

Making the Transition to Fiber-Based Packaging for Food Multipacks

The intersection of performance, convenience & sustainability in a circular economy



Graphic
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Introduction

According to a report¹ by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), global plastic production reached a staggering 460 million tonnes in 2019, more than doubling from 2000 statistics. Only 9 percent of that total tonnage was successfully recycled, 19 percent was incinerated, and nearly half was sent to landfills. The remainder—roughly 20 percent— was disposed of in uncontrolled dumpsites or leaked into the environment. Almost 40 percent of plastic use was attributed to packaging, which typically has a short lifespan compared to other applications such as construction.

Amidst growing environmental concerns, consumer perceptions of plastic packaging are rapidly evolving. Realizing that plastic materials may take up to **400 years to break down**², environmentally conscious consumers are paying more attention to the materials that encase the products they buy.

The impact of packaging waste is also driving stricter regulations around the globe as governments and industries enact initiatives to reduce dependence on single-use plastics in favor of more sustainable alternatives. This accelerates the adoption of packaging alternatives and the transition from a linear “use-and-dispose” model to an economy that promotes recycling and reuse.

The entire packaging value chain must adjust to address these changing consumer sentiments while complying with rigorous regulations. Food packaging companies can meet these expectations head-on by exploring the benefits of fiber-based multipacks as a viable alternative to plastic rings, film, and shrink wrap.

1 <https://rds.org.co/apc-aa-files/205ec78c9cca6d1850bdca24e20e50bf/document.pdf>
2 <https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/conservation/smm/wastewise/web/html/factoid.html>



The environmental benefits of fiber

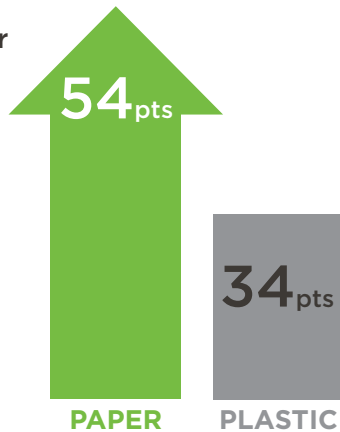
Swapping single-use plastics for recyclable alternatives can significantly reduce the environmental impact of packaging. Paperboard is made from renewable plant-based fiber from sustainably managed forests, and the fiber is often a byproduct of construction timber. The paper and paper packaging industries focus on maintaining healthy forests by committing to sustainable forestry practices and replanting trees.

According to the [Environmental Protection Agency](https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials)¹, compared to plastic alternatives, paper and paperboard are far more likely to be recycled—with paper and paperboard making up 66.5 percent of all recycled materials in the United States, and plastic makes up 4.47 percent. Meanwhile, according to [Eurostat](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/cei_wm020/default/table)², in 2020, Europeans recycled 81.6 percent of paper and paper-based packaging and 37.7 percent of plastic packaging. Similarly, paper-based products are far less likely to end up in landfills: in the United States, the figure is 22 percent compared to 70 percent for plastics, and in Europe, 8 percent compared to 24 percent of plastics.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials>
² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/cei_wm020/default/table

Please tell us your **FEELINGS ABOUT EACH INDUSTRY** using a scale that ranges from 0 to 100.

Plastics has dropped from 41 in 2020 to 34 in 2021.



60% **PAPER PRODUCTS** are part of the environmental solution
AGREE

64% **PAPER-BASED PACKAGING** is part of the environmental solution
AGREE

87% **Prefer** paper-based product packaging

Source: Isobar November 2021 A&U Tracking

4 in 10 **ACTIVELY AVOID** plastic product packaging.
Up from 34% in 2020

Research³ from the Paper & Packaging Board in 2021 demonstrates a clear—and increasing—shift towards paper-based packaging alternatives.

Consumers are increasingly using their spending power to drive the impact they want to see. According to a [global online survey conducted by Trivium](#), the majority (67 percent) of consumers say they would change their consumption habits to reduce their environmental impact, according to a global online survey conducted by Trivium. People between 18 and 44 would pay higher prices for products or packages made with sustainable materials (86 percent). Moreover, a longer packaging lifespan is enticing for shoppers, as 74 percent express interest in products with reusable packaging.

