse, circular design and reduced packaging waste. Tosca's pooling model already aligns with these principles. Our reusable plastic assets are designed for multiple rotations, reparability and full recyclability, supported by a managed system of collection, washing, repair and redistribution."

### Design and function

DS Smith's Manuvelpillai points to strong demand for fibre-based packaging that combines sustainability with high-quality print and standout shelf appeal. "As sustainability continues to be a key consideration for shoppers, brands want packaging that reflects those expectations," she says. "Design creativity is also key, particularly in FMCG where packaging must balance recyclability, supply chain efficiency and strong brand visibility."

Two trends stand out – material authenticity and functional design, according to VPK Packaging's Platts. "Many brands are embracing the natural look of fibre-based packaging rather than fully covering packs with print. This approach supports sustainability messaging while still delivering strong shelf presence," he says. "Meanwhile, SRP that speeds up shelf replenishment, opens cleanly, provides a marketing tool at point of purchase and presents products effectively is becoming increasingly important as retailers look to reduce labour and improve in-store efficiencies. The most successful packaging today balances visual impact with sustainability and operational efficiency."

However, Biffa's Wright believes one of the biggest misconceptions is around 'paperisation'. "Switching from plastic to fibre does not automatically make packaging recyclable or lower carbon," he says. "Barrier coatings, food contamination and mixed materials often make paper formats harder to process than expected. The more meaningful shift is around reuse and refill. That is where the biggest system change sits, but it only works if packaging, logistics and consumer



## Digital Product Passport

behaviour are designed together."

Amcor's Mitru says pet owners' demand for solutions tailored to a pet's life stage, breed, activity level and specific needs is influencing manufacturing, with more smaller production runs that support targeted recipes, seasonal or limited-edition lines, and faster testing of new ideas. "Functionality remains critical as well, so convenience features are a growing design priority," she says. "Sustainability remains central, with increasing interest in mono-material, recycle-ready solutions that combine shelf appeal with circularity."

**“The most successful packaging today balances visual impact with sustainability and operational efficiency”**

Yet, visual impact is also much sought after, notes No More Lids' Brown. The company has collaborated with artist Craig Black to launch a range of cups with bold colour artwork that are suitable for the Instagram society, but without the need for clear PET plastic cups and dome lids, he reveals. "Paper cups for cold drinks, still rare in the UK, offer a much better opportunity for branding compared to PET cups," he notes. "The paper solution also guarantees brand consistency and serves to bolster sustainability."

### Biggest challenges in 2026

Asked to identify the biggest challenges facing the packaging industry in 2026, suppliers answered as follows:

● **Amcor:** Progressing sustainability requirements without compromising performance, shelf life or supply-chain efficiency, all while managing cost pressure. "The industry will need solutions that minimise trade-offs

# Benefits of the digital bridge

“Packaging is increasingly a digital bridge between brands and consumers,” says Mitru at Amcor. “Tools such as QR codes can support traceability, information sharing, and engagement. AI and digital tools have the potential help to automate processes, improve efficiency, and inform design decisions across the packaging industry.”

Variable QR codes allow the client to change the content the customer experiences, observes No More Lids’ Brown. “We actively encourage our clients to use QR codes within their designs.”

The move to 2D barcodes and QR

codes enables brands and retailers to connect packaging to real-time data, notes Biffa’s Wright. “For the waste sector, that creates opportunities to improve sorting accuracy, give clearer recycling guidance and track material flows far more precisely. The technology is ready. The challenge is integration and consistency across supply chains.”

While able to communicate messages around brand identity and product quality, labelling is also a key source of information for consumers looking to dispose of packaging, notes

OPRL’s Allan. “We are already seeing increased use of QR codes, and the intention to replace linear barcodes with 2D versions offers fantastic opportunities to provide consumers with up-to-date, geo-located content about recycling,” she says.

