

# Redpack®

Packaging Machinery

# Packaging trends 2025 and beyond

# Insights and ideas to help your business thrive



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## Packaging today: Creating the right balance for your business

There's no doubt about it. Packaging your product is more challenging than ever, with cost, sustainability and consumer expectation creating a complex balancing act for producers, brands and retailers.

You reduce your pack size so you're not transporting air and your consumer thinks they're getting less product for their money. You switch to low or no plastic packaging on fresh produce and reduce the life on your product, adding to a growing food waste problem. You want to use more post-consumer waste in your packaging to move towards a circular economy, but the recycling infrastructure holds you back.

All challenges that can create an impasse for a busy business. But there can be a way forward.

This guide will help you consider the options and make the right packaging choices for your business, customer and the environment. And if you still need support to find your way, the experts at Redpack are here to help.

# CHAPTER 1

## Challenges facing producers, brands and packaging businesses in 2025

The United Kingdom generates around 200 million of tonnes of waste every year, and while municipal recycling rates more than quadrupled between 2000 and 2019, there are concerns that recycling has reached a plateau<sup>1</sup>.

The government is placing an increasing focus on recycling, aiming for 55 per cent of household waste recycled by the end of 2025, but it's a challenge that requires changes to infrastructure, business practices and consumer behaviour if we're to see a significant uptick in recycling and a downturn in the use of virgin materials.

But becoming more sustainable isn't about cutting plastics out of your packaging portfolio entirely. In fact, knee-jerk reactions could lead to 'green washing', with intended improvements potentially increasing your carbon impact in other ways and even reducing recyclability.

And while consumers may say sustainability matters to them when it comes to packaging (55 per cent believe businesses should prioritise sustainable packaging, according to the Macfarlane Unboxing Survey<sup>2</sup>), 42 per cent say it only matters if sustainability doesn't significantly increase costs.

So, for producers and packagers, balancing what consumers say matters with what they're prepared to pay for, continues to be a challenge.

**42 per cent of consumers want manufacturers to prioritise recyclable packaging<sup>3</sup>**



1 - Waste management in the UK - statistics & facts | Statista

2 - Macfarlane unboxing survey - what it means for your packaging

3 - 5 Major Innovative Alternatives to Overcome the Plastic Problem

## CHALLENGE 1: Consumer demand vs. consumer understanding

The reality is that the average shopper isn't aware of what 'more sustainable packaging' means and, when more sustainable options are introduced, there can be confusion about both the quality and value of the product, despite nothing else having changed.

For example, many retailers are moving to flow wrapped mince to reduce the need for gas-flushed solid plastic trays with a film seal. This creates efficiencies for packing operations <sup>4</sup> and increases the volume of product that can be transported, reducing the carbon impact of each pack. Yet, while there is no change to the food protection, volume or quality, many consumers initially assumed the new packs contained less meat and questioned the freshness of the meat because of the colour difference created by a different packing process.

In 2023 only 73.4 percent of residential recyclables (paper, cardboard, plastic, glass and metal) were being recycled in the UK, dropping to 52.5 per cent for plastics <sup>5</sup>

4 - Why choose flow wrapping to package mince - Redpack UK

5 - UK: packaging waste generated & recycled by material | Statista

## CHALLENGE 2: Growing regulatory pressure and legislation

As concerns about waste and environmental damage grow, many governments are strengthening legislation to address the problem. In the UK, the Plastic Packaging Tax has been designed to reduce plastic pollution and promote sustainability, with significant implications for both businesses and consumers

Introduced in the UK on April 1 2022, the aim is to drive reduction of the use of new plastic and encourage the use of recycled plastic in packaging, and its remit is likely to become more extensive. You can find out more about what that means for your business in chapter 3.

## CHALLENGE 3: Packager capability and cost

Changing packaging materials can take time and investment, as moving to new substrates might require new machinery, or at the very least a slow-down in production volumes while you or your packers adjust to a new way of working. You might need more – or fewer–people for your new approach, and packaging will need testing in transit and in-store to ensure it's fit for purpose and product damage and waste is kept to a minimum.

That doesn't mean it should be a barrier to making changes, however. Working with a partner who can design and test a new approach at every stage can ease the transition find solutions that work with existing machinery and minimise impact to both cost and deficiency.

