Packaging



Drive to improve

Despite recent cost-of-living challenges, packaging suppliers maintain that, with consumers still focused on sustainability, they are continuing to drive for overall improvement in materials and design. But recycling infrastructure remains challenging



In 2024, a survey by Deloitte* investigated whether UK consumers are still invested in sustainability and consider it a priority. While noting that, on balance, fewer consumers had been adopting a more sustainable lifestyle compared with 2023, the report still highlighted the fact that "a significant number" of consumers continued with the top sustainable behaviours observed in the previous year. Indeed, 73% reported recycling household waste, 68% reducing food waste and 61% limiting the use of single plastics. So, there is no let-up in the pressure on packaging suppliers and manufacturers to continue to find new materials and ways to improve environmental standards, not only for their own businesses but for those of their clients.

As Gerald Rebitzer, sustainability &

public affairs senior director at Amcor, says: "Adopting more sustainable packaging – such as moving to recycle-ready solutions, bio-based materials, minimisation of material usage and including post-recycled content in place of virgin resources – are ways brands can demonstrate commitment to drive circularity, reduce their carbon footprint and help consumers buy more sustainably," he says. "Over 95% of our rigid packaging by weight is recyclable and 94% of our flexible portfolio has a recycle-ready solution available."

Sustainability continues to drive innovation across every industry, and the flexible packaging category has seen a surge in demand as people look for lightweight minimal-material solutions to meet their sustainability goals, says Parkside group marketing manager Julia O'Loughlin. "There

has been a definite push to make flexible packaging more circular, with a rise in recycle-ready solutions that are compatible with front-of-store recycling schemes, paperisation and compostable packaging," she says. "In 2024, we launched the Recoflex range of fully recyclable flexible materials, which... includes high-performance recycle-ready PP and PET solutions as well as innovative paper materials in a variety of configurations.

Reusable packaging has advanced significantly, driven by technology and packaging regulations across Europe, says Richard Evans, director of sales downstream at Tosca UK. "The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is reinforcing circularity," he says. Tosca's R&D team is developing new circular packaging solutions to enhance sustainability



and efficiency, with a focus on packaging innovation that supports a circular economy while guaranteeing successful supply chain operations.

At SIG, marketing manager UK & Ireland Caroline Barr says that, in 2024, the aseptic packaging sector experienced notable advancements, driven by technological innovations and a strong commitment to sustainability. "Recent developments in aseptic processing have enhanced the product scope that could run this process, including beverages with particulates or probiotics," she notes. "These advancements are offering consumers more options in the sector of shelf-stable foods."

As for glass, lightweighting has been a key focus for the industry, helping to reduce carbon emissions while maintaining the strength and shape of existing bottles, says Encirc sustainability director Fiacre O'Donnell. "In February, Vidrala, our parent company, launched a new 300g 75cl bottle. For every million bottles produced the new bottle will reduce carbon emissions by more than 48 tonnes," he reveals.

In the steel market, meanwhile, changes are afoot in Wales as Tata Steel incorporates electric arc furnace (EAF) technology to its business. Due to be introduced this year, it produces high-grade steel with the same quality, formability and AA+ food safety standards as traditional methods, while significantly cutting carbon emissions and allowing a significant increase in recycled content, reveals Adrian Davies, market strategy at Tata.

Meanwhile, with growing numbers of consumers buying in bulk and bringing

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Analysis

multipacks into their homes, there has been rising retailer interest in – and expectations of – secondary packaging, from functionality, sustainability and brand recognition perspectives, notes Keenan Hoar Perez, regional sales manager, UK, Europe & Latin America at pack handles manufacturer PakTech. These multipacks need to stand out, look good in-store and offer dependable performance all the way to the kitchen cupboard, as well as minimising environmental impact, he says.

Minimalism and EPR in view

While minimalism in packaging plays a role, reusable packaging delivers a greater impact in driving sustainability, maintains Tosca's Evans. As a reusable packaging pooler, Tosca supports the shift towards a circular economy by eliminating waste and improving supply chain efficiency. However, while Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) encourages circularity, it introduces financial and logistical challenges for businesses, he adds.

Encirc's O'Donnell says reducing overall material use is beneficial for all packaging types. "The less raw material used, the more sustainable the entire sector can be," he says. "Glass is the most sustainable option for the future of packaging, offering infinite recyclability and chemical inertness. However, EPR is causing challenges to some players in the glass sector, who may have to divert funds away from sustainability projects to deal with the increased costs imposed. The way EPR fees are calculated needs to be reworked, because a large part of the fee is based on weight, not individual bottles. This severely punishes glass as a material in particular and could push brands to less eco-friendly and less healthy packaging."

DS Smith expects to see more minimalism, according to packaging sales, marketing & innovation director Liz Manuvelpillai. "According to our research, 26% of online shoppers said they would stop ordering from a company if they experienced too much unnecessary packaging¹," she says. "So, making the design more compact will mean less waste alongside making it more appealing for consumers. Also, packaging designs that allow for multiple uses or applications is something we could also see more of."



However, Parkside's McLoughlin argues that 'eco-friendly' packaging doesn't really exist, "as every pack, no matter how it's made, consumes some of our planet's resources and produces emissions". Packaging design is a "delicate balancing act" as the primary purpose is to prevent waste by protecting contents, not to become waste itself, she says. "So, balancing efficient material use with product protection - particularly in food applications – is critical, as the environmental impact of food waste is much higher than that of packaging waste. Minimalism helps drive those efficiencies, making the balancing act easier to execute."

"EPR has focused minds on developing circular solutions, but it remains to be seen if the modulated fees will encourage companies to act. EPR as it stands does present challenges, however," she adds. "For example, flexibles do offer a more lightweight, minimal material, sustainable option for many brands, but Defra's Recyclability Assessment Methodology currently limits them to a middling amber rating at best, simply because mainstream recycling infrastructure is lacking. We hope to see this change as simpler recycling comes into force."