“Digital technology is increasingly important for supply chain visibility,” comments Tosca’s Fleming. “Tools such as asset tracking, RFID and QR codes help businesses monitor packaging flows and optimise logistics networks. In reusable pooling models, digital tracking enables companies to understand where

assets are, how often they are used and how efficiently they circulate, improving overall supply chain performance.”

Digital connectivity is an increasingly useful bridge between brands and consumers, but digital tools are also transforming how packaging is developed, notes VPK’s Platts. “Digital modelling enables packaging structures to be visually validated before physical prototypes are produced, helping optimise pallet layouts, material use and performance earlier in the development process,” he says.

and help brands move faster toward circularity,” says Mitru.

●**DS Smith:** Balancing regulatory change, including EPR and PPWR, with cost pressures and consumer expectations. “Retailers also need packaging that protects products across increasingly complex delivery networks,” says Manuvelpillai. “81% of e-commerce retailers say parcel damage is a problem<sup>6</sup>, and with food and drink accounting for 26% of damaged deliveries<sup>7</sup>, it is important to invest in packaging solutions that meet customer expectations while supporting sustainability goals.”

●**Tosca:** Transitioning from linear packaging models to circular systems while maintaining operational efficiency. “Regulations such as EPR and PPWR are accelerating this shift, but success will require companies to rethink packaging not just as a material choice, but as part of a wider supply chain system,” notes Fleming.

●**Biffa:** For retailers, cost pressure meeting sustainability ambition. “EPR fees, new labelling requirements and PPWR readiness all land at once. Packaging now has to perform on-shelf, in regulation and at end of life,” says Wright. “Ultimately, the winners will be the businesses that stop designing packaging for appearance alone and start designing it for how it to support the realities of collection, sorting and recycling at scale. That is where the real environmental impact is made.”

●**No More Lids:** The recent conflict with Iran. “We’re already seeing large surcharges on delivery; and greatly increased freight costs coupled with delays,” says Brown. “This will be then met with a decrease in consumer spending, as belts are tightened.”

●**OPRL:** Globally, multiple issues impacting the entire value chain, from challenges around supply routes to larger safety concerns. “Circumstances are changing at speed, so we can expect

to be in a different situation by the time this report is printed,” notes Allan.

●**VPK Packaging:** Managing regulatory complexity while maintaining affordability and supply chain reliability. “The industry is navigating EPR, PPWR and evolving sustainability expectations, as well as dealing with evolving cost pressures due to economic volatility and operational complexity,” says Platts. “The opportunity within that is to treat packaging as a strategic supply chain tool, not just a compliance requirement. Packaging that improves logistics efficiency, supports recyclability and performs reliably across retail and e-commerce environments will deliver the greatest value.”

## Sources

<sup>1,2</sup> Amcor survey stats: ‘Pet food.

What are today’s consumers

looking for?, 2025. n=1,693

pet owners

<sup>3</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/e9y967jf>

<sup>4</sup> [circularonline.co.uk/news/poll-](https://circularonline.co.uk/news/poll-)

reveals-typical-brits-annual-waste/

<sup>5,6</sup> Opinium polling, October

2025, n= 500 retail decision

makers and 2,000 nationally

representative consumers

# Improving retort circularity

## DETAILS

**Amcor EMEA**  
Thurgauerstrasse 34  
CH-8050 Zurich  
Switzerland  
t: +41 (0) 44 316 1717

## KEY CONTACTS

**Madalina Mitru**  
Marketing Director, Pet  
Care, Coffee and Specialties

## KEY BRANDS

**AmLite® HeatFlex**  
**Recycle-Ready**  
**AmFiniti™ Recycled**  
**Content**  
**AmFiber™**  
**Performance Paper**  
**AmPrima® Recycle-Ready**

Retort packaging plays a vital role in heat-treated foods, helping brands deliver long shelf-life and product protection in lightweight, convenient formats. But those same performance requirements have historically made recyclability difficult. Many conventional retort packs rely on complex, multi-layer structures designed to achieve the barrier and sealing performance demanded by high-heat processing. In practice, that complexity can limit recyclability, even when individual materials may be recyclable in other contexts.

