



BelleHarvest transforms industry packaging with a unique, 100% recyclable, and sustainable produce carton

BelleHarvest is a Michigan-based apple distributor with over 50 years of experience getting apples from the field to store shelves. Pursuing their commitment to sustainability and healthy eating, BelleHarvest partnered with Graphic Packaging International (Graphic Packaging) to create new produce packaging that is functional, aesthetically pleasing, and 100% recyclable.

Case Study: Sustainability | Convenience | Elevated Experience

Challenge 

- **Design**
Offer convenience, functionality, and product differentiation
- **Graphics**
Command in-store attention and convey product information
- **Performance and Sustainability**
Offer an alternative to traditional plastic packaging that is also functional and can hold up to storage and transport

Solutions 

- **Custom Grab-and-Go ProducePack™**
With comfortable handle, viewing window for product visibility, and space for brand messaging
- **Colors and Illustrations**
Elegant litho printed illustrations and brand messaging
- **18pt AquaKote™**
Selected for strength and performance in high moisture environments. AquaKote is made from renewable resources and is recyclable*

Results 

- Easy-to-pack carton with auto-bottom construction
- Convenient design for busy produce consumers
- Beautiful color schemes help each apple variety stand out. Bold brand messaging makes it easy for customers to see BelleHarvest's value propositions
- Paperboard solution holds up exceptionally well in transit and storage, and is made from a plant-based material that is recyclable

Challenge

BelleHarvest wanted to become a catalyst for packaging change in the apple category and reached out to Graphic Packaging for a solution. Graphic Packaging was tasked with finding a solution for a unique, 100% recyclable, and sustainable produce pack. The new carton needed to be convenient for consumers while also incorporating strong branding and an attention-grabbing design for in-store differentiation. Additionally, from a performance standpoint, the design needed to protect apples from bruising, withstand storage in cool, humid environments, and fit standard shipping cases.

Solution

BelleHarvest partnered with Graphic Packaging's design team to develop a unique structure using ProducePack™, the company's line of custom produce packaging. The carton features an ergonomic handle that allows for grab-and-go convenience for busy consumers. Cutouts allow for product visibility and venting, while the enclosed carton addresses consumer preference for reduced handling of fresh produce. Additionally, the carton promotes shelf and category differentiation with ample space for brand messaging and eye-catching graphics.

To achieve stunning graphics, a close collaboration with Graphic Packaging's internal Production and Prepress teams, BelleHarvest, and their design agency transformed art into Litho printed cartons that command in-store attention. BelleHarvest's three apple varieties (Honeycrisp, Fuji, and Gala) received their own color scheme to help each apple variety stand out.

The carton was produced for performance and sustainability using Graphic Packaging's 18pt AquaKote solid unbleached sulfate (SUS™) board. This recyclable paperboard has additional strength added at the mill to make the carriers reliable in the cool, humid environments in which they are filled, distributed, sold, and stored.

Results

By partnering with a paper-based packaging leader like Graphic Packaging, BelleHarvest's new produce pack is a sustainable, functional solution that stands out in the market. Consumer experience is enhanced by the unique design, including a grab-and-go handle that delivers efficiency to busy consumers.

Compared to traditional plastic, the dense paperboard protects the apples from bruising during transport and storage. Consumers enjoy apples that are firm, crisp, and have more shelf life, while retailers and grocers benefit from stocking produce shelves with a product that lasts longer. BelleHarvest reported that the new ProducePack has resulted in 15 percent less apple defects while stored in refrigeration.

The use of Graphic Packaging's 18pt AquaKote paperboard emphasizes BelleHarvest's commitment to environmental sustainability. Consumers understand that paperboard is a highly sustainable packaging material, evident in the 66% recycling rate of paper and paperboard in the US today.* The choice of a recyclable paperboard provides a sustainable option to conscious consumers, a strategy that increases the capacity of BelleHarvest to become a household name.

Angela Sommers, marketing director at BelleHarvest, said: "We care greatly about our effect on the environment, so we are excited to lead the way in evolving our packaging in the apple category and respond to consumer demands for a paper-based alternative to plastic."

*Source: American Forest & Paper Association - 2020