Minimal material and lightweight design are at the forefront of every PakTech concept, says Hoar Perez. "The product should speak for itself and unnecessary packaging that wraps around the product isn't needed. Rigid recycled plastic packaging handles eliminate the need for large quantities of plastic shrinkwrap film or cardboard outers. In addition, shelf appeal and brand recognition were the motivators behind our recent development of can-facing technology. This enables co-packers and CPG manufacturers to ensure the artwork of products are perfectly aligned for optimal retail display."



Rising material costs boost local need

According to Tosca's Evans, material costs remain volatile. with wood prices rising again in early 2025. "Stability is a challenge, highlighting the need for long-term solutions," he says. "Our 100% reusable plastic packaging offers a cost-stable recyclable alternative to single-use materials, reducing reliance on fluctuating raw material markets."

Although material prices are showing signs of stabilisation, volatility remains a factor, says Parkside's McLoughlin. Prices for certain materials, such as NBSK pulp, are experiencing downward pressure due to oversupply, while BOPP, LDPE and PET continue to

face upward price pressures driven by rising energy costs, geopolitical factors (such as the Ukraine conflict), and supply chain disruptions. The LME metals market remains volatile, with fluctuations driven by geopolitical tensions and trade policies. While paper-based and flexible packaging, are stabilising or even slightly decreasing, overall price stability is still contingent on external factors. including energy prices and global trade dynamics, she notes.

"So, diverse local supply chains are hugely important, helping us to be more agile while minimising costs and disruption for customers," she says.

For glass, prices are stabilising across the supply chain, but Encirc is eager to obtain as much material from local markets as possible, says O'Donnell. "Local supply is a necessity for reducing the carbon emissions of the bottles we produce and helping us with our mission to decarbonise glass and, eventually, make it carbon-free," he says.

As for steel, local supply of materials is definitely a factor for the value chain and Tata Steel's move to EAF technology will significantly increase its need for UK-sourced steel scrap. This will support domestic recycling and reduce the country's reliance on exporting scrap overseas, notes

Davies. "Last year, for example, Tata Steel consumed around o.5m tonnes of steel scrap annually, resulting in approximately 17% recycled content," he says. "Under the EAF proposal, this will increase to around 2.5m tonnes per year, sourced from the 7-8m tonnes of steel scrap that the UK currently exports. This will enable us to achieve at least 50% recycled content for packaging steels, strengthening the circular economy for steel in the UK.

"Prioritising local scrap supply means we improve resource efficiency and sustainability, enhance supply chain resilience and reduce transport-related emissions."

"Over the last 30 years, the weight of steel cans across Europe has been reduced by around a third, significantly cutting resource consumption and environmental impact²," says Tata Steel's Davies. "Today, the body of a can is no thicker than a human hair, yet it remains incredibly strong and robust³. This approach aligns with the broader industry shift towards minimalism in packaging – reducing material use without compromising functionality and ensuring packaging remains a vital part of the circular economy."

Minimalism, while certainly a consideration, is only one part of varied strategies to achieve more sustainable packaging, contends Amcor's Rebitzer. "Recyclability, reusability and material innovation all play a role," he notes. "In fact, our recent research4 into consumer perceptions of sustainability claims showed that consumers feel 'biodegradable', 'compostable' and 'recyclable' packaging are the least

damaging to the environment, while 'less packaging' is ranked fourth. In part, this may be because consumers associate less packaging with loss of product protection and convenience."

Strategies to minimise packaging, while still offering the product protection consumers expect include reduced head-space in the pack, thinner materials that still maintain product freshness and switching from trays for products like meat and cheese to much lighter-weight flow packs and skin films, he adds.

More in favour of EPR is Amcor's Rebitzer, who says schemes like this are an important mechanism for incentivising recyclable and more sustainable packaging, which he notes will drive a circular economy and increase the availability of good -quality recycled content. "With well-designed eco-modulation of EPR schemes, each material type should 'pay its own way', meaning the fees for that type of

material fund the collection, sorting and recycling of that material," he says. "This is necessary to reflect different recyclability levels. Additionally, EPR systems should operate on a 'net cost' basis for full transparency."

At SIG, Barr also notes that advocating through industry associations creates a stronger voice for favourable recycling policies and regulations at global. regional and national level. "EPR incentivises the uptake of recyclable packaging and investment in collection, sorting and recycling infrastructure by holding manufacturers responsible for their products and packaging through the lifecycle," she says. "In cases where EPR legislation alone does not achieve high collection rates, we support the use of deposit return schemes to encourage people to return used items for recycling. We also work with partners to develop effective systems for collection and recycling in countries where there is no enabling legislation."

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Focus on material development

At Aquapak, CEO Mark Lapping says the main materials trend the company is seeing is a switch away from conventional plastics to paper-based materials. "However, paper often needs to be combined with other materials to give packaging the functionality needed by brands and consumers," he notes. This is why Aquapak's Hydropol brand provides functionality yet still turns non-recyclable packaging into something fully recyclable, he adds.

Bioplastics, with materials based on corn starch, sugarcane, vegetable oils and even seaweed, are also achieving greater interest as environmentally friendly materials, says Lapping. "Yet, the bioplastics market is in its infancy and the challenge new solutions providers face is that becoming commercially viable at scale is an R&D process that takes years to complete."

