



CONSISTENT, EFFECTIVE DESIGN AND LABELING STANDARDS ARE NEEDED TO ACHIEVE A MORE CIRCULAR FUTURE FOR COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

Roughly one-third of the world's food is wasted each year¹—a loss valued at nearly \$230 billion². Every year, millions of taxpayer dollars are used to send wasted food to landfill, creating both economic and environmental risks. Compostable packaging presents a way to address these issues by providing an opportunity to recover the food waste that comes with food packaging, thereby reducing food waste and avoiding greenhouse gases emitted when food ends up in landfills.

STATE OF COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

Increasing demand for alternatives to single-use plastic packaging is driving up volumes of compostable packaging material. Some local municipalities have banned single-use plastic foodware, with restaurants turning to compostable packaging as an alternative.

The market for compostable packaging is poised to grow 17% annually between 2020 and 2027.³

The rapid growth of compostable packaging is not matched with similar growth in food waste composting infrastructure. In fact, only 2% of U.S. composting infrastructure accept and process food-contact, compostable packaging, meaning much of it is wasted⁴. At the same time, compostable packaging that mistakenly ends up in recycling streams loses a significant portion of its value and creates a contamination challenge that impedes recovery of valuable materials.

5 NEW INSIGHTS ON HOW CONSUMERS PERCEIVE COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

A new study from Closed Loop Partners' Composting Consortium and the Biodegradable Products Institute releases first-of-its-kind, public data on how U.S. consumers perceive different compostable packaging labels and designs, and how this informs their assumptions on how to dispose of the packaging after it's used. Key findings include:

1. Look-alike packaging made of non-compostable materials can mislead consumers.

Look-alike products and packaging are non-compostable plastic materials that are virtually indistinguishable from their compostable counterparts. Green coloring and tinting, leaf icons and labels such as "made from plants" are often used on both recyclable and compostable packaging. This causes significant confusion among consumers, which can lead to improper disposal of packaging at end of life given "made from plants" does not always mean packaging is compostable.

Up to 50% of respondents said they would mistakenly place packaging labeled with "made from plants" in the composting bin.

2. Consumers cannot distinguish between packaging labeled "biodegradable" and "compostable."

Only certified compostable packaging should be placed in composting collection bins. While all compostable packaging is biodegradable, not all biodegradable packaging is compostable. Biodegradable packaging is not held to the same regulatory standards as

certified compostable packaging and is not designed for a controlled compost environment.

Up to 49% of respondents had difficulty distinguishing between the terms “compostable” and “biodegradable.”

4 in 10 consumers inaccurately believe biodegradable = compostable.

3. Consumers are confused about how to dispose of compostable packaging.

Compostable packaging is not designed to be recycled and can contaminate the recycling stream if intermixed with conventional recyclable packaging. Cross contamination of recycling and composting with the wrong material is an expensive and pervasive problem.

Nearly 1/3 of respondents said they would incorrectly place compostable packaging in the recycling bin.

4. Access does not equal understanding.

Access to curbside organics collections at home or in public does not appear to improve understanding of where or how to dispose of compostable packaging.

Even in regions like the Western region of the U.S.—where people are nearly twice as likely than the average American to have access to residential curbside composting—respondents still mistakenly believed they could place compostable packaging in the recycling bin.

5. Use of multiple, prominent labels is vital.

Utilizing 2 to 3 design elements that communicate compostability on food-contact compostable packaging is most effective for consumer comprehension.

Adding a trusted certification logo and larger “compostable” call out increased consumers’ ability to identify a package as compostable by up to 22%.

SOLUTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Without clarity and harmonization of labeling designs and claims, consumer confusion will persist. This confusion will make it impossible to achieve a shift to a circular economy—a more resilient system without waste.

This new consumer data should inform policies that advance an economically viable, sustainable future for food-contact compostable packaging. A harmonized approach to state labeling policies would promote a higher likelihood of adoption and compliance among brands, manufacturers, converters and consumers, helping reduce waste in the process.

HOW POLICYMAKERS CAN TAKE ACTION

- 1 **REQUIRE INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY VERIFICATION FOR COMPOSTABLE PRODUCTS AND PACKAGING TO ENSURE THEY MEET ASTM D6400 OR D6868 STANDARDS**
- 2 **ADVOCATE FOR FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION “GREEN GUIDES” AND POLICY LANGUAGE TO HOLD “BIODEGRADABLE” CLAIMS TO THE SAME STANDARDS AS “CERTIFIED COMPOSTABLE” CLAIMS**
- 3 **ENSURE PRODUCTS MARKETED AS “MADE FROM PLANTS” HAVE QUALIFIER LANGUAGE TO INDICATE TO CONSUMERS WHETHER PACKAGING IS RECYCLABLE OR COMPOSTABLE**
- 4 **PREVENT COMPOSTING AND RECYCLING CONTAMINATION THROUGH:**
 - ENFORCED ADEQUATE LABELING PRACTICES
 - TRUSTED ON-PACK CERTIFICATION LOGOS
 - PROMINENT ON-PACK LABELING AND DESIGN, AS DESIGNATED BY THE CERTIFIER, THAT DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH OTHER LABELING REGULATIONS
 - INCREASED CONSUMER EDUCATION
 - IMPROVED SORTATION TECHNOLOGY FOR HAULERS AND COMPOSTING FACILITIES

1 8 FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT FOOD WASTE AND HUNGER
2 CLOSING THE FOOD WASTE GAP
3 GLOBAL COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING MARKET – INDUSTRY TRENDS AND FORECAST TO 2029
4 WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR US TO GET TO ZERO WASTE? COMPOSTING PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE.

Learn more about this study [HERE](#) or contact Kate Krebs, Director of External Affairs at Closed Loop Partners at kkrebs@closedlooppartners.com for more information.