At the same time, expectations are rising – from shoppers to brands' own sustainability commitments to regulation. In Amcor research across the UK and major European markets, 69% of respondents said the sustainability of their pet food packaging was a major consideration<sup>1</sup>; 55% said recyclable packaging claims positively influenced their purchase decision; and 76% believed recyclable packaging should be the industry standard<sup>2</sup>.

Policy is adding urgency too. The EU's PPWR\* is expected to tighten the requirements around design for recycling and recyclability targets towards 2030 – raising the bar for packaging that performs in demanding applications such as wet pet food and ambient ready meals.

So, how do you improve circularity for high-performance retort packaging without compromising on shelf life, line efficiency, or product safety? One approach is to simplify the structure. "AmLite HeatFlex Recycle-Ready has been recognised for helping make recyclable retort packaging a practical



“Many retort packs rely on complex, multi-layer structures, designed to achieve the barrier and sealing performance demanded by high-heat processing. In practice, that complexity can limit recyclability”

option for heat-treated foods, explains Madalina Mitru, marketing director, pet care, coffee and specialties at Amcor. “The structure is based on mono-material polypropylene (PP), avoiding the use of mixed materials. PP packaging is already widely recycled in many markets, so this approach is designed to enable practical recyclability wherever established PP collection and recycling streams exist.”

From a performance perspective, retort applications set a high bar, she notes. “AmLite HeatFlex is designed to deliver strong barrier properties and reliable performance after heat treatment, with pack options that support brand impact, including print quality and optional transparent windows for product differentiation.”

Keeping sustainability outcomes together matters – and so does credibility, adds Mitru. “AmLite HeatFlex can help brands reduce the carbon footprint of their packaging by up to 60%<sup>3</sup>, compared with standard non-recyclable retort pouches, based on Amcor's ASSET lifecycle assessment system, assured by the Carbon Trust.

For manufacturers, progress will come from solutions that keep the benefits of retort while moving structures toward circular design – especially in demanding segments.

## Source

<sup>1,2</sup> Amcor survey stats: ‘Pet food. What are today's consumers looking for?’, 2025. n=1,693 pet owners

<sup>3</sup> Based on a cradle-to-gate comparison of standard retort PET/Alu/PP packaging vs. AmLite® Heatflex Retort PP-based pouch with assumption of 100% incineration of the baseline pack and 100% mechanical recycling of the new pack. Carbon footprint reduction is calculated using Amcor's ASSET lifecycle assessment model, which is assured by the Carbon Trust. Data valid at time of analysis.

\* Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation



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# Pack decision strategy for 2026 onwards

## DETAILS

**Biffa**  
Coronation Road  
Cressex  
High Wycombe HP12 3TZ  
t: 0800 601601

## KEY CONTACTS

**Roger Wright**  
Waste Strategy &  
Packaging manager

## KEY BRANDS

Waste prevention & reduction  
Waste collection & management  
Recycling & recovery processes  
Recycling & recovery products  
Landfill disposal

↘ The past year has again defined a new epoch on UK packaging, says Roger Wright, waste strategy & packaging manager at Biffa. “The rubber has hit the road on key policies and it’s no longer theoretical or preparatory,” he says. “At Biffa, we’ve been helping customers move from reacting to regulation towards making informed packaging decisions grounded in real-world outcomes. In 2025, we supported more than 100 organisations to navigate the evolving policy landscape, providing practical consultation across Simpler Recycling and packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR). Biffa delivers expert consultation on material choice to ensure packaging strategy aligns with both compliance requirements and operational reality.”