The 'paperisation' trend continued to gain momentum in 2024, with fibre-based alternatives replacing traditional packaging, says Amcor's Rebitzer. "Switching to paper is an easier option for products that require low to no barrier," he notes. "However, for products that are sensitive to oxygen and moisture, paper is not a natural fit. But, thanks to innovations such as high-barrier AmFiber Performance Paper, brands are able to launch products [such as instant coffee, spices, chocolate bars in paper-based pouches, sachets and wrappers. Of course, it's key that these paperbased materials are also designed for recycling, as that's not always a given with paper," he warns.

The advancement of paper-based materials means they are now more viable for a much wider range of applications, agrees Parkside's O'Loughlin. "Our Recoflex range, for example, includes options that are suitable for snacks, produce, convenience food, meat, and even frozen applications, demonstrating the versatility of paper-based materials in the right hands." She also points to "an explosion of innovative printing and finishing techniques" as brands look to differentiate themselves. "This isn't just impacting the way packaging looks, but also the way it feels, with many adding tactile finishes to their labels and packaging to create a more memorable sensory experience for consumers."



SIG's Barr also highlights the trend towards 'fiberisation/paperisation' and points to its "carton bottle" SIG Dome, which she says is made primarily from renewable paperboard. "SIG is actively increasing the paper content in its beverage cartons to enhance renewability, further reduce the carbon footprint, and simplify recycling. With an interim target of 85% paper content by 2025, SIG aims to improve pulp yield at paper mills and ensure compatibility with standard paper recycling facilities. This approach is particularly crucial in markets without dedicated beverage carton recycling infrastructure, helping to unlock recycling opportunities."

At DS Smith, the company is focusing on finding solutions of packaging materials, specifically alternative fibres and coatings, says Manuvelpillai. "Our R&D team have created an innovative barrier option which uses biodegradable and water-soluble polymers to protect a box on its journey

to the customer," she says. "These can be separated from recyclable fibres during the recycling process. Furthermore, our partnership with Nafici Environmental Research (NER) is exploring 'second harvest' materials. This initiative aims to transform agricultural waste into paper-making pulp, potentially saving up to 10% of the virgin fibres used in papermaking."

PakTech recently introduced near infra-red (NIR) detectable packaging handles that are made from renewable grain-based biomaterials, reveals Hoar Perez. "They retain the same colour intensity and durability as our previous products, but are aligned with the goals of the UK Plastics Pact and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. We advocate collaboration throughout our supply chains and meaningful progress towards a circular economy, and NIR-detectable handles are one way we can improve plastic recyclability and help retailers advance their sustainability."



Favouring smart thinking on packs

AI-driven algorithms are increasingly being used to design products - and even design their packaging, says Amcor's Rebitzer. "With limited on-pack space, scannable QR codes can provide consumers with product info, recycling instructions and more. For example, QR codes on packaging are used as part of the SmartLabel programme.

"Brands can turn packaging into an interactive experience by incorporating QR codes," he adds. "On-pack digital codes can provide a direct link between physical packaging and digital content, allowing brands to gain insights about consumer behaviour

and preferences, vital in today's rapidly changing retail landscape."

Digital interactivity is increasingly viable for brands looking to differentiate their products and elevate their packaging, says Parkside's O'Loughlin. "Technology like QR codes can transform static packaging designs into immersive interactive experiences, while AR and VR technology can be used to engage consumers in exciting and memorable ways. This also creates a seamless link between a brand's physical and online presence, opening up opportunities for cross-selling, subscription services and... more functional options,

such as collecting consumer data. This complements the advancement of AI technology, which can analyse this data and use it to deliver optimised or even personalised experiences for consumers. AI can also be leveraged to predict trends, helping brands be proactive when adjusting branding or packaging designs."

Encirc is an advocate of the 'Smart Bottle' project, which will enable a bottle and the materials that make it to be tracked through technology like blockchain and digital twinning – from its raw materials right through to the end of its lifespan, says O'Donnell. "This transparent view of the complete journey

is imperative if we're to better understand the individual product's carbon impact," he says.

"Uniquely identifying bottles and placing them in the blockchain is also a key enabler for a digital deposit return scheme in the UK. This has huge potential going forward, with glass better suited to kerbside collection."

Digital connectivity allows manufacturers to showcase their products' story to consumers without being limited by labels, he adds. "So, consumers get more information on products and suppliers can create more individualised messaging, building brand loyalty and driving demand."

One of the most exciting materials developments is the introduction of low-CO2 steel, particularly those produced using electric arc furnace (EAF) technology, says Tata Steel's Davies. "This shift significantly reduces carbon emissions by increasing recycled content and using renewable energy sources where possible."

Sustainability and recycling

Aquapak has recently conducted new benchmark research⁵ with consumers to understand how they feel about packaging sustainability, reveals Lapping. "Three in 10 say they do consider whether packaging is recyclable as part of their purchasing decision, and a further 49% sometimes consider its recyclability," he reveals. "When it comes to choice, 61% of Brits says they are more likely to buy a brand of crisps that uses paper packets that can be recycled at home, rather than plastic recycling that needs to

be returned to the store for recycling. Similarly, 66% are likely to buy dry goods, such as pasta, bread and biscuits, where packaging is 100% recyclable, highlighting that, despite the cost-of-living crisis, British shoppers would rather opt for sustainable packaging where they can."

However, recycling remains a minefield for consumers, he says. Almost three-quarters (71%) of shoppers admit to being confused by what materials can be recycled and which cannot, with the problems compounded by a lack of clear instructions on-pack. "Of course initiatives like the OPRL 'swoosh' will help, but the industry needs to get much better at helping consumers with clearer instructions.

SIG's Barr agrees that despite recent consumer spending habits, the focus on packaging sustainability has never gone away. "Our own research⁶ shows that it is still one of the most important factors when buying food and drink,

with less than 15% of respondents giving up on sustainability despite a challenging financial environment," she says. "Over 45% of respondents also said that they recycle more than they used to, showing the importance of packaging being recyclable, and easy to do so."