Public perception of packaging materials proves critical—57 percent of consumers are less likely to purchase products in packaging they consider harmful to the environment. Widespread commitment to reducing packaging waste is more than a passing trend; brands can gain respect and revenue by responding to it. However, to justify a move away from plastic in commercial beverage applications, packaging solutions must address these environmental concerns while performing at least as well as their plastic counterparts. In other words, paperboard multipacks must be perfectly suited for the products they hold.

³ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/Most-Americans-Say-That-the-Design-of-a-Products-Packaging-Often-Influences-Their-Purchase-Decisions>



Paperboard fit for purpose

It doesn't matter how sustainable a packaging solution might be if it doesn't meet the performance requirements of an effective food multipack. These requirements include:

- Ability to **perform** through the supply chain
- **Flexibility** in pack styles, formats, and size capabilities
- **Convenience** for carrying, opening, and dispensing
- Alluring **shelf appeal** in retail stores

Performance through the supply chain

Alternatives to plastic must protect and secure products adequately. The innovative design of paperboard packaging secures products with the minimum amount of material needed to be effective, depending on configuration and application. The packaging itself is durable and ensures that the structure is robust and remains intact through the supply chain and onto the retail shelf. Adopting paper-based packaging ensures that customers enjoy a recyclable alternative with the same degree of functionality.

Flexible formats

Multipack cartons are suitable for a wide range of package styles, formats, and sizes to meet each product's and distributor's unique requirements. Depending on your needs, your ideal multipack solution might take a range of different appearances:

- **Fully enclosed multipacks** deliver maximum coverage to protect your product, offering the broadest branding real estate options. This product features a variety of carry features, including handles or finger holes. Additionally, cans are completely covered to protect the product throughout the supply chain.
- **Wrap-style multipacks** deliver just enough coverage to secure your product while maintaining the visibility of the canned food items. Packs offer a variety of styles, such as straight, top, and bottom gussets, wraps with panels, and more. Customers can enjoy added convenience with multiple carry options available.
- **Clip-style multipacks** deliver a minimal material option that protects and secures products through the supply chain. Available solutions offer the opportunity for high-impact branding and comfortable-to-carry finger holes.

These versatile multipack formats can accommodate all pack configurations for cans. Whatever style best suits your product application, paperboard alternatives can replace plastic rings and shrink film to reduce the environmental footprint of your packaging while adding unique features that set your multipacks apart from the competition.

Consumer convenience

Portability is a top priority when transporting multipacks of canned food products throughout the supply chain. Consumers want to feel good about the environmental impact of products and packages they buy while having features that make the product easy to use. For that reason, consumer convenience is a driving factor of any multipack design. A foldable design also contributes to simplified post-use recycling as it takes up less space.

Although plastic rings and shrink wrap films sufficiently hold cans in place, they can be inconvenient when it comes to carrying, opening, and dispensing products easily. Paperboard multipacks, in comparison, offer excellent options for convenient handling from the distributor to retail shelves to the customer's home.

Comfortable handle options

Fiber-based multipacks deliver multiple handle options to suit various market needs and preferences. For example, wrap and clip-style multipacks feature finger holes for easy carry with improved comfort and reliability for product transportation. Fully enclosed cartons may feature two-sided crate handles for heavy packs, reinforced strap handles for one-handed carry, and straps that make packs portable when open.



Easy to open and dispense

Multipack solutions must strike a delicate balance between securely holding cans during transport and ease of opening and dispensing the product when the customer is ready to consume. Clip-style cartons, for example, keep the tops of cans clean and covered while securing products in place. Yet when it's time for use, removal from the carton is effortless and does not rip or tear the paperboard. Innovative carton designs can create excellent pack integrity with wet strength to stand up against damp and humid conditions in the cooler.