Three things all packaging decision makers need to consider in 2026 are:

### Rethink packs earlier in the process

“Much of our growth has come from helping customers rethink packaging earlier in the design process,” says Wright. “By combining waste system insight with packaging expertise, we have helped businesses to reduce material use, trial alternative formats, and evaluate emerging materials and reuse systems with a clearer understanding of recyclability and end-of-life outcomes. Alongside customer delivery, our team has strengthened its industry role through participation in pEPR Scheme Administrator (PackUK) and On-Pack Recycling Label (OPRL) technical committees, keynote speaking and advisory positions, so we contribute directly to shaping policy and industry standards. Highlights from the year include supporting Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) on a national toothpaste recycling project, onboarding corporate



“The rubber has hit the road on key policies and it’s no longer theoretical or preparatory. At Biffa we’ve been helping customers move from reacting to regulation towards making informed packaging decisions grounded in real world outcomes”

clients preparing for Simpler Recycling, helping launch the UK’s first own-wheel national coffee cup recycling service, and sponsoring and judging the Starpack Schools competition to support future industry talent.”

The biggest sector shift has been the move from theoretical policy to real financial consequence, notes Wright. “With EPR fees now taking effect, packaging decisions are increasingly driven by data quality, fee modulation and material performance,” he says. “This creates opportunities for businesses to unlock cost savings through better design and data cleansing, but also introduces new risks around compliance complexity, greenwashing scrutiny, and emerging regulatory pressures such as PFAS.”

### Policy as a driver of circular design

2026 is another pivotal year for UK packaging reform, he adds. “Plastics will remain essential despite ongoing paperisation, and customers will need support navigating limited recycled material supply and evolving thresholds such as the Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT). We expect rapid growth in smart packaging, data-enabled recycling and reuse models, as well as ongoing momentum towards flexible plastics recycling ahead of 2027 collections.

“Our role is to help customers innovate confidently, manage regulatory risk and deliver measurable environmental outcomes that work at scale.”

# what iff

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# Packaging for a changing world

**DETAILS**

**DS Smith Packaging**  
1 Paddington Square  
London W2 1DL

**KEY CONTACTS**

**Liz Manuvelpillai**  
Sales, Marketing &  
Innovation Director

**KEY BRANDS**

**Packaging Solutions**  
**Recycling Services**  
**Paper Products**  
**POS Display Solutions**  
**High Quality Print**

**Regulatory support**  
Regulation is accelerating the shift to sustainable packaging, with the likes of the UK's Extended Producer Responsibility scheme pushing brands to improve recyclability. DS Smith supports customers through this transition with tools such as its **Circular Design Metrics**, which help measure and improve packaging circularity, alongside its **Recyclability Evaluation Service**, which assesses fibre-based packaging and provides guidance on improving recyclability.

↙ The packaging landscape is transforming rapidly, shaped by shifting consumer expectations, regulatory pressures and the need to reduce environmental impact.

As DS Smith prepares for its next chapter as an EMEA packaging leader, it is focused on being a strategic partner to customers navigating complexity with packaging that is compliant, sustainable and cost-effective.

**A future-ready UK&I network**

DS Smith has strengthened its UK & Ireland footprint through targeted optimisation and strategic investment. These enhancements give customers what matters most: a network with the capacity, reliability and responsiveness to support changing demand and provide operational resilience.

“We are developing packaging that solves real challenges for customers while supporting the transition to a low-carbon circular economy,” says Liz Manuvelpillai, sales, marketing & innovation director at DS Smith. “We’re designing solutions that help brands run efficient supply chains, minimise unnecessary cost and remain robust.”

This customer-first mindset has driven innovation across food, drink and FMCG, she notes. Recent developments include paper-based tubs designed to replace plastic confectionery packaging, alongside fibre-based multipack solutions such as DS Smith Lift Up, an alternative to plastic shrink wrap for rigid bottle multipacks, and DS Smith Round Wrap, a fully recyclable fibre format that improves pallet efficiency while reducing stretch film use.