While consumers are still looking for sustainable and circular options. the question now is how much they are willing to pay for them, says Encirc's O'Donnell. "The cheaper we can make sustainable products, the more uptake we'll see from consumers - many either don't want, or can't afford, to pay a premium for the sustainable choice. This factor must be considered in the design of schemes such as EPR, which is set to raise the cost of sustainable materials like glass for consumers. We have a lot of work to do to develop more consistent schemes that not only help recycling but incentivise glass being kept in the UK's circular economy."

Analvsis

He points to how efficient recycling systems can be, as exemplified by Wales recycling 92% of its glass through kerbside collection. "Implementing a standardised system like that across the UK would help improve access to locally supplied cullet," he notes. "Too much glass is currently lost to landfill and incineration across the UK."

Despite financial pressures, sustainability remains a priority, says Tosca's Evans. Many consumers still choose environmentally friendly packaging when possible, but affordability can affect purchasing behaviour, he agrees. Confusion around recyclability persists due to inconsistent policies and unclear labelling, he notes. "The OPRL 'swoosh' will help, but improved recycling infrastructure is essential. Reusable packaging is a long-term solution, Reducing single-use materials and integrating returnable packaging into supply chains lowers costs, improves efficiency and supports sustainability goals."

Tata Steel's Davies agrees that consumer demand for sustainable packaging remains strong and argues that steel food cans continue to be one of the most budget-friendly and sustainable options available for consumer wallets. Also, as steel cans are universally and easily recyclable, disposal is straightforward for consumers and steel is easily separated from the waste stream using magnets, ensuring high recycling rates and minimal contamination, he notes.

Meanwhile, DS Smith has created its own set of Circular Design Metrics7 to rate and compare the circularity of packaging designs across eight different indicators, reveals Manuvelpillai. "The Circular Design Metrics are an industry-first and give a clear identification of a packaging design's sustainability performance, and where to focus attention. This has been game-changing for many of our customers in helping them meet their own sustainability goals," she says.

Consumers are increasingly ecoconscious, she adds. With 62% of people trying to buy environmentally friendly packaging, but 45% struggling due to financial constraints8, businesses must continue to prioritise sustainable practices.

"That said, there is still a lot of



confusion around what packaging can and cannot be recycled. Our research found a lack of knowledge was cited as one of the top reasons for respondents struggling to recycle9. In fact, Boomers are the most likely (54%) to recycle all their paper and cardboard with Gen Z (19%) coming last¹⁰. While there's no doubt that all generations want to play their part in helping the environment; the challenge – which legislation needs to address – is getting people to understand the role recycling plays in this and educating them on best practice for recycling their packaging."

Despite the challenging financial environment, sustainability remains a significant concern for many UK consumers, says Amcor's Rebitzer. "However, there is still widespread confusion about what packaging can be recycled and what the claims and logos all mean," he observes. "Our recent research¹¹ shows that 80% of European consumers don't understand what most sustainability logos mean. So, brands need to ensure they are incorporating clear, written claims alongside any logos on their packaging. The OPRL 'swoosh' is a positive step, and on-pack QR codes can provide consumers with more detailed recycling instructions."

Consumers are definitely still focused

on sustainability¹² – but they expect brands to meet them halfway, says Parkside's O'Loughlin. "While 76% of consumers expect retailers and brands to be more sustainable, only 68% are willing to pay more for sustainable products13. That means there is a definite gap between what consumers expect and their purchasing power. It's up to brands to work with their packaging partners to fill that gap using efficient design.

"Labelling like the OPRL 'swoosh' is an important step in the right direction, but it has to be one small step on a much bigger journey towards simpler recycling. Standardised labelling is one thing - but we need the rest of the recycling process to be standardised across the country before a real difference can be made. This is particularly pertinent for flexible materials and soft plastics."

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- com/4xbabmmz ¹³ https://tinyurl.com/54hjb2nk

Technology to transform packaging

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Hydropol™

Aquapak has developed a marine-safe, non-toxic polymer technology called HydropolTM, which breaks down harmlessly in all existing recycling streams, says Mark Lapping, chief executive officer at Aquapak Polymers. "When used in place of conventional plastic in packaging for a range of dry foods such as crisps, salted snacks and confectionery wrappers, it makes unrecyclable packaging fully recyclable because it is dissolvable and biodegradable, leaving no harmful microplastics behind," he explains. "Unlike conventional wrappers, this means consumers can put it in kerbside collections where it is recycled alongside paper, plastic, metal or food without any risk of contamination."

Hydropol gives paper a functional performance and, used in combination with metallised paper, provides a high oxygen (OTR) barrier, keeping products like crisps and nuts fresh in transit and on-shelf," he notes. "Pioneering brands





Hydropol™ breaks down harmlessly in all existing recycling streams" already recognise the advantages of packaging made with Hydropol – they can keep their products in premium condition while any concerns over harming the environment literally disappear. We look forward to Hydropol being used in a growing number of applications across a range of product categories like bakery and dry foods over the coming months."



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Is sustainability your priority?

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If you are in any doubt about how much of a priority more sustainable product packaging is for your business, just ask your customers, says Amcor. "According to Mintel, over a third of customers are now basing their buying decisions on a brand's sustainability credentials¹," it notes.

"Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) fees and the new EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) are further accelerating the move to increased sustainability. PPWR regulations dictate that all packaging sold in the EU must be recyclable by design by 2030. You will also need to incorporate a minimum amount of post-consumer recycled (PCR) content into plastic packaging."

Amcor is here to support you, it adds. "Our expertise helps food and drink brands develop more sustainable packaging, design for recyclability and introduce recycled content. We provide a wide choice of more sustainable and high-performing solutions in plastic, paper and aluminium."