A range of retail-ready solutions make product display and dispensing even easier in the store. For example, fully enclosed cartons can offer a fold-up advertising panel for countertop displays, a perforated zipper to remove the top of the package for easy access, or individual dispensing systems for grab-and-go convenience. These innovations eliminate the need for additional trays or shrink wraps while offering improved access to the product.

Shelf appeal

Fiber-based multipacks offer the potential to maximize on-shelf differentiation and brand appeal. Paperboard printing possibilities deliver top-quality graphics, full-spectrum colors, and other enhancements that plastic simply cannot.

For example, using a high-gloss coating to accentuate details on otherwise matte finish packaging creates a standout effect on the shelf. Likewise, dimensional coating and texture add depth and amplify the visual impact of a multipack with enhanced tactile sensations.

Paperboard expands the potential marketing real estate of packaging with more printable space to communicate brand messaging. This space can be leveraged to draw awareness to sustainability initiatives, announcing your move toward renewable materials by telling consumers that the paperboard is made of plant-based fiber from sustainably managed forests and can easily be recycled.

According to [an online survey conducted by Ipsos](#) on behalf of the Paper and Packaging Board, 71 percent of American consumers say they're more likely to buy brands that package their products in paper or cardboard. 63 percent agree that paper and cardboard packaging makes a product seem premium or high quality.

Brands can further enhance the sustainability credentials of natural fiber by printing key messaging on the pack, such as fiber certification information. The available real estate can be extended by printing messaging on the reverse of tear-off strips.

With unlimited opportunities to print graphic elements across the outside and inside of multipacks, paperboard offers an effective billboard to promote brand messages for greater shelf appeal. This brand premiumization helps differentiate brands that are moving toward more sustainable packaging and may result in increased sales volume.

Adopting innovative paperboard multipacks

Driven by concern for the environment, tightening regulations, and the quest for a premium image, food companies across the globe have switched to paperboard packaging. Many leading brands are partnering with Graphic Packaging to successfully implement recyclable, fiber-based solutions that help them achieve their corporate sustainability goal to reduce single-use plastic packaging.

Case study: McCall Farms Turns to Paperboard Packaging to Support Membership Club Distribution

The large-scale canned fruits and vegetables producer needed a multipack packaging solution to support its expansion into wholesale club retail stores. The packs needed to accommodate two of the McCall Farms' 27oz canned vegetable products, be strong enough to withstand distribution, and retain structural integrity for shelf display.

- McCall Farms partnered with Graphic Packaging to create a solid fiber packaging solution to meet its requirements.
- The multipack is a seal-end folding carton with a special non-skid water-based coating.
- Produced on 24pt coated recycle board (CRB), the multipack can self-palletize, withstand the rigors of shipping and distribution, and protect the product inside.
- The compact size of the carton increased the number of filled cartons per pallet, resulting in more products being delivered to retailers for sale.



[Read the full case study here.](#)



Future-proof your food multipacks with fiber

Companies that stay on the leading edge of innovation in packaging gain a distinct competitive advantage. Fiber-based multipacks are quickly eclipsing other packing solutions by addressing consumers' environmental concerns while offering clear benefits over single-use plastic rings and shrink wrap.

Paperboard multipacks have the power to:

- Reduce dependence on single-use plastics
- Satisfy evolving consumer needs and preferences
- Differentiate your brand with maximum shelf appeal
- Promote your products with a range of display options
- Stand up to the rigors of transport and storage throughout the supply chain
- Enhance brand loyalty with an elevated customer experience
- Add value through unique features that make your packaging a selling point

The experts at Graphic Packaging work closely with brands to innovate award-winning fiber-based solutions to address the most demanding challenges facing multipack manufacturers and retailers today. We leverage our breadth of industry experience to deliver packaging solutions that are responsibly made, beautifully designed, and fit-for-purpose to meet specific brand requirements. We'll guide you through every step of the transition from plastic to paperboard to unleash the full potential of your packaging.

Ready to revolutionize your food multipacks with more sustainable packaging?

[Contact Graphic Packaging](#) to consult with one of our experts about the growth potential of fiber-based packaging solutions.



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