



## Packaging industry sets the bar higher on eco-friendly products

By Andy Nelson

**C**onsumers love the convenience and safety of packaged food products. At the same time, they're concerned about the environment and want to reduce waste wherever possible.

It's one of the central paradoxes in the food world today. But while many throw their hands up and consider it to be an unsolvable problem, packaging manufacturers see it as a challenge that can be tackled and overcome, as their continually evolving product lines make clear.

In January, Madison, Wis.-based Placon, which makes containers for food and other industries, released its first-ever sustainability report.

It's the first thing you see when you go to Placon's website, a symbol of the company's commitment to recycling as much plastic, conserving as much energy and achieving other Earth-friendly goals as it can.

The report is both a look back and a look forward - a review of the company's achievements and a road map for the future.

The recent past is full of sustainability achievements for Placon, said Kali Kinziger, a product manager for the company.

In December, Placon launched its new line of crystal clear tamper-evident round deli containers, which come in five different sizes, ranging from 8 to 32 ounces. That follows on the heels of the company's introduction of new tamper-evident salad bowls that can do double duty for bakery, prepackaged foods and other applications. All are 100% recyclable.

On tap for this year: at its main manufacturing facility in Madison, Placon is aiming for zero net waste by the end of 2023, and its other facilities will follow in the coming years, with all plants expected to reach the goal by the end of 2025, Kinziger said. To help achieve that goal, Placon is extensively remodeling its standalone recycling center, which takes plastic from a variety of sources, recycles it and turns into Placon packaging for instore delis and bakeries and other food and non-food destinations.

"We truly have post-consumer recycled content, and we can prove it," she said. "Our customers who have sustainability goals, we're telling them: we can help you achieve them."

Placon's recycling center covers about 70,000 square feet and is located on the same campus as the company's thermoforming headquarters. Placon uses all recycled content and extruded RPET material made at the facility internally across food, retail, and non-sterile medical PET packaging product lines, Kinziger said.

The facility, 12 years old, is in the midst of a three-phase expansion with the ability to accept 100% locally-sourced bales. Currently, Placon works with multiple sources of PET bale suppliers, including certified ocean-bound plastic, domestically and internationally to obtain the highest flake yield.

In addition, in 2023 Placon will add a new bottle sorter and flake sorter that will allow the company to capture more PET bottles and thermoforms and increase its throughput by 21%.

As its sustainability report makes clear, Placon is aligning its goals with the Ellen McCarthur Foundation, which prioritizes a circular economy, regenerative nature, waste elimination and other goals.

And Placon's efforts extend beyond recycling plastic. In 2021 the company invested in its own "solar farm," a piece of land up the road from its Madison plant that is full of solar panels. 2022 was the first full year the system was in use, and the results were phenomenal, Kinziger said: from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., solar accounted for half of the power used at the plant.

### **Novolex doubles down on consumer education**

Nearly 50% of all raw materials used in packaging made by Novolex are derived from either post-consumer recycled (PCR), renewable, or bio-based sources.

That allows the company to innovate new products designed for commercial composting, said Erik Gonring, senior director of sustainability.

In October, Novolex received BPI certification for the Dubl Life line of paper bags and sacks, extending its product offering with the leading compostable certification to include one of its highest volume product categories.

"Dubl Life bags are also recyclable, so we had a great opportunity to use the bags to support consumer education by featuring both the How2Compost and How2Recycle labels, which inform consumers of how to



At the same time, there is a push for new bio-based solutions that are also compostable and the availability of options in the Novolex portfolio helps show customers the data that can inform sustainability-driven decisions.

Novolex's industry-leading actions regarding sustainability include its GHG reduction target of 30% by 2030 and the recent decision to invest \$10 million into its recycling facility in North Vernon, Ind.

**Hot food innovations**

In 2022, Shelton, Conn.-based Inline Plastics expanded its tamper-evident, tamper-resistant technology with the launch of Safe-T-Chef, the industry's first polypropylene product family with patented technology specially designed for hot food applications.

Safe-T-Chef adds security and protection to heated foods, especially those that need to travel, said Carrie Cline, senior brand manager.