Innovative options to consider

Amcor's innovations offer brands and consumers a more sustainable choice, it says. "Through our extensive product portfolio, you can quickly identify solutions that offer more sustainable features. Currently, 94% of our flexible packaging portfolio offers recycle-ready alternatives, helping to reduce environmental impact while supporting a circular economy. For example, AmLite® HeatFlex Recycle-Ready is high-barrier, high-heat resistant packaging that is eligible for the On-Pack Recycling Label in the UK.

"As well as minimising the use of virgin resources, recycled content can lower your UK plastic tax and EPR fees in many countries. We recently worked with Mondelez to help make its packaging more circular. Cadbury sharing bars in the UK and Ireland are now wrapped in 80% certified recycled plastic packaging². That's the highest percentage of recycled flexible plastic used by this confectionery giant anywhere in the world. To achieve this, it uses Amcor's AmFiniti™ Recycled







66 We have the expertise to help food and drink brands develop more sustainable packaging, design for recvclability and introduce recycled content"

Content, which offers mechanically and chemically recycled material solutions.

"Across Europe, a well-loved Polish confectionery brand partnered with Amcor to develop 80% paperbased packaging that aligns with its environmental goals while preserving product appeal. They use AmFiber™ Performance Paper, our paper-based, high-barrier recyclable solution."

Additional support on your journey

To help make more informed decisions, customers can access Amcor's ASSET™ Lifecycle Assessment service. Certified by the Carbon Trust, this measures a packaging's carbon footprint and finds ways to reduce it. If a company can demonstrate a carbon footprint reduction of 20% or more, it can qualify to add a certified Carbon Trust label to its packaging, which is sure to increase consumer confidence in its product.

"Stay ahead on your packaging journey with our support, helping you discover the latest innovations that help you meet sustainability goals."

Source

- Mintel Global Outlook on Sustainability: A Consumer Study 2024-25
- ² Using ISCC certified recycled material sourced via mass halance Mass halance refers to the proportion of material coming from processing recycled plastic vs. that coming from virgin sources during the manufacturing process. This means you can't trace how much recycled plastic makes its way physically into the packaging of each individual wrapper.

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Redefining packaging

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Packaging Solutions Recycling Services Paper Products POS Display Solutions High Quality Print Changing consumer behaviours, continuing demand for sustainable solutions and upcoming legislation are key trends where DS Smith is supporting its customers.

"At DS Smith we have leading tools to help our customers in decision-making tailored to their requirements – whether that is packaging weight reduction, moving to fully recyclable solutions, plastic substitution, CO2 reduction or supply chain optimisation – many of which are complementary to the solutions that we provide," says Liz Manuvelpillai, DS Smith UK & Ireland packaging sales, marketing & innovation director.

Plastic removal

In May, DS Smith reached the milestone moment of removing over 1 billion pieces of plastic across its international markets, 16 months in advance of the 2025 target, she reveals. "Our target concerned any primary or secondary plastic packaging that has now been reduced or completely removed from customers' packaging as a direct result of our solution," she says. "The achievement has its roots in a plastic replacement and reduction programme established in 2020 as part of DS Smith's 'Now & Next Sustainability Strategy', which supports the business' 'Purpose to Redefine Packaging For A Changing World'.

"We are proud to see our UK business leading the way across all markets, removing over 274m pieces ahead of schedule. Everyday plastic items that have been replaced from supermarket shelves include fruit and vegetable punnets, plastic carriers, and shrinkwrap that is commonly found on soft drink bottles. To make this happen, we worked with some of the most iconic FMCG brands to find innovative ways to reduce plastic – from secondary packaging through to POS."

Successful case studies

DS Smith collaborated with Europe Snacks on a packing project to reduce its CO2 emissions, resulting in a drop of 23% in its carbon footprint. It also worked with Premier Foods on its



In May last year, DS Smith reached the milestone moment of removing over 1 billion pieces of plastic across its international markets, 16 months in advance of the 2025 target"

Aquaman wow display, replacing plastic rivets with recycled brown inner liners. As a result, the display is now 100% recyclable and over 200g lighter, says Manuvelpillai.

"Additionally, we supported global snacking company pladis in reducing plastic in its iconic orange Jacob's Cream Crackers box. With plastic reduction increasingly front-of-mind for retailers and demanded by consumers, pladis approached DS Smith about creating new packaging for the iconic Jacob's Crackers Selection pack, which minimised the amount of plastic waste in the shell of the packaging, while retaining the tamper-proof seal. After rigorous testing by DS Smith designers, the finished product featured 78% less plastic per pack, saving over 373,248kg of CO₂ – all the while incorporating high-quality print to the same standard as the previous solution.

"Our customers need solutions that extend beyond the box – changing shopping habits and expectations around sustainability demand that they continue to adapt to a changing world," she adds. "They need greater sight and understanding of complex supply chains to drive efficiencies and achieve challenging sustainability goals.

"Through breakthrough innovations, we are redefining packaging for a changing world, and will increasingly deliver products and services that solve our customers' challenges holistically, and sustainably."





More power to you.

From reducing costs to increasing sales, innovative corrugated packaging solutions that put you in control.

That's more power to you.

Find out how we can work together to optimise your packaging solutions.



Glass: the material of the future

DETAI

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KEY SERVICES

Glass manufacturing and filling solutions

Infinitely recyclable, chemically inert and non-porous, glass is the ultimate packaging material, says Fiacre O'Donnell, sustainability director at Encirc. "The power of this material has been a catalyst for our work to become a manufacturer of the future. inspiring us to innovate how we make, deliver and recycle our products, as well as the unique services we're able to offer our partners," he says. "This year, we've made great strides towards our ZE30 goal, producing carbon-neutral bottles from 2030. This means finding new ways to cut carbon across every area along the length of our value chain."