**19 per cent of food available to consumers is waste at retail, food service and household levels <sup>6</sup>**



## Marks & Spencer lead the way with across-the-board packaging focus

M&S has been leading from the front on sustainability for many years, launching its Plan A commitment back in 2007. Now, it's focusing on reducing single use plastic and increasing closed-loop precycling, setting itself the target of 100per cent of packaging being recyclable by the end of 2025. It's also looking to remove one billion units of plastic by 2027, adding up to a 30 per cent reduction in the volume of plastic food packaging it uses.

Since 2018, the brand has removed over 3,000 tonnes of food packaging, including removing plastic trays from vegetables like broccoli, asparagus and pears, and getting rid of all black plastic in its food halls, replacing ready meal trays with mono-materials like foil.

Its holistic approach to sustainability – from packaging to plastic take back schemes and pack size reductions to reduce carbon emissions linked to transport is central to its brand DNA and what its customer demographic demands.





## CHAPTER 2

### Three 'right now' trends to tailor your packaging to the eco-conscious consumer

There's so much innovation and development in packaging substrates, from entirely fungus-based board to milk protein-based plastic film that dissolves in water, that it can be difficult to know where to look. And while it's never a good idea to make a switch without extensive cost and consumer research, there are a few mainstream trends that might work for your business and brand image.

#### #1. Mono-materials

To put it simply, when it comes to recycling, the more materials you use, the harder it will be to recycle. So, a simple switch many brands are opting for is a move to mono materials – using substrates that use just one basic, easily recycled ingredient, whether that be paper, plastic or another. This packaging tends to fall into the existing recycling infrastructure, so there's no need to wait for waste collection services to catch up with your packaging changes.

Take Lego for example. Traditionally, the toy company used cardboard outers with multiple plastic flow wrap bags inside to sort its plastic bricks. Now, kits come with fully paper packaging, so that once your build is complete, all the packaging goes straight into your paper and card recycling bin.

The downsides to using mono materials are that raw materials tend to be higher in price and can be heavier and have more carbon impact in shipping. You also need to be careful when adding extra elements. That paper sticker you've added to flow wrap to highlight a deal or brand message? It's now multi-material. You may also find that speed of production and quality of product visuals are reduced by using mono-materials. Laminates have been created to maximise throughputs on machinery and improve film clarity – qualities that mono-materials can lack.



## #2. 100 per cent bio based

Petroleum-based plastic is often demonised, despite it being a bi-product of other processes. But if your brand would benefit from using other base products, there are other ways to create plastics, using natural materials like cornstarch, sugarcane and pea starch which break down much more easily than traditional plastics.

Biodegradable packaging materials, such as polylactic acid (PLA) and plant-based fibres are more expensive than traditional plastics and production costs tend to be higher, but their long-term impact on the environment is less, as they break down more easily than petroleum-based plastics. They're already familiar to eco-conscious consumers and can form a positive part of your brand strategy if communicated well. However, it's also important to share clear instructions on disposing of bio-plastics, as disposing of them incorrectly can contaminate the recycling stream and reduce how much oil-based plastic waste is recycled. Plus, bio-plastic doesn't mean biodegradable, so consumer education is needed to ensure they're clear on the product choices they make.

## #3. Paper laminates

While many consumers believe switching from plastic to paper packaging will fix all their packaging guilt, there are still multiple downsides, from raw material cost to increased carbon impact. And if you're a food producer, product life is likely to be your biggest challenge should you want to make the switch to paper-based packaging. But if paper is right for your brand and customer, laminated paper could be a stepping stone option.

Laminating paper with plastic can increase durability and help retain the airtight seal plastic creates to keep food fresher for longer. And, if you get the balance right, laminated paper can be included in standard kerbside collections. For laminated paper to be recyclable in standard UK collections, it can only be coated on one side and non-paper elements should make up no more than 5 per cent of packaging weight<sup>7</sup>, however to meet this target, some packaging manufacturers simply make a material thicker rather than more recyclable. These percentages vary across different markets, up to 10 per cent across European markets<sup>8</sup>, but it's likely that over time, allowable laminate percentages will decrease to ensure as little plastic as possible enters the paper recycling process.

