

WEB EXCLUSIVE

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Guest Editorial: Navigating Sustainable Packaging

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In the ever-evolving landscape of packaging, where sustainability takes center stage, our team at Fox Packaging actively monitors the market, its trends and, most importantly, supply chain needs. I am glad to speak to the complexities of sustainable packaging and our commitment to the fresh produce industry.



Designing flexible packaging involves a number of considerations. First, we must ask: what are the product requirements? How does the product behave? Then, we consider how to make packaging more responsible without sacrificing the quality of the produce. This involves a variety of strategies, such as downgauging, design-to-fit approaches, careful material selection and ongoing material research. Circularity in sourcing and extending shelf life for fresh produce are also critical components of responsible packaging. At Fox Packaging, we explore these aspects thoroughly, ensuring that our solutions are compatible with current packing house automation and recycling streams.

U.S. Versus EU

Flexible packaging, despite facing scrutiny, boasts essential advantages, including safeguarding products, prolonging shelf life and enhancing presentation. The ongoing debate on whether the U.S. should align with the EU's model for flexible packaging necessitates a meticulous examination of supply chain impacts and material downsides. This includes acknowledging the pivotal role packaging plays in food safety and preservation.

The Alliance for Sustainable Packaging for Foods (ASPF) provides a crucial perspective on this matter. While acknowledging the benefits of flexible packaging in curbing food loss and waste, ASPF contends that existing regulatory frameworks fail to adequately recognize these advantages. ASPF advocates for a more

comprehensive regulatory perspective, considering not only the environmental impact of packaging materials but also their crucial role in preserving food quality and reducing waste. They propose alternative technologies like functional Price-Look-Up (PLU) stickers for traceability, and minimizing material use as a potential compromise between material reduction and maintaining food safety standards.

The significance of these considerations intensifies as we delve into future regulations on EU packaging. The concern lies in the potential unintended consequences that well-intentioned policies may pose to public health. This debate extends beyond regulations, impacting consumer habits and marketing strategies. Flexible packaging faces increased scrutiny, and the prospect of adopting an EU-based model in the U.S. raises concerns about high costs, potential disregard for established consumer habits and marketing strategies. Branding on packaging plays a vital role, fostering trust and loyalty, particularly for families seeking quality and value in their food purchases.

Geographic & Consumer Shopping Differences

Considering the geographical and climatic diversity of Texas, the second-largest state in the United States, which could accommodate 10 EU countries within its borders alone, presents logistical and climate challenges favoring flexible packaging. The versatility and resilience of flexible packaging make it well-suited for various environments, ensuring product freshness and safety under different conditions, while also offering a lightweight and efficient solution in the distribution process.

Furthermore, understanding the lifestyle and shopping habits of American families, characterized by larger, less frequent shopping trips due to suburban living and ample home storage space, compared to the EU's preference for smaller, more frequent purchases driven by urban proximity and daily shopping traditions, is crucial for making packaging choices that prioritize food safety and sustainability, ultimately impacting consumers and the environment.

Paper packaging, often lauded for its sustainable features and suggested as a viable alternative material to polyethylene packaging, is not without drawbacks. The recycling process for paper is resource-intensive, requiring substantial amounts of water, energy and labor. A comparison of the environmental costs between paper and low-density polyethylene (LDPE) reveals that paper's sustainability merits are not as clear-cut as they may seem. Moreover, paper products often require additional materials such as adhesives and wax coatings to enhance functionality, introducing complexities in their environmental impact. For instance, paper bags now incorporate a mesh panel in their windows, creating a non-homogenous packaging construction, ultimately categorized as RIC #7 Other.



Creating Partnerships

Navigating sustainable packaging necessitates collaboration, innovation and a commitment to responsible practices. At Fox Packaging, we stand not just as a packaging provider but as a dedicated partner in your sustainability journey toward responsible packaging programs. The increasing complexity of packaging

requirements across various regulations underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that consider the entire lifecycle of packaging materials.

Federal and state laws are actively shaping the future of packaging through new bills and regulations. However, there is a growing concern that these legislative efforts may not fully grasp the nuanced impacts on communities relying heavily on packaging in their supply chain. These communities often face unique challenges that must be addressed to ensure that sustainability efforts do not inadvertently create new problems or exacerbate existing ones.

At Fox Packaging, we recognize the crucial role that domestic suppliers play in the agricultural ecosystem. Our team is dedicated to supporting the success of fresh produce, ensuring that our efforts contribute to feeding communities rather than filling landfills. It's essential to acknowledge that packaging suppliers are pivotal in these discussions, and we are eager to share our expertise and insights with lawmakers to promote the responsible treatment of quality materials.

Each brand's path to sustainability is distinct, and it's imperative that this journey be a collaborative one. By uniting our efforts, we can define and support decision-making where packaging not only preserves the freshness of our produce but also delivers tangible benefits to our environment and society at large.

Aaron Fox is the Vice President of Fox Packaging. As partners, we would be glad to review your packaging program, advising on considerations and changes realistic to your brand, product and infrastructure. Whether you choose Fox Packaging or not, our advocacy for responsible packaging, the circular economy and collaboration across the supply chain remains unwavering. Visit foxbag.com for more information.