Encirc makes, fills and moves glass. "Our groundbreaking 360 service – an end-to-end beverage supply chain that combines glass container production, advanced filling facilities, warehousing and logistics, enabling our customers to get their products to market faster with lower environmental impact."

Beyond glass

Working with glass at the core of its operations allows Encirc to focus on eliminating waste from elsewhere in its value chain, he adds. "For example, we're replacing plastic stretch wrap with brown paper wrap on pallets shipped out for customers. Expanding this trial with more of our partners will

The power of glass has been a catalyst for our work to become a manufacturer of the future, inspiring us to innovate how we make, deliver and

Below (I): In 2024, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer visited Encirc's Elton site; (r) Fiacre O'Donnell, Sustainability Director, Encirc

recvcle our

products"





mean we're distributing zero plastic packaging – a game-changer for the logistics industry.

"Also, bulk shipping of beverages around the world in flexitanks means we can fill them in-market, reducing the shipping carbon footprint by almost half. It takes another trip out of the supply chain as we can fill our bottles at the same site where they're produced."

Building a sustainable future

2025 is set to be another important year for Encirc, he reveals. "Building on 2024, when we welcomed Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to our Elton site to discuss sustainable manufacturing, we'll continue our exploration of sustainable fuels such as hydrogen and biofuels – keystones in a net-zero industry," he says. "We're also looking to lightweight our bottle portfolio over the year. Our parent company Vidrala has launched a new 75cl 300g bottle that matches the shape and strength of its predecessor, reducing CO2 emissions by over 48 tonnes per million bottles produced. These exciting projects are just the beginning."

The future for glass is exciting, says O'Donnell. "We're proud to be championing a genuinely sustainable packaging material and pioneering the forward-looking supply chain that allows it to fulfil its potential. Glass is the best for health, taste and the environment and we aim to make it the packaging of choice for many generations to come."





We make, fill and move glass



Secondary packaging that delivers more

DETAILS

PakTech

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KEY CONTACTS

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Nancy Baker

International Sales Manager

Keenan Hoar Perez

International Sales Manager t: 001541214 9983 e: keenan.hoar@ paktech-opi.com

KEY PRODUCTS

Multi-pack handles Can handles Bottle handles Handle applicators Secondary packaging is rising up the agenda for many European consumers, brands and retailers, including those in the UK. Finding high-performance, user-friendly, sustainable solutions that truly support brands has historically felt like a conundrum. But this is exactly the conundrum PakTech has been solving for over 30 years, with its 100% recycled HDPE packaging handles.

"PakTech consistently develops new and better solutions, tailored to each customer's needs," says Keenan Hoar Perez, international sales manager. "As those are increasingly sustainability-focused, we recently replaced our carbon black handles with near-infrared (NIR) technology-based ones, manufactured from renewable, grain-based biomaterials, making sorting and recycling plastics simpler and quicker."

However, function and sustainability should not come at a cost to brand visibility or quality, he adds. "Digital



We recently replaced our carbon black handles with infrared technology-based ones"

printing enables us to apply customers' artwork directly to our multipack handles with UV-curable ink. This creates a fade- and scratch-resistant image to the top of the multipack, boosting brand visibility on-shelf and ensuring a premium look and feel. Practical and durable, our premiumquality handles are waterproof and aesthetically attractive in-store."

PAKTECH HANDLES

Made from 100% recycled containers

SMART

- · Attractive & Innovative
- · Value Added
- Smart Form & Function
- Cost Effective

SUSTAINABLE

- Made from 100% Recycled HPDE
- Repurposed from Recycled Containers
- Recyclable



PakTech has repurposed **over a billion milk jugs** into packaging handles

SIMPLE

- Easy to Apply Carry & Remove
- · Grab & Go
- Highlight Brand with Colour Accent Handles









The future is flexible with Parkside

Parkside Flexibles

Tyler Close Normanton West Yorkshire WF6 1RL t: 01924 898074

Visit our website today to learn more about how we can support your packaging journey in 2025

KEY CONTACTS

Julia O'Loughlin Group Marketing Manager

KEY TECHNOLOGIES

Parkscribe™ Park2Nature™ Popflex™ Recoflex™

It's a challenging time for the packaging industry, but Parkside's team work hard to ensure it bucks that trend, says the company.

"We've seen strong trading, boosted by new launches over the last year, including our Recoflex recyclable materials and our monopolymer lidding films," it says "Both are opening up new markets, geographically and in terms of end-use applications. as businesses seek more functional sustainable packaging solutions."

Paper is hugely popular right now, but alongside offering 'the usual' materials, Parkside also specialises in tricky solutions that require specific tailoring to meet a customer's needs, it adds. "After all, no two products are the same – so no two packaging solutions should be the same, either. We develop our portfolio around our customers' requirements, working collaboratively with them to deliver new innovations.

"As well as market-leading flexible



66 We've seen strong trading, boosted by new launches over the last year"

packaging and technical capabilities, our expertise ensures our offering from innovative coatings to laminates and materials – is always exceptional."

2025 will see a step-up for sustainable materials, improving functionality, recyclability and compostability, it adds. "We aim to increase innovation to meet this demand, staying ahead in a rapidly evolving market."