## CHAPTER 3

### What are the expectations for packaging going forward?

Under the UK government's Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme (EPR)<sup>9</sup>, UK organisations that supply or import packaging are asked to collect data on their packaging use, which is linked to financial penalties. The scheme – designed to shift the financial burden of recycling from local authorities to producers and businesses – has been in place for some time, but now the parameters are shifting to look at detail like polymer levels and recyclability, to bring sustainability and recyclability into sharper focus.

2.5m tonnes  
of plastic  
packaging  
is used in  
the UK  
every year

With this approach, DEFRA predicts that 78 per cent of all UK packaging will be able to be recycled by 2030<sup>10</sup>. For plastics, it is expected that in 2025 42 per cent will be recycled, with a 20 per cent increase expected in the next five years. Further developments in this scheme may cover closed loop materials (where only post-consumer materials can be used in the production of new packaging), however, this hasn't been included in current EPR guidance to allow producers to adapt to new guidance first.

The government also announced an increased tax rate on plastic that contains less than 30 per cent recycled material from April 2025, with the Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) now sitting at £223.69 per tonne<sup>11</sup> – almost a 10 per cent increase year on year. It's likely this approach will continue, with stark increases, to encourage businesses to look to alternatives over the coming years.

The government also has ambitious targets for recycling other materials, aiming for 92 per cent of steel by 2030 and 85 per cent of paper and card. However, these products are already widely recycled and comparatively less complex than plastics, making the ask much less ambitious.

78 per cent  
of packaging  
should be  
recycled by  
2030

Over the next five years, the challenge for packaging producers and businesses is balancing innovation with the development of an appropriate infrastructure for recycling post consumer waste and creating a level of consumer knowledge and understanding to ensure that every piece of packaging that can be recycled is.

9 - Extended producer responsibility for packaging: who is affected and what to do - GOV.UK

11 - Annex A: rates and allowances - GOV.UK

10 - Targets.pdf

## CHAPTER 4

### Spotlight on innovation: How brands and retailers are getting ahead of the curve.

With packaging technology advancing every day, it can be tempting to wait for the next innovation before you start making changes to pack format and substrate. But there are plenty of brands and retailers already making small steps that have a significant impact, from switching to flow wrap to reduce plastic use and product weight, extend life, innovations in substrate, improve recyclability, and even removing packaging all together.

And it's not just ambient where simple pack changes are making a difference – fresh produce, protein and bakery are also seeing some step changes to allow manufacturers, brands and retailers to start making an impact today.

Switching to flow wrapped mince reduced  
Aldi's plastic use by 73 per cent

Switching whole chicken packaging to flow wrap  
increased Tesco's product life by two days

## Fresh produce

Produce has long been a target for packaging reduction campaigners, not only to reduce plastic use but to reduce food waste by allowing consumers to select the amount of produce they'll actually use.

Research shows that if items like bananas and potatoes were sold loose, around 60,000 tonnes of food waste would be prevented every year, and plastic use would be cut by nearly 8,800 tonnes.<sup>12</sup>

But for manufacturers and retailers who need to retain primary packaging, there are eco-friendly alternatives for produce packaging. For example, by using mono materials like PET and PP instead of layered materials, consumers can recycle more easily, and the efficiency of the recycling process is improved.

Compostable and biodegradable packaging materials, such as PLA (polylactic acid) and PHA (polyhydroxyalkanoate), are also becoming more widely used. These materials, which decompose naturally, reduce the environmental burden of single-use packaging.

There's also the option of using more post-consumer recycled materials in produce packaging, helping to support the circular economy.





# Protein

Packaging protein effectively, safely and in an eco-friendly way is perhaps the most challenging switch meat producers and manufacturers needed to make. But simple switches like moving to flow wrap, bioplastics and laminated paper have allowed the meat aisle to become more sustainable in incremental and achievable ways.

Take steak – a premium product where product visibility and freshness is key. Many retailers have not moved to pressed board vacuum skin (VSP) trays, where recyclable board can easily be separated from a heat-sealed plastic skin to increase recyclability, enhance product life and reduce weight in transit. When supermarket chain Morrisons introduced this technique for its premium steak, it eliminated 250 metric tons of plastic per year from its supply chain<sup>13</sup>. The challenge, however, is how willing and able consumers are to do the leg work to separate and dispose of dual material packaging correctly.