**Packaging that performs**

As retail environments become more competitive, packaging must deliver not only on sustainability but also on performance across the supply chain, says Manuvelpillai. “For grocery brands, this means protecting products in transit while supporting efficient store operations and strong shelf presence,” she says. “Formats such as shelf-ready



“Packaging today must do far more than protect products. It plays a critical role in reducing carbon, improving supply chain efficiency, and helping brands meet retailer and consumer expectations”

packaging enable faster replenishment, improve product visibility and reduce handling times, while point-of-sale displays help brands stand out in-store.

“For retailers and brands, packaging has become a strategic tool,” she adds. “By combining efficient design with strong visual impact, we help brands improve operational performance and in-store experience.”

**A platform for future growth**

Looking ahead, DS Smith expects strong momentum in fibre-based packaging across food and beverage sectors, alongside innovations in high-quality print, right-sized packaging and sustainable materials. “Packaging today must do far more than protect products,” says Manuvelpillai. “It plays a critical role in reducing carbon, improving supply chain efficiency, and helping brands meet retailer and consumer expectations.”

By optimising its footprint and continuing to invest in innovation, sustainability, and customer partnership, DS Smith is unlocking new value for customers across the UK, Ireland and the wider EMEA region.



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# Editorial feature Packaging



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**DETAILS**

**OPRL Ltd**  
Beaumont House  
Beaumont Rd  
Banbury  
Oxfordshire OX16 1RH

**KEY CONTACTS**

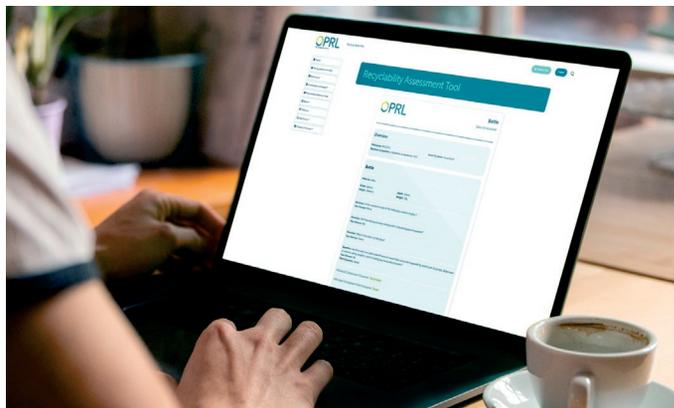
**Jude Allan**  
Managing Director, OPRL

**KEY INFORMATION**

**OPRL is a not-for-profit organisation that provides standardised recycling instructions on product packaging**

“The packaging sector is in mid-transformation,” says Jude Allan, MD at OPRL. “With pEPR<sup>1</sup> reporting and eco-modulation underway in the UK, and PPWR<sup>2</sup> taking shaping in the EU, OPRL is responding to a huge number of questions about new legislation and responsibilities. Primarily, we help brands to navigate the intricacies of RAM<sup>3</sup> and ensure that our recycling labels continue to inform consumers. However, with areas such as mandatory labelling for pEPR and PPWR yet to be defined, we are dealing with ‘known unknowns’,” she notes.

“So, what do we know? As modulated fees are introduced, accurate RAM assessments become even more important for brands looking to control costs. Also, Simpler Recycling’s consistent collections across England make it easier to communicate with consumers. Increased recycling leads directly to reduced pEPR fees – but only if consumers are kept in the loop.



“Consumers want to recycle correctly but, without clear labelling, even the best intentions can go awry”

Consumers want to recycle correctly but, without clear labelling, even the best intentions can go awry. With such huge investment into systems to make the value chain more sustainable, the final hurdle is consumer engagement.

“Amid the complexity of packaging reform, we must keep consumers informed and engaged. Without that, no regulation, however well-designed, will deliver the outcomes we’re aiming for.”

