Q&A: Packaging Can Be More Sustainable

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Interview with Derric Brown, Director of Sustainability, Evergreen Packaging

Packaging sustainability continues to be an important issue for food manufacturers. Improving sustainability can be as simple as the choice of packaging, whether it be can, plastic bag or cardboard box — each package has its own benefits. The Carton Council of North America is working to raise awareness and increase recycling for what it says is one of the most renewable packaging choices available: the carton.*Food Manufacturing* spoke with Derric Brown, Director of Sustainability for Evergreen Packaging, about these efforts.

Q: What is the overall mission of the Carton Council?

A: The Carton Council is committed to increasing carton recycling in the United States. By promoting both recycling technology and local collection programs, we are working to limit the number of cartons that become waste. We're making great progress in expanding carton recycling and are in talks with a number of additional locations about adding cartons to the recycling stream. The Carton Council of North America is made up of packaging companies committed to improving environmental performance of the carton. The Council includes Elopak, Evergreen, SIG Combibloc and Tetra Pak. Our website is www.RecycleCartons.com.

Q: How is the carton more environmentally friendly than other packaging products?

A: The primary ingredient in all cartons is wood—one of the most renewable resources on earth! The wood in our cartons comes from growing forests where new trees replace the ones harvested and biodiversity is maintained. In fact, none of the

resources used in our cartons come from old growth trees or rainforests. Cartons create less waste as they are made with less material. Cartons have 66 percent less packaging than a can and 93 percent less packaging than a bottle. Cartons are light-weight and have a great product to package ratio. If you choose a product in a carton, you are taking home an average of 94 percent product and only 6 percent package. Products packaged in cartons are transportation efficient.

The Carton Council members are dedicated to environmentally preferable practices throughout the entire lifecycle of a carton package. By producing sustainable and carbon smart products made mainly from a renewable resource, consumers can wisely select cartons as one of the best package choices to meet their food and environmental needs.

Q: How is the Council seeking to reduce the environmental impact of the carton?

A: The Carton Council is working to build a sustainable infrastructure for carton recycling nationwide. Recycling reduces the amount of material going to our landfills. The recovered recycled fiber is reused in other paper products.

Q: Who is the Carton Council working with to help increase carton recycling?

A: The Carton Council is working with the recycling supply chain to increase carton recycling. We are starting with municipalities to ensure there is interest in expanding the recycling programs to include cartons. We then work with the recyclers to get the cartons separated into a single grade of recyclables. Finally we work with the end user mills to ensure there are facilities to recycle the high quality carton fiber into tissue and other paper products. Generating material volume is critical, so the Carton Council is also focused on developing tools and programs to raise consumer awareness.

Q: What obstacles is the Council facing in accomplishing its goal of increasing carton recycling?

A: The biggest obstacle that we face is the misinformation about the recyclability of cartons in the U.S. Once people understand that cartons are recyclable and communities are accepting cartons, we need consumers to do their part. When they recycle their cartons it increases the volume of cartons generated, which supports the recycling supply chain and is good for the environment.

Q: What do you see in the future for carton packaging as far as environmental impact?

A: We believe the carton is among the most environmentally friendly packaging solutions available. The carton is increasingly recyclable and it is made primarily from a renewable resource. We see a future where cartons are accepted for recycling nationwide.

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