

09/03/2021

Our Ref: 09244948

Dear

Thanks for your email to Steve Murrells, Co-op Chief Executive. My name is Sam and your email has been passed onto the Executive Resolution Team to reply on his behalf.

Reducing the environmental impact of our products is, and always has been, at the very core of the Co-op's efforts. Our ambition is for 100% of our product packaging to be recyclable which our Members overwhelmingly backed last year at our AGM (Co-op has 4.6M active Members). We are reducing the impact of single-use plastics in products and packaging, by improving recyclability, increasing recycled content, and changing materials to remove plastic altogether.

Packaging has a place, it protects our food and keeps it fresher and safe for longer. We want to keep plastics and packaging in the economy and out of the oceans by using less and making our products easy to recycle.

We've always been at the forefront of removing hidden plastic and unnecessary packaging and are proud to have one of the smallest plastic footprints of any major food retailer.

In 2017 we stated that we want to make all our packaging easy to recycle. We've moved from 46% of our products being easy to recycle to 78%. Almost three-quarters of our own brand products are being widely recycled, 94% of the packaging for all these products when measured by weight.

Our compostable bags can be used in kerbside food waste collections. Co-op is calling upon more local authorities in England to encourage universal kerbside food waste collections sooner than 2023 so that twice as much of the food wasted in the UK can be recycled into energy.

Over the past two years, we've removed 331 tonnes of plastic from our fresh produce and horticulture lines through the removal of single use plastic trays, light weighting of films and switching to reusable flower buckets. Here's what we have done so far:

- 100 tonnes of plastic per year was saved by implementing a system of reusable flower buckets in stores
- 4 million plastic trays were removed from asparagus and tender stem broccoli saving 42 tonnes of plastic per year

- 3.5 million pots of wet salads (such as coleslaw) were light weighted, resulting in a saving of 16 tonnes per year
- 3.9 million vegetable steam pots were also light weighted, saving 13.8 tonnes per year
- 1 million plastic trays were removed from baby sweetcorn and courgette packets, saving 10.4 tonnes per year
- 6.5 million stir fry and bean sprout packets were light weighted, saving 2.7 tonnes of plastic per year. 529,000 plastic wrappers were removed from aubergines, saving 1.1 tonnes per year
- 10 million plastic fruit labels were replaced with compostable alternatives resulting in a saving of 1 tonne per year

Last November, we announced the removal of plastic, as well as glitter, from our entire Christmas celebration range, cutting out 1.1 million pieces of plastic - a total of 8 tonnes. We have also reduced our reliance on virgin or 'new' plastic and now use almost 37% recycled content across our own-brand packaging. We have done many other plastic reduction projects outside of produce totalling 1438 tonnes.

Going forward, the Coop is committed to achieving the following:

- Rolling out compostable carrier bags in more areas where household food waste can be recycled
- 15% plastic reduction by the end of 2022
- Support the roll out of the UK's largest ever scheme to recycle plastic film which local councils do not presently collect for recycling
- Ensuring the packaging we use extends shelf life and limits food waste
- Collaborating with 25 project groups in non-governmental organisations, universities, charities, packaging and product suppliers, and industry groups to find better ways to package food, improve labelling and maximised the amount of recyclable packaging

Please be assured that it is an issue definitely on our radar. I hope that I have given you some confidence on our commitment to play a big part in improving our environment for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gemma Beckett  
Executive Correspondence