



August 2023 Blog Post

In an era dominated by ominous news of the impacts of [climate change](#)—most recently evidenced by devastating fires in Maui—and a [legitimate plastic pollution crisis](#) that appears to have no end, Pack Green is here to offer a bit of encouragement. Sustainable packaging innovation is on the rise and offers smart alternatives to single-use plastics that far too often clog our landfills and pervade our lands and waterways. In 2023, we have happily taken note of environmentally-friendly packaging advancement across three major sectors: consumer packaged goods, produce, and beverages. Here, we highlight promising developments in each of these spaces:

CPG

American toy manufacturer [Mattel](#)—the creator of Barbie—has publicly pledged to (1) achieve 100% recycled, recyclable, or bio-based plastic materials in its products and packaging by 2030, (2) maintain 95% recycled or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified content in the paper and wood fiber used in its products and packaging, and (3) reduce plastic packaging by 25% per product by 2030. In addition to its packaging and materials pledges, the company has also started the [Mattel Playback](#) scheme, which seeks to keep the toys and materials in circulation longer through recycling. The program currently accepts Barbie, Fisher-Price, Matchbox and MEGA toys for recycling, and is available in the US, Canada, France, Germany and the UK.

LEGO—the world’s leading toy manufacturer—announced in [its annual results](#) that it has begun to transition to paper-based bags in LEGO boxes, putting it on track to make all of its packaging from more sustainable sources by the end of 2025. In its factories, it has continued to invest in reducing waste, operating more energy efficiently, and expanding production and use of solar energy.

As part of its commitment to sustainability, consumer goods giant [Procter & Gamble](#) has pledged by 2030 to reduce its use of virgin petroleum plastic in its packaging by 50%. As part of this process P&G has invested in technology to improve the efficacy of post-consumer recycled content to more closely match that of virgin materials.

Produce

Paper companies have long embraced the inherent advantages of fiber-based packaging over plastic, even as the latter has sought to make inroads into grocery and produce protection. Two of these makers of sustainable paper packaging solutions are Georgia-based [WestRock and Graphic Packaging International](#). WestRock creates packaging for several industries, including food, beverage, healthcare, retail, beauty, and more. Its [EverGrow® Collection](#) includes punnets, tills, totes, and trays produced specifically for growers, distributors, and retail produce brands. EverGrow® is made from renewable paperboard and allows for curbside recyclability when emptied and flattened, offering an alternative for hard-to-recycle plastics.

PACK GREEN COALITION

The same goes for the [ProducePack™](#) line of fresh produce packaging from Graphic Packaging International. ProducePack™ is a line of paper-based fruit packaging that offers a variety of sustainable, shelf-ready solutions for fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, the ProducePack™ Punnet includes a wide range of applications to deliver an effective alternative to traditional plastic/acetate produce packaging for retailers and producers.

Beverage Containers

Holland, Michigan-based [Boxed Water™](#) is emerging as a leader in the transition away from plastic beverage bottles. Currently, there are roughly 38 billion single-use plastic bottles landing in U.S. landfills and waterways each year, a figure that takes into account the current recycling rate of single use plastic water bottles of around 25%. Boxed Water has sought to address this using simple formula: the least amount of plastic and the most renewable materials, the better the package. Its box is FSC-certified and 92% plant-based, made from paperboard and paper waste. The FSC- and ISCC-certified water box cap is made of pine tree waste, harvested responsibly from Nordic forests. The result is a low carbon-impact product that is also 100% reusable and recyclable.

In the 2010s a [consortium of packaging, bottling and beverage manufacturers](#)—including the Carlsberg Group—worked together to create an innovative paper bottle. The result was [PABOCO](#) (Paper Bottling Company), which has developed bio-based bottle prototypes in Europe and has invited additional partners to join in its efforts, including Coca-Cola, L’Oreal, Pernod Ricard, The Absolut Company, and Procter & Gamble.

In yet another encouraging development, American food and beverage company [PepsiCo](#) has unveiled its plans to replace plastic rings on beverage multipacks across the US and Canada with recyclable paper-based designs. In 2022, [Coors Light](#) announced that it will globally shift away from plastic rings to cardboard-wrap, a move the company said will save 1.7 million pounds of plastic waste annually by 2025.

Conclusion

While the problem of plastic pollution is multi-faceted and may seem overwhelming, we know that the solution will come down to the basics of reducing virgin output, improving a fractured and anemic recycling system, and increasing re-use as we move away from our throwaway culture. Only through a concerted effort to combine the foregoing dynamics will we be able to achieve circularity and ameliorate the adverse impacts environmental, health, and aesthetic impacts of our drastic overuse of plastic packaging. The advent of the products and innovations described in this post gives us reason to believe we are beginning to make progress.