Flexible Packaging Association
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185 Admiral Cochrane Drive
Suite 105
Annapolis, MD 21401

Tel (410) 694-0800
Fax (410) 694-0900

www.flexpack.org

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For more information, contact:
Dani Diehlmann
Vice President, Communications
Flexible Packaging Association
ddiehlmann@flexpack.org
410-694-0800

Future Packaging Leaders Recognized in FPA's 2026 Student Design Challenge

Competition highlights emerging talent and forward-thinking packaging solutions from leading university programs across the United States

Annapolis, MD, June 22, 2026 – The Flexible Packaging Association (FPA), the leading advocate and voice of the U.S. flexible packaging industry, is pleased to announce the winners of the 2026 Student Flexible Packaging Design Challenge. This year's first- and second-place honors were awarded to student teams from California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), with three additional packaging concepts receiving Honorable Mention recognition.

As part of its commitment to fostering the next generation of packaging professionals, FPA has sponsored the Student Flexible Packaging Design Challenge since 2004. The competition complements FPA's annual Achievement Awards program by encouraging students to apply packaging science, engineering, and design principles to innovative real-world flexible packaging solutions.

For high-resolution photos of the winners, please click here.

First Place Winner
The first-place award was presented to Cal Poly students Kanya Misra, Olivia Peterson, and Jennifer Takao for their Paw Pantry Pre-Portioned Nature's Blend Dry Kibble concept. The team was advised by Ajay Kathuria, Ph.D., Professor.

Paw Pantry delivers pre-portioned dog food meals in high-barrier metallized flexible packaging designed to preserve freshness and extend shelf life. Individually sealed pouches feature perforated tear openings for convenience, portion control, and portability while reducing food waste and mess. The concept demonstrates how advanced flexible packaging structures can enhance both product protection and consumer experience within the growing pet care market.

"With Paw Pantry, our team wanted to create a flexible package that makes life easier for active dog owners by offering a convenient, pre-portioned solution that helps preserve freshness and reduce hassle on the go," the team said. "Being recognized in this competition means a great deal to us because it reflects the time, creativity, and care we invested in designing a package that balances usability, innovation, and sustainability."

source reduction
less waste in the first place.®

Kathuria noted, "The FPA Student Design Challenge allows students to apply the fundamentals of packaging science and technology to real-world applications. The competition encourages students to evaluate design choices comprehensively, and the skills gained throughout the process enhance their career readiness."

Second Place Winners
Two Cal Poly teams tied for second place.

One winning entry, BoilBag Pasta – Boil & Strain Bag, was developed by Raina Patel, Vania Robles, and Kimberly Santana under the direction of Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor.

The BoilBag Pasta package transforms traditional pasta packaging into an active cooking solution. The heat-resistant pouch allows consumers to boil, strain, and serve pasta directly from the package, eliminating the need for a separate colander. The design incorporates an integrated drainage zone, reinforced handling features, and a recyclable laminate structure engineered for thermal performance and durability. By reducing cleanup, water usage, and packaging weight, the concept demonstrates how flexible packaging can become an integral part of the product experience.

"Through designing BoilBag Pasta, I learned how flexible packaging can go beyond simply containing a product and actually improve the consumer experience," said Patel. "The project challenged me to think about how packaging could simplify cooking, reduce cleanup, and create a more convenient and functional product overall. I am honored to receive second place in the FPA Student Design Challenge and excited to continue exploring innovative solutions that improve everyday products."

The second second-place award went to Apollo Son and Brooklyn Still, also under the direction of Shin, for their ChEASY All-in-One Mac n Cheese Pouch. The dual-compartment, BPA-free flexible package combines pasta and cheese ingredients within a single heat-safe structure. Designed for both convenience and manufacturability, the pouch streamlines meal preparation while reducing the need for secondary packaging and additional cooking tools.

Honorable Mention Recipients
Three packaging concepts received Honorable Mention recognition for their outstanding concepts:

- Flavored Gravy Sample Pouches, developed by Ava Franco, Sophia Marlow, and Sophie Simmer from the University of Wisconsin–Stout under the direction of Xiaojing “Kate” Liu, Ph.D., Associate Professor.

- Flexible Cotton Swab Package with Roll Over and Resealable Mechanism, developed by Tracy Liu and JT Wilcox from Cal Poly under the direction of Joongmin Shin, Ph.D.

- Four Square Beef Package, developed by Tucker Barth, Kara Ng, Devan Reynard, and Caden Sieger from Cal Poly, also under the direction of Joongmin Shin, Ph.D.

Best Video Award
The Best Video Award was presented to Cal Poly students Ethan Girtle, Katerina Harris, Alondra Lobos, and Leo Miller for their DUOLOOP™ Dual-Chamber concept. The video can be found here.

Competition Overview
FPA’s Emerging Leadership Council (ELC) oversees and judges the Student Flexible Packaging Design Challenge. Judges for the 2026 competition included:

- Alana Carr, Inside Sales and Marketing Manager, Hosokawa Alpine American, Inc., and ELC Co-Chair

- John England, Territory Manager – Converter Films, Berry Converter Films, and ELC Education & Recruitment Committee Vice-Chair

- Kyle Vafiadis, Senior Packaging Engineer, PPC Flex, and ELC Member

The 2026 competition attracted 49 concept outlines from students representing some of the nation's leading packaging design programs. Following an initial review, 23 concepts advanced to the development phase, where students refined their ideas into comprehensive packaging solutions.

Through the Student Flexible Packaging Design Challenge, FPA continues to support innovation, creativity, and professional development among future leaders in the packaging industry.