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> pEPR – Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging
- <sup>2</sup> PPWR – The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation
- <sup>3</sup> Recycling Assessment Methodology

# A SIMPLER WAY TO MANAGE PACKAGING RECYCLABILITY

We understand that the packaging landscape is challenging, and it seems ever changing but you don't have to navigate it alone. We're involved in the key conversations, ensuring our members always know what's changing and how it will affect them.

We're here with expert guidance when you need it, and simple, reliable tools when you don't. OPRL is more than recycling labels. We're the UK's only independent authority on the recyclability of packaging, supporting businesses to make clear, compliant decisions.

**WE GO**  
→ **BEYOND**  
**THE LABEL**



DISCOVER MEMBERSHIP  
[OPRL.ORG.UK/JOIN](http://OPRL.ORG.UK/JOIN)

**OPRL**

# Introducing The Good Cup

**DETAILS**

**No More Lids Limited**  
3A Doublebois  
Industrial Estate  
Liskeard  
Cornwall PL14 6LE  
t: 07565 385278

**KEY CONTACTS**

**Chris Brown**  
MD & Business  
Development  
**Jason Robinson**  
Operations  
**Zeus Food**  
Distribution Partner

**KEY BRANDS**

The Good Cup

↙ The Good Cup, created by award-winning designer Cyril Drouet has begun to change convention in the short time it has been available in the UK. Its unique integrated fold, lock lid, eliminates the need for separate lids. This, along with the 1000-cup pack size reduces the storage space need by 35%, as well as the logistics carbon footprint.

The Good Cup can be used for hot and cold drinks and comes in five (fully brandable) sizes. It has an aqueous coating, is certified PFAS-free, and is recyclable and home-compostable. Cornish-based No More Lids MD Chris Brown, a coffee industry veteran, says: "This is not just another cup, it's a fundamental change," he explains. "With the issues of forever chemicals and microplastics, consumers now demand more. The Good Cup is a leap forward in an industry that has lacked true innovation for some time."

Now, No More Lids is revealing its collaboration with Zeus Food as its



“This cup is a fundamental change in an industry that has lacked innovation for some time”

distribution partner, which will make The Good Cup brand more accessible to a wider audience, says Brown.

Fresh from its win at the Future of Food Competition\* in November, No More Lids is making waves. With a new food cup and artist collaboration range, and customers such as Bidfood, Alliance and Tri-Star, chances are you'll be drinking from The Good Cup soon.

\* The Future of Food Competition is a not-for-profit event curated by Fuel 10K founder Barney Mauleverer

the good cup x Craig Black



Same Look, No Plastic\*

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AT LAST THE ALTERNATIVE TO PLASTIC CUPS AND LIDS  
AWARD WINNING FOLD LOCK LID | PFAS FREE | WITH OR WITHOUT STRAW



\* Contains no PET, PE or PLA. PFAS free



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# Powering reusable drinks logistics

**DETAILS**

**Tosca Ltd**  
Floor 3, Castlemill  
Dudley DY4 7UF

**KEY CONTACTS**

**Adrian Fleming**  
Managing Director –  
Northern Europe  
e: [adrian.fleming@toscaltd.com](mailto:adrian.fleming@toscaltd.com)