Unlock a **Flexible Future**

Creating new possibilities for elevated pack functionality from easy open & reclosable pouches to recycle ready lidding films



Recoflex™

Unlock the future of recyclable flexible packaging



Compostable innovation



Laser scribing technology











Designing packaging for the future

DETAILS

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KEY CONTACTS

Caroline Barr Marketing Manager UK & Ireland

KEY BRANDS

SIG Terra Alu-free + Full barrier SIG Terra Alu-free SIG Terra Alu-free + Forest-based polymers

Source

- 1 based on independent ISO-compliant life-cycle assessments cradle to grave for Europe: go.sig. biz/l/251992/2024-06-07/rbypj/251992/17177555 531Q5SUmoz/LCA_SIG_Terra_ Alu_free_and_SIG_Terra_Alu_ free_Forest_based_polymers_ an.pdf
- ² based on an independent ISO-compliant life-cycle assessment cradle to grave for China
- Waste Regulation a
 European Union law that
 aims to reduce packaging
 waste and pollution, due to be
 implemented in the UK from
 August 2026
- 4 Extended Producer Responsibility, shifting the cost of packaging waste management from local authorities to producers in the UK, introduced in 2024

SIG is always innovating — whether it's developing new packaging structures to contribute towards a circular economy or introducing new packaging formats to the market to make consumers' lives easier. One example of SIG's pioneering portfolio is SIG Terra Alu-free + Full barrier, the world's first aseptic carton packaging material without aluminium layer, providing full barrier properties for a wide range of products — an innovation in carton packaging and the newest addition to the SIG Terra range.

Innovations in the SIG Terra portfolio industry-leading firsts and exclusives that offer both on-shelf appeal and stand-out environmental credentials, says Caroline Barr, marketing manager UK & Ireland at SIG. "SIG Terra Alu-free + Full barrier extends SIG's lower-carbon packaging materials without aluminium layer – already available for plain white milk – for wider use with oxygen-sensitive products such as fruit juices, syrups, flavoured milk or plant-based drinks," she explains.

"SIG led the industry with the firstever aluminium-free solutions for aseptic cartons. By eliminating the need for an aluminium layer, SIG Terra Alu-Free cuts the carbon footprint of SIG's standard packaging material by 27% when launched in 2010. SIG Terra Alu-Free + Forest-based polymers took

66 We are making continuous progress to develop an aseptic aluminiumfree packaging material with full barrier protection and a paper content of at least 90% by 2030 - with an interim target of at least 85% by the end

of this year"



this one step further in 2017, offering a 63%¹ lower carbon footprint than SIG's standard packaging material by linking all polymers used to renewable forest-based materials via a certified mass-balance system. SIG Terra Alu-free + Full barrier cuts the already low carbon footprint of standard SIG carton packaging material by a further 25%²."

By taking out the aluminium layer and replacing it with an innovative, ultra-thin, polymer-based barrier, SIG Terra Alu-free + Full barrier offers the potential to simplify the recycling process for beverage cartons, with just two materials to separate – paperboard and polymers – instead of three.

"Sustainability – and recyclability in particular – is still an important decision-making factor among consumers," says Barr. "With new regulations like PPWR³, EPR⁴ and England's new Simpler Recycling reform coming into play from March 2025, SIG is committed to offering sustainable food and drink packaging innovations on the market and will continue to design to contribute towards a circular economy.

"We are making continuous progress to develop an aseptic aluminium-free packaging material with full barrier protection and a paper content of at least 90% by 2030 – with an interim target of at least 85% by the end of this year. Our customers, together with retailers and consumers, are increasingly demanding low-carbon, sustainable packaging solutions that are easy to recycle. SIG Terra packaging materials help to answer this plea."









Tata Steel UK

Electrifying packaging steels

DETAILS

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(from April 2025) **Sarah Passmore**Commercial Manager,

Packaging

Adrian Davies

Market Strategy, Tata Steel
Nicola Iones

Manager, Steel Packaging Recycling

Geraint Lodwig Product Manager, Packaging

KEY BRANDS

Protact® Polymer coated steel Tinplate ECCS for a wide range of packaging applications

As sustainability drives buying decisions, material choice plays a vital role in decarbonisation, says Adrian Davies, market strategy at Tata Steel, noting: "A key area for packaging innovation is greener steelmaking. Tata Steel UK is leading this transformation with its commitment to Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) technology, which will produce high-grade packaging steel with 50% lower CO2 emissions and at least 50% recycled content. This provides a sustainable solution for everyday essentials, such as food cans, while maintaining quality, formability and AA+ food safety standards."

Tata Steel's shift to EAF technology at Port Talbot marks a major step for the UK's packaging sector, he notes. "Unlike traditional blast furnaces, EAFs use electrical energy to melt scrap steel, reducing emissions and supporting domestic recycling by utilising some of the 8 million tonnes of steel scrap the UK currently exports annually.



66 Using EAFs to melt scrap steel reduces emissions and supports domestic recycling"

"For retailers, adopting low-CO2 steel packaging aligns with consumer expectations, enhances brand reputation, and strengthens supply chain resilience. EAF steelmaking means steel packaging reduces reliance on virgin materials. By championing sustainable steel, retailers can drive emissions reduction and reinforce their sustainability credentials."

Electrifyingpackaging steel

We're leading the way in the next generation of packaging steel, made sustainably using Electric Arc Furnace technology.

Our steel will contain at least 50% recycled content and reduce carbon emissions by 50%, while maintaining the high quality you expect. This unique innovation in packaging steel aligns with the ambitious Net Zero and sustainability targets of brands and retailers, marking a major step forward in building a truly circular economy.



The power of reusable packaging

DETAILS

Tosca Ltd

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KEY CONTACTS

Richard Evans
Director of Sales
Downstream

KEY PRODUCTS

Durable and hygienic 100% reusable plastic packaging designs, including:

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

Efficiency, sustainability and cost control are more critical than ever in food and beverage supply chains. Tosca's 100% reusable plastic packaging and pooling solutions help businesses cut single-use packaging, reduce costs and improve operations, says the company. "Our pooling model guarantees asset availability and operational success, ensuring businesses always have the packaging they need while streamlining operations and eliminating supply chain disruptions," it notes. "In the past year, our expanded global reach has seen us partner with more businesses to deliver smarter, more sustainable packaging of the highest hygiene, food and sustainability standards."