For more information on the Student Flexible Packaging Design Challenge or the Flexible Packaging Achievement Awards Competition, please visit www.flexpack.org or contact FPA at 410-694-0800.

FIRST PLACE HONORS

Paw Pantry Pre-Portioned Nature's Blend Dry Kibble

- **Student Team:** Kanya Misra, Olivia Peterson, and Jennifer Takao
- **School:** California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly)
- **Professor:** Ajay Kathuria, Ph.D., Professor

Paw Pantry delivers pre-portioned dog food meals in high-barrier metallized flexible packaging designed to preserve freshness and extend shelf life. Individually sealed pouches feature perforated tear openings for convenience, portion control, and portability while reducing food waste and mess. The concept demonstrates how advanced flexible packaging structures can enhance both product protection and consumer experience within the growing pet care market.

SECOND PLACE HONORS – TIE

BoilBag Pasta – Boil & Strain Bag

- **Student Team:** Raina Patel, Vania Robles, and Kimberly Santana
- **School:** Cal Poly
- **Professor:** Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor

The BoilBag Pasta package transforms traditional pasta packaging into an active cooking solution. The heat-resistant pouch allows consumers to boil, strain, and serve pasta directly from the package, eliminating the need for a separate colander. The design incorporates an integrated drainage zone, reinforced handling features, and a recyclable laminate structure engineered for thermal performance and durability. By reducing cleanup, water usage, and packaging weight, the concept demonstrates how flexible packaging can become an integral part of the product experience.

ChEASY All-in-One Mac n Cheese Pouch

- **Student Team:** Apollo Son and Brooklyn Still
- **School:** Cal Poly
- **Professor:** Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor

The ChEASY All-in-One Mac n Cheese Pouch is a dual-compartment, BPA-free flexible package that combines pasta and cheese ingredients within a single heat-safe structure. Designed for both convenience and manufacturability, the pouch streamlines meal preparation while reducing the need for secondary packaging and additional cooking tools.

Honorable Mentions

Flavored Gravy Sample Pouches

- **Student Team:** Ava Franco, Sophia Marlow, and Sophie Simmer
- **School:** University of Wisconsin–Stout
- **Professor:** Xiaojing “Kate” Liu, Ph.D., Associate Professor

The Flavored Gravy Sample Pouches offer cat owners an easy, low-waste way to discover their pet’s favorite flavors. Many cats are picky eaters, leading to wasted food and money as owners experiment with full-sized products. Our innovative design separates flavor from dry food, providing five single-serve gravy pouches in a convenient, flexible, resealable Doy pack made from 90% post-consumer recycled (PCR) content material. Each tear notch pouch lets owners squeeze out just the right amount to test a flavor without committing to a large purchase. This sample pack reduces waste, saves money, and makes mealtime customization simple and stress-free.

Flexible Cotton Swab Package with Roll Over and Resealable Mechanism

- **Student Team:** Tracy Liu and JT Wilcox
- **School:** Cal Poly
- **Professor:** Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor

This innovative stand-up gusset pouch offers a lightweight, resealable alternative to traditional rigid cotton swab packaging. Designed for convenience and sustainability, it reduces plastic use while maintaining product protection and shelf appeal. The integrated zipper closure ensures freshness and easy access, while high-quality printable film enhances branding opportunities. Compatible with existing form-fill-seal manufacturing systems, this package supports efficient, large-scale production without costly equipment changes. By combining functionality, material reduction, and consumer convenience, this flexible packaging solution represents a modern, sustainable evolution in personal care packaging.

Four Square Beef Package

- **Student Team:** Tucker Barth, Kara Ng, Devan Reynard, and Caden Sieger
- **School:** Cal Poly
- **Professor:** Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor

Four Square Beef is an innovative 1 lb. ground beef packaging solution featuring four individually accessible ¼ lb. portions in a thermoformed recyclable tray with peelable lidding film. Designed to reduce food waste, improve portion control, and minimize cross-contamination, it allows consumers to use only what they need while keeping the remaining portions sealed and protected. Each square can be easily removed from the tray without disturbing the others, and the flexible tray allows for convenient storage, folding, or stacking in refrigerators and freezers. The unique design also supports eye-catching graphics, clear instructions, and enhanced shelf appeal. By combining convenience, sustainability, and structural integrity, Four Square Beef modernizes fresh meat packaging to meet both consumer and environmental needs.

Best Video Award

DUOLOOP™ Dual-Chamber

- **Student Team:** Ethan Girtle, Katerina Harris, Alondra Lobos, and Leo Miller
- **School:** Cal Poly
- **Professor:** Joongmin Shin, Ph.D., Professor
- Video Link

DUOLOOP™ Dual-Chamber replaces traditional shampoo and conditioner bottles with one flexible dual-chamber pouch. An internal divider prevents cross-contamination, while bottom dispensing caps allow controlled use. The package can be hung from shower components using its attached feature, reducing bathroom clutter. Made from PET/PE multilayer film, it uses less material than two rigid bottles while maintaining functionality. By combining two products into a single lightweight structure, DUOLOOP™ reduces material use and improves space efficiency. This design presents a practical alternative to conventional rigid shampoo and conditioner care packaging.

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About the Flexible Packaging Association (FPA)

The Flexible Packaging Association is the voice of the U.S. manufacturers of flexible packaging and their suppliers. The association's mission is connecting, advancing, and leading the flexible packaging industry. Flexible packaging represents $51.5 billion in direct economic impact in the U.S. and is the second largest and one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. packaging industry. Flexible packaging is produced from paper, plastic, film, aluminum foil, or any combination of those materials, and includes bags, pouches, labels, liners, wraps, rollstock, and other flexible products.