**KEY BRANDS**

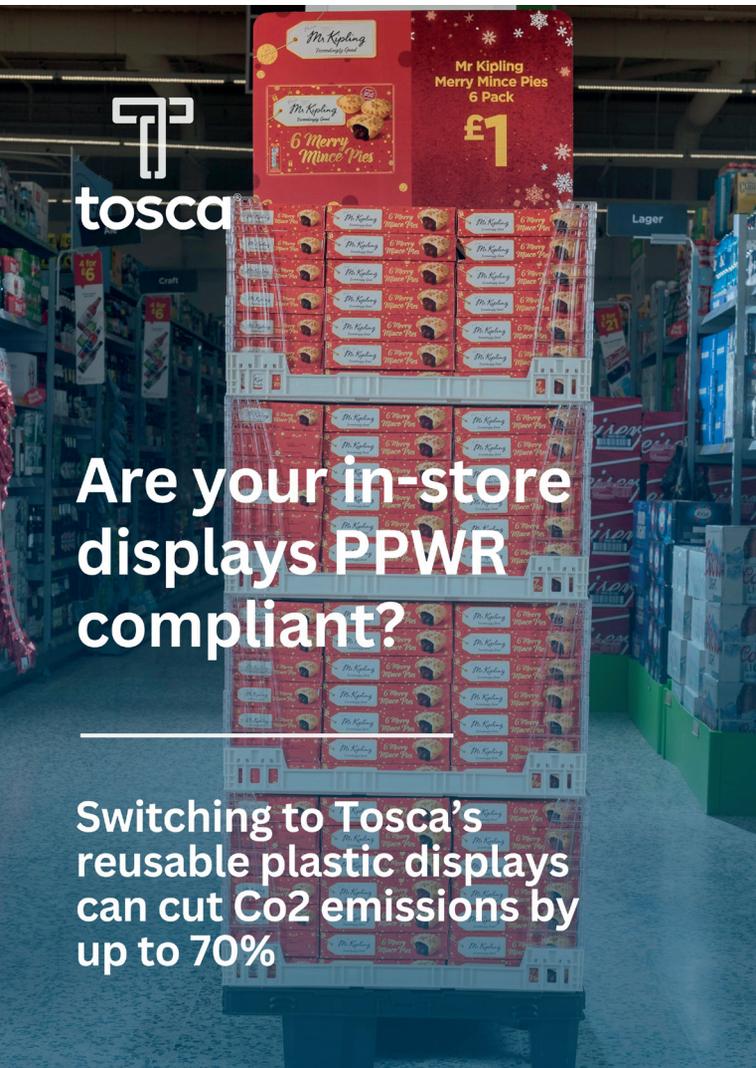
**Durable and hygienic 100% reusable plastic packaging designs, incl: Reusable plastic crates** – ventilated for airflow and strength, keeping food products fresh while meeting food safety standards  
**Beverage trays** – robust, stackable and hygienic in transit and for retail display  
**Retail-ready display bins and trays** – customisable and automation-friendly, enhancing visibility and replenishment

↙ In FMCG logistics, one of the most important developments has been the growing shift towards reusable transport packaging, particularly in high-volume sectors such as beverages. “At Tosca, we’ve seen strong momentum for our reusable beverage tray solutions, which eliminate single-use cardboard while improving product protection, handling efficiency and shelf-ready presentation – helping retailers drive sales,” says Adrian Fleming, MD – Northern Europe. “A key milestone this year has been the launch of our updated UDP half pallet, designed for fast-moving retail environments. This combines durability, lightweight performance and full compatibility with automated handling systems. Used together with Tosca’s reusable beverage trays, it improves stability during transport, simplifies store replenishment and reduces packaging waste.”  
The advantage of reusable plastic



“Our UDP half pallet is designed for fast-moving retail environments”

assets lies in their consistency and circular design, notes Fleming. “Unlike single-use materials, Tosca’s assets are built for multiple rotations, automation compatibility, repairability and full recyclability at end of life. For beverage producers and retailers, these offer a clear opportunity to build more efficient, resilient and circular logistics while boosting in-store performance and long-term supply chain efficiency.”



Are your in-store displays PPWR compliant?