As the leading single-source provider for reusable plastic food and beverage packaging, Tosca offers end-to-end solutions, flexible service, reliable supply and automation-ready designs, it says. "Our nestable, foldable,



66 Nestable, foldable and stackable packaging allows more products per trip"

and stackable packaging products maximise transport efficiency, allowing more products per trip, fewer empty runs and lower fuel use—cutting logistics costs and carbon footprint.

"In-house manufacture and R&D means we continuously refine products for efficiency, durability and sustainability, keeping customers ahead of industry demands."



See how much you could save with our pooling and packaging solutions Send an email to uk_sales@toscaltd.com Or give us a call: +44 0845 2000 001

100% reusable and recyclable plastic packaging and pooling solutions

We focus on your supply chain, so you can focus on your business, with a flexible and sustainable service offering:

Pool · Rent · Buy · Service



How cartons can help us decarbonise

DETAILS

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KEY CONTACTS

Berit Hoffmann

Marketing Director, Tetra Pak Northern Europe

KEY BRANDS

Tetra Recart® Tetra Pak®

For more information on Tetra Recart® and other packaging solutions, visit www.tetrapak.com

Source

- ¹ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation study, Food systems account for over one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, 2021
- ² HSBC Future of Food Report, 2023
- ³ Tetra Pak Index Report, The Future of Health and Nutrition, 2023
- 4 https://www.tetrapak.com/ sustainability/focus-areas/ food-access-availabilityand-resilience/protectingperishable-foods
- 5 For every plastic package that is replaced today by a carton package for an equivalent amount of food in our core categories such as aseptic juice and milk, the immediate impact would be a reduction of the plastic amount in the market by approximately 70% and a significant reduction in CO2 as well, because the average Tetra Pak beverage carton is made of 70% paperboard. Comparison based on weight.
- 6 Life Cycle Assessment Ireland, 2022, Comparative Life Cycle Assessment of Tetra Pak® carton packages and alternative packaging systems for beverages and liquid food on the UK and Irish market
- 7 Lifecycle Assessment Report, European Market of Tetra Recart® 390ml comparison to glass jar 390ml, 2020
- glass jar 390ml, 2020 ⁸ Four environmental reasons to choose Tetra Recart® infrographic, Tetra Pak, 2024
- 9 YouGov survey on plastic use, 2024
- Tetra Pak Ready-Made Sauces Report, 2021

It has never been more important for the food industry to prioritise decarbonisation, says Berit Hoffmann, marketing director North Europe at Tetra Pak. The global food system still accounts for one-third of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide¹. Meanwhile, demand for food supplies is increasing, with consumption expected to rise by more than 50% by 2050². Plus, wider awareness of the food system's impact on our planet is continuing to grow, with over half (54%) considering the planet when making food choices³.

Finding different ways to reduce food industry carbon emissions will play a crucial role in tackling climate change. One piece of this puzzle is considering the different packaging choices available, and assessing their adoption based on what foods a company is packaging along with its supply chain.

Beverage cartons play a crucial role in sustainable food systems by ensuring the safety and quality of nutritious food and beverages, such as milk⁴, says Hoffmann. They help to reducing food waste; minimise plastic usage⁵; and enhance efficiency in manufacturing, distribution and storage.

The anatomy of a carton

The average Tetra Pak beverage carton is made up of 70% paperboard; a renewable material from FSC®-certified forests and other controlled sources. The rest of the carton package is composed of plastic (25% average) and aluminium (5% ave), which protect food from oxygen and light, allowing it to be safely consumed for up to 12 months without refrigeration or preservatives.

A higher share of renewable materials can reduce the impact of carbon emissions when packaging foods. For example, Tetra Pak's Tetra Recart® carton



66 A higher share of renewable materials can reduce the impact of carbon emissions when packaging food and beverages"

Berit Hoffmann, Tetra Pak Northern Europe packages – suitable for products ranging from pet food and packaged fruit and vegetables to ready-made sauces – have a lower climate impact than alternatives such as glass?. Their lightweight, rectangular design also means 10-20% more units can be transported per truck compared to cans, reducing the number of trucks on the road8. For retailers, as well as having a great shelf impact and large surface area for communication, cartons can fit easily on shelves – resulting in less stock replenishment and more efficient shipments.

Adopting carton packaging can also help align with changing shopper expectations around packaging alternatives, with research finding 43% of consumers are now intending to reduce single-use plastics globally. Tetra Pak's 'Ready-Made Sauces' Report has also shown that functionality is a key consideration for consumers, and Tetra Recart® carton packages are easy to use, pour from, and dispose of 10.

The future food system

"As we continue to work towards decarbonising the global food system, retailers should consider the impact of packaging and understand whether there's room for improvement," says Hoffmann. "Accelerating the

adoption of carton packaging can support the transition away from fossil-based resources, towards packaging with a greater share of renewable materials."



The convenient food package - Tetra Recart®

Tetra Recart® cartons are lightweight and easily stackable, with a space saving shape. Manufactured with paperboard from FSC® certified forests and other controlled sources.

Make an informed choice, consider Tetra Recart packages for your cooking sauce products.

www.tetrapak.co.uk

The FSC license code for Tetra Pak is FSC® C014047

Find out more



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Editorial feature Packaging



Grocer miss it, miss out

94%¹ of retail buyers find The Grocer's category and ranking reports useful and informative. No wonder 90%² of Britain's top 20 biggest grocery brands advertise with The Grocer.

Sources: 1 The Grocer Reader Survey 2021. 2 Britain's Biggest Brands 2023 (NiQ 52 w/e 31 December 2022) who have advertised with The Grocer during Jan 2022 – Sept 2023.

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