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Audit may boost light weighting of packaging

By Jane Byrne, 02-Apr-2009

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A consumer packaging audit that encourages shoppers to leave behind what they view as excess packaging is designed to inform a wider research project, claims a leading UK retailer.

Tesco said the results of the six week trial offering consumers the opportunity to remove what they deem to be excess paper and plastic packaging at the tills will influence its packaging strategy, with the retailer claiming it favours the reduction of packaging materials in the first place rather than increased recycling.

The retailer said that having already identified many products that could be less packaged, [Tesco](#) now wants consumer help in pinpointing other product packaging they believe could be improved upon.

A spokesperson for the retailer told FoodProductionDaily.com that the initiative, which began this week in two of its UK stores, will also enable it to provide clear results to its [suppliers](#) about what packaging is needed, and about what can be trimmed or discontinued.

"We constantly consult with our suppliers in this regard, and, following our discussions, one manufacturer, simply by changing a few components on its packaging line, was able to significantly reduce the amount of material used for its dog food packaging," she said.

The retailer also recently introduced reusable plastic cartons for the distribution and display of its fresh produce, thereby eliminating the need for suppliers to use cardboard trays, continued the spokesperson.

Restrictions

However, she claims that minimisation of packaging will not happen overnight: *"For regulatory reasons or where labelling is essential, such as where warning of products containing nuts is required, packaging might still be necessary."*

The spokesperson said the Tesco trial follows a similar scheme undertaken by a German retailer and is the latest in a series of over 3,500 waste reduction and recycling projects the retailer has initiated.

According to the supermarket chain, it is now diverting 87 per cent of its waste from its store network away from landfill, compared with its target of 95 per cent by the end of the year.

Green-minded shoppers

A recently published survey, conducted online by an independent research group on behalf of the Federation of European manufacturers of glass packaging containers (FEVE), showed that nearly 60 per cent of consumers pay attention to the environmental friendliness of food and drink packaging material during their grocery shopping.

The participants varied in age from 18 to 54 years old and were spread over 12 European countries, added the glass packaging group.

Lack of infrastructure

Meanwhile, a recent report from the Local Government Association (LGA) in the UK, released as part of its *War on Waste* campaign claims that only 40 per cent of food packaging in UK stores is recyclable.

And the LGA claims that supermarkets should pay more for recycling services to reduce the £1.8bn councils will spend in landfill tax on rubbish sites up to 2011.

However, retailers in the UK criticised the methodology used in the LGA report, arguing that while they continue to work to reduce packaging and food waste, the difficulties lies in the fact that consumers can not always recycle packaging because often local facilities do not exist.

And the supermarkets maintain that the responsibility does not lie with just retailers but with local authorities to make facilities consistently available across all of the UK.

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