Switching to Tosca’s reusable plastic displays can cut Co2 emissions by up to 70%



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Start free trial

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Email: [uk\\_sales@toscaltd.com](mailto:uk_sales@toscaltd.com)  
Phone: +44 0845 2000 001

# Performance where it really matters

## DETAILS

**VPK Packaging UK & Ireland**  
Stoke Albany Road  
Desborough  
Kettering NN14 2SR  
t: 01536 760266

## KEY CONTACTS

**Adam Platts**  
Sales & Marketing Director

## KEY PRODUCTS

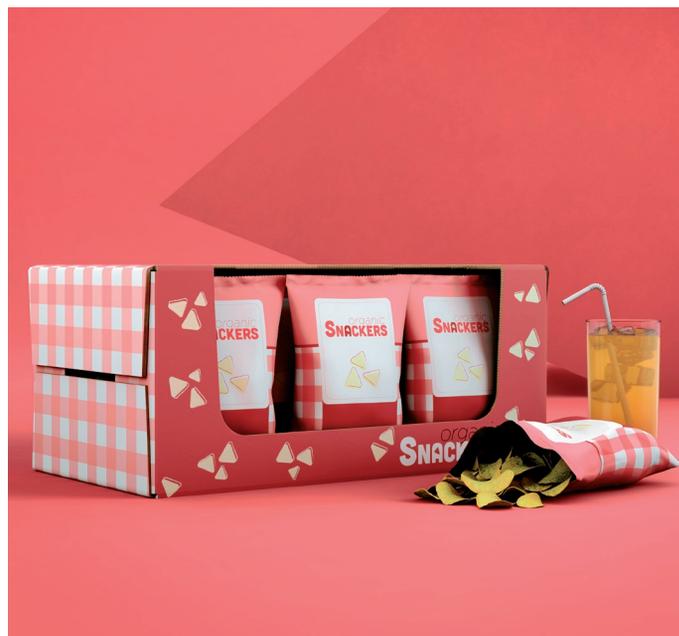
Recycled paper  
Corrugated sheets  
Corrugated packaging  
Solid board packaging  
Cores and edge protectors

Corrugated packaging is no longer simply a transport solution sitting in the background of the supply chain. Increasingly, it plays a visible role at the fixture, helping brands secure standout, improve shopper navigation and maximise the impact of valuable retail space.

In-store, packaging has become part of the marketing toolkit. Well-designed shelf-ready packaging (SRP) formats can deliver stronger brand blocking, clearer product presentation and faster shopper recognition at the point of sale.

In busy grocery environments, where customers make decisions quickly, these factors can have a measurable impact on product visibility and sales performance. "Corrugated SRP allows brands to present products cleanly and consistently while maintaining the structural integrity required to support stacked displays and high-volume retail environments," explains Adam Platts, sales & marketing director at VPK Packaging UK & Ireland. As the retail media space continues to grow in value, the ability of packaging to reinforce brand presence on-shelf has become an increasingly important advantage.

"At VPK Packaging UK & Ireland, we have focused on developing solutions that support this dual role of packaging as both a retail display and a supply chain asset," he notes. "One example is our StackIT single piece SRP system, a



**"In grocery networks, where millions of cases move every week, small improvements in pack design can translate into significant operational gains"**

modular family of corrugated designs engineered to improve on-shelf presentation while simplifying store operations. This includes formats such as pre-glued pop-up trays, friction-lock stackers and side-lock solutions that can be activated quickly in-store while maintaining stable product presentation and strong stacking performance. For retailers, this means faster replenishment and reduced handling time. Shelf-ready formats that open cleanly and present products immediately help reduce labour and ensure consistent presentation."

These structural improvements also support greater distribution efficiency, adds Platts. "Corrugated packaging can be engineered to optimise pallet efficiency, improve product protection and reduce handling complexity across the supply chain," he says. "In grocery networks, where millions of cases move every week, small improvements in pack design can translate into significant operational gains."

Packaging is optimised for pallet configuration, material efficiency and structural performance before it ever reaches the packing line. The result is packaging that works across the entire journey, from production and logistics through to retail display and shopper engagement. Platts sums up: "When designed effectively, secondary packaging becomes a marketing tool that helps brands stand out on-shelf, supports retailer efficiency and improves the performance of the supply chain behind it."





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deserve **great**  
**packaging**



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