When Aldi introduced flow wrapped mince in 2023, it reduced its plastic packaging use by 73 per cent<sup>14</sup>. The move followed Aldi's switch to colourless milk caps across all its UK stores in a bid to further improve the recyclability of the bottles, showing that plastic isn't the problem – it's making it easier for consumers to easily recycle it that's key.

Flow wrap is now a common sight in the poultry aisle too, with Tesco the first to go live with fully flow wrapped chicken more than a decade ago<sup>15</sup>. Removing the solid plastic tray achieved a weight reduction of 70 per cent, but the retailer also cited the increase of pack integrity of flow wrap – reducing leaks – as helping avoid food poisoning from campylobacter and increasing the shelf life of a whole bird from nine to 11 days. Again, showing consumer experience and food waste reduction is integral to any packaging redesign.

Sausage brand Westaways became the first meat producer in the UK to use full eco-friendly packaging when it swapped out traditional plastic wrap for bio-plastic that's fully compostable at home.

The firm had already been using Forestry Stewardship Certified (FSC) cardboard –which is recyclable or compostable – in its packs, but the switch to bio-plastic wrappers allowed Westaways to make an 100 per cent eco-friendly claim<sup>16</sup>.

13 - Graphic Packaging Partners With Morrisons To Redefine Sustainable Meat Packaging Thanks to Next-Generation Tray Technology

14 - Aldi to trial vacuum and flow-wrap packed beef mince to reduce plastic | News | The Grocer

15 - New flow wrap keeps poultry safe, says Tesco

16 - Westaways – The Perfect Package


## Bakery

The bakery aisle was once the home of plastic wrap, moulded plastic trays, cake collars and multi-material packaging – mostly due to the need to preserve life and protect delicate baked goods in transit. But in the last couple of years, there's been a noticeable shift in how baked goods are packaged, playing into consumers' desire to reduce plastic use and to borrow the craft and freshness cues from packaging in artisan and in-store bakeries.

Mainstream bread brands and own brand loaves are moving to dual material packaging with easy to separate film and paper elements that the consumer can pull apart and recycle at home and in store.

Sweet treat brands like Mr Kipling have swapped black plastic trays for clear ones to make home recycling easier, switching from heavily laminated board to matte materials to improve recyclability and increase quality cues. The brand's single-serve slices come in recyclable trays with a plastic top seal and a cardboard outer to make recycling simpler but retain the products' long life and ease of use – a key requirement in this category.

Flow wrap remains popular, but products feature clear recycling messaging on pack or use bioplastics to make a step change towards more sustainable solutions in the future.



44 per cent of consumers say buying over-packaged products will prevent them buying them again<sup>17</sup>



## CHAPTER 5

# How to use packaging alternatives as a competitive advantage for your brand

In a crowded market, it can be hard to get your product to stand out, particularly in a category where brands aren't prevalent, so considering packaging format and substrate alternatives could be key to creating on-shelf impact.

Of course, any change to your packaging approach must be driven by consumer insight, ensure product life and protection, and work for you and your consumer from a cost perspective. But there are five lenses you could look through – alone or in combination – to determine changes that could improve brand perception and performance.

PepsiCo has already switched to 100 per cent recycled bottles for Pepsi Max and 7UP, resulting in an annual reduction of 1,480 tonnes of virgin plastic<sup>20</sup>

**Recycled:** The UK Plastics Pact aims to make 30 per cent of all plastic packaging recycled by the end of 2025, aiming to reduce the amount of virgin plastic needed to produce new packaging. For brands and manufacturers looking to incremental changes in their sustainability, making the switch to recycled plastic could be an easy first step in the right direction. The challenge, however, will be the availability of post-consumer plastic to use in recycled products – currently the UK ranks 10th in Europe for recycling plastic with more than 50 per cent of the plastic we used still ending up in landfill<sup>18</sup>.