Just as important, it's sustainable. Hot foods have traditionally been packed using a black-based component, which are challenging to sort at materials recovery facilities (MRFs). Safe-T-Chef packaging is clear.

"Black plastics usually end up in landfills," Cline said.

*Inline's new Safe-T-Chef product family for instore bakery, deli and other applications combine tamper evidence with sustainability.*

dispose of packaging after use," Gonring said. "While making products of this nature is important, it's equally important to provide clear instructions to consumers about disposal options."

With the increase in science-based carbon targets, many customers have prioritized carbon footprint data on products to support their purchasing decisions, he added.

Inline Plastics

# THE DELI



light is green.



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"With all-clear packaging, Inline has designed this line with sustainability in mind."

Finding the right balance between sustainability, convenience and safety is the biggest, and most on-trend, challenge now facing the packaging industry, she added.

For Inline's PET product lines, the company introduced 10% post-consumer content to its entire PET portfolio. They are the first PET food packaging manufacturer in the US to provide products with post-consumer content born from cutting-edge technology called Advanced Recycling, which is recycling at the molecular level. This material, known as rDPET, has the lowest carbon footprint PET material on the market, Cline said.

"Our products help promote a circular economy that gives consumers and customers the packaging solutions they want, while simultaneously keeping those packages out of landfills. It's a win-win."

Consumers want convenience, but they're also increasingly conscious about preventing unnecessary waste, Cline added.

One way to achieve that balance is through single serve packaging, for which Inline has seen a steady uptick in demand since 2017.



## commissary INSIDER

### Keeping baked goods packaging sustainable

Display Pack bakery packaging for commissaries, central kitchens and other facilities that supply grocery instore bakeries includes solutions for cheesecake trays, cupcake and muffin containers, pies and many other products. And sustainability is at the top of the company's agenda. Display Pack packaging limits excess material, increasing shelf space and optimizing case counts-ultimately resulting in lower emissions and cost savings. And the company's operations team is continuously working to improve its carbon footprint through energy efficiencies, landfill diversion and scrap material recovery.

Benefits of the recycled PET Display Pack uses in its packs include:

- rPET has a lower carbon footprint than virgin PET
- There are no significant performance challenges with using recycled PET



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"Individual servings eliminate food waste, because consumers want to buy the right-sized, perfectly portioned amount of food they need," Cline said.

Covid spurred huge growth in the need for pre-packaged foods with added layers of security. Inline's extensive Safe-T-Fresh product line, and now Safe-T-Chef, provide the company's patented tamper evident/tamper-resistant technology.

But with the growing demand for convenience and safety has come similar demand that this new packaging be recyclable to eliminate or reduce packaging waste. All Inline Plastics packages, Cline said, are designed to be recyclable, where recycling is available.

When it comes to sustainable packaging, two things separate Inline from its competitors, Cline said – innovation and quality.

"Green and sustainable initiatives dove-tail perfectly with our corporate identity and goals. This encompasses the variety of our product lines, the actual production processes, and research and development into new technologies."

In addition to its packaging innovations, Inline also has installed 2600 solar panels to power its Shelton manufacturing plant.



**PLA and Bio-PET are among the recyclable or compostable materials good natured uses for its packaging containers.**

### **New sizes from good natured**

Earth-friendly, patent-pending new dual-hinged tamper-evident containers from good natured Products Inc. are now available for purchase in North America in sizes of 8, 12, 16, 24, and 32 ounces.

The new containers were designed with customers' food safety concerns – and sustainability - in mind.

They have a locking tab that shows clear signs of being opened, and they're available in two sustainable material options: certified compostable PLA (99% plant-based materials) and curbside recyclable Bio-PET (up to 30% plant-based materials and up to 50% recycled content).

For good natured, sustainability is second nature.

"Our affordable and accessible biobased packaging made from renewable resources performs as well as, if not better than, petroleum-based packaging, ensuring a seamless transition without compromising on quality," said Paul Antoniadis, CEO.

The packaging materials good natured uses, such as PLA (compostable) and Bio-PET (curbside recyclable), undergo durability tests to ensure they meet or exceed industry standards. The company's designs also prioritize functionality and quality, and in some cases,

good natured

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