**Recyclable:** Producing packaging that's compatible with home recycling is the easiest way to ensure your packaging goes back into the recycling stream. Choosing common materials that are easily cleaned, separated and sorted makes it as easy as possible for consumers to process your packaging after use – particularly when you ensure there's clear communication on pack. According to a survey by the World Economic Forum, around 50 per cent of people thought avoiding products that are hard to recycle would reduce waste<sup>19</sup>.

69 per cent of UK consumers say clearer information would improve their recycling habits<sup>21</sup>

18 - The Benefits Of Recycled Plastic Packaging: Reducing Waste And Protecting The Environment - Climate Of Our Future

19 - Survey reveals why people don't recycle more | World Economic Forum

20 - Plastic

21 - Four in 10 adults still unclear about recycling practices in the UK | Express.co.uk

Transparent: Communication is key when it comes to sustainability – it's not just about changing what your packaging is made from. For example, with more than 30 per cent of consumers claiming a rating scale showing environmental impact would influence their purchasing decision<sup>22</sup>, clarity about your practices, purpose and future intentions can have a huge impact on brand perception while you're working out what longer term substrate changes could look like.

Research also shows that 64 per cent of UK consumers don't know which type of food packaging is the most sustainable<sup>23</sup>, so clear on-pack communication about what your packaging is made of, and how to dispose of it, could help bridge the knowledge gap and increase the amount of post-consumer packaging being recycled.

Product innovation: While changing packaging might seem like the easy solution, could it be that product innovation could be the key? Consumers are already familiar with concentrates in household products to reduce the carbon impact of shipping water, but are there other innovations that could help you stand out? For example, German brand Milik Veganz produces oat milk in sheet form, which saves 94 per cent on packaging and 85 per cent of the weight of liquid milk<sup>24</sup>, saving money and carbon in the shipping process, increasing product life and consumer convenience.

A decorative background featuring several overlapping circles in shades of beige and light brown. A prominent red rectangular callout box is positioned on the right side, containing white text. The overall design is clean and modern, with a focus on sustainability themes.

42 per cent of people get 'recycling guilt' when they throw recyclable packaging in the rubbish

22 - Unwrapped: Eco-Friendly Innovation is the Way Forward in Food and Drink Packaging | Mintel

23 - Unwrapped: Eco-Friendly Innovation is the Way Forward in Food and Drink Packaging | Mintel

24 - Germany Sustainable Food and Drink Market Report 2024-2029 | Mintel

## SUMMARY

### Who we are and how we can help: Your sustainable packaging partner

At Redpack, our vision is to deliver the best packaging for your products, every time.

Engineers at heart, our expert teams work to find the right solution for every packaging challenge your product faces.

We design, build and maintain packaging machinery and inspection equipment to meet your needs and can work with you to explore solutions that suit your product, budget and brand.

We aren't tied to any one substrate and work with substrate manufacturers to make materials work on our machines, with your brief front of mind. We can work with producers and FMCG brands to test and trial new substrates and packaging solutions both before and after launch, reviewing performance in a live environment to make improvements to packaging performance and consumer experience.

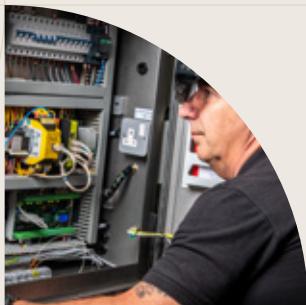
We're committed to helping you meet your sustainability goals. Our innovative engineering experts are constantly evolving their capacity to meet your consumers' demands by ensuring our machines are compatible with any recyclable, biodegradable, and eco-friendly packaging materials you want to explore.

We've already received ISO 14001: 2015 Environmental Management System accreditation for our commitment to reducing the environmental impacts of operations and products in areas including energy use, water consumption and waste, sourcing materials and services locally to reduce carbon footprint and CO2 emissions and reducing primary material usage through the reduction, recovery, and reuse of resources, so making incremental positive changes to reduce our environmental impact is central to who we are as a business.

Ready to talk about how you can make your packaging more sustainable and efficient?

**Get in touch with the experts at Redpack now.**

**Visit our website or call +44 (0)1603 722280**





Walstan House, 39 Barnard Road, Bowthorpe, Norwich NR5 9JB



[www.redpack.co.uk](http://www.redpack.co.uk)