



To open this feature, Ron Alalouff reports on how growth in packaging is being driven by demand for environmentally friendly and convenient products.

Fuelling the packaging boom

The worldwide food packaging market is worth almost \$62bn this year, according to a new report from Research and Markets. *Global Food Packaging Technology and Equipment Market 2018-2023* reports that the packaging technology sector is growing at 7% a year to reach \$57.8bn by 2023, and the packaging equipment sector is growing 6.5% annually to \$27bn by 2023.

The globalisation of the food trade has led to more demand for food products with longer shelf lives, which in turn increases the demand for packaging technologies such as aseptic, controlled, intelligent and active. However, the high cost of development and installation – together with Government regulation – are restraining the market's growth.

Based on technology type, the biodegradable packaging segment is projected to grow at the fastest rate, with demand being fuelled by environmental concerns about plastic packaging. Biodegradable technology includes the encapsulation of biodegradable components in food and packaging materials for the release of bioactive components, and the use of enzymes that can facilitate the decomposition process.

By equipment type, the form-fill-seal sector is forecast to account for the largest share of the food packaging equipment market this year.

The Asia-Pacific region is estimated to be the fastest growing for food packaging with China, India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea at the forefront. Rising household incomes and increasing middle-class populations have led to the growth in demand for packaged food products, which in turn is fuelling demand for packaging technologies and equipment in this region.

Increasing demand for portion packaging providing efficient 'need-based' packaging is driving strong growth in the filling and dosing segment of the equipment market.

Based on application, the bakery products sector is projected to grow at the highest rate during the forecast period. The increasing globalisation of



> More businesses are starting to show their commitment to reduce plastic packaging.

the business is expected to increase the demand for packaging which helps retain the texture, taste and quality of bakery products.

If the pledge is adhered to, all plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

Supermarkets in voluntary pledge to reduce plastic

A range of UK food businesses – including major supermarkets – have signed up to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic packaging by 2025.

The aim of the UK Plastics Pact – under the auspices of not-for-profit sustainability body WRAP – is to achieve these targets by redesigning and innovating packaging and using alternative delivery methods. If the

pledge is adhered to, all plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

Recently, 42 businesses – including Asda, Birds Eye, Coca-Cola, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Premier Foods, Sainsbury's and Tesco right through to plastic reprocessors and packaging suppliers – signed up to the pact. These businesses are responsible for over 80% of the plastic packaging on products sold through UK supermarkets. In addition, 15 other organisations have also shown their commitment to the pact.

“We are delighted to launch this pioneering national implementation initiative with WRAP in the UK,” said former record-breaking yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur, founder of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. “This bold new pact will bring together businesses, policymakers and the public to create a circular economy for plastics that tackles the causes of plastics waste and pollution, not just the symptoms. Focusing on innovation, better packaging design and end-of-use systems will not only generate long-term benefits for the environment but is also a huge economic opportunity.”

←
...but UK in the dock over plastic waste

UK consumers are the second biggest users of single-use cups, straws, food containers, crisp packets and wet wipes in the world, and the overall amount of plastic waste produced could rise by 20% by 2030, according to conservation charity WWF.

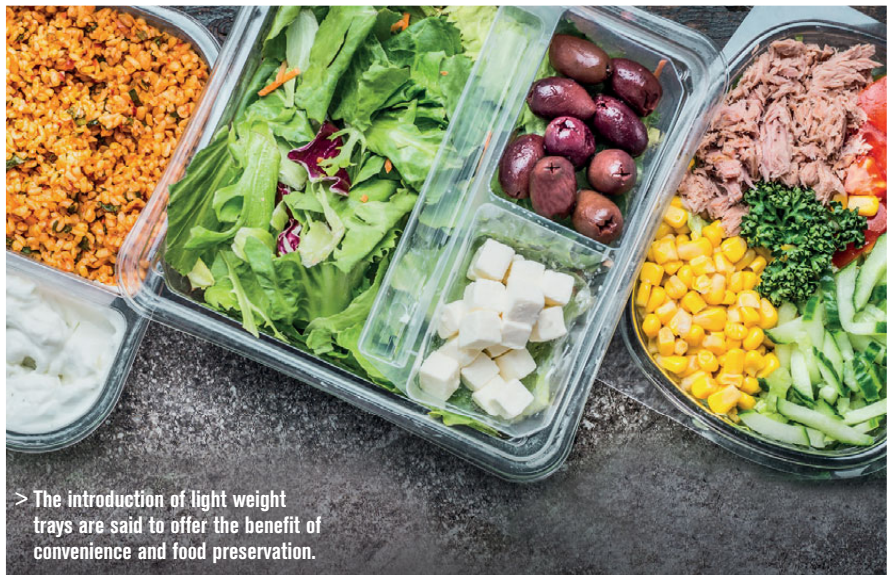
To help combat plastic waste, WWF has called for policies such as a 'latte levy' – a charge on disposable cups – and a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles. Without urgent new action, it says, the amount of plastic waste produced by the UK will rise from 5.2 million tons this year to 6.3 million tons in 2030. The majority of this waste (67%) is from packaging, a far higher proportion than the rest of the EU, due in part to more people in the UK buying convenience foods and takeaway meals.

Currently, only 31% of total plastic waste is recycled, though this is projected to rise to 42% by 2030, as a result of lifestyle changes and future policies taking effect. But the amount of recycled single-use plastic will only rise from 29% to 37%, taking into account increases in plastic bottle recycling as a result of the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive. The remaining plastic waste will likely head to landfills or be incinerated.

"We are polluting our world with plastic, suffocating our oceans and overwhelming our wildlife," said Tanya Steele, CEO of WWF. "We must act now – banning avoidable single use plastic by 2025 – and introducing incentives to help people and businesses make the right choices to reduce, reuse and recycle."

But Tony Burgess, head of sales and control systems at Proseal, says the reduction of food waste is also critical to the sustainability debate in food packaging.

"It is important to stress that plastic packaging still has many benefits for the food sector," says Burgess, "particularly its ability to help reduce food waste, which is widely acknowledged as a far greater problem than packaging waste in terms of its impact on the environment."



> The introduction of light weight trays are said to offer the benefit of convenience and food preservation.

Just as important, says Burgess, are the steps that pack manufacturers have already taken to minimise packaging waste. This includes the introduction of lighter weight trays that still have the strength and robustness to withstand the rigours of the supply chain, while offering the benefits of convenience and food preservation. Another example is the soft fruit sector with the move from clamshell and clip-on lids to simple thin top sealed film.

"Top sealing allows the use of today's modern tray sealers with all the corresponding benefits of an automated and efficient packing process," he says.



> Tony Burgess, head of sales at Proseal.

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Proseal has also been behind the launch of a machine to erect, fill and seal cardboard skillets for sandwiches, which has helped the move away from plastic packs. A recent innovation has been the launch of board-based MAP-capable food trays produced from sustainable cardboard. The trays feature a barrier that enables extended shelf-life compared to conventional carton-board trays, so reducing food wastage.

"It is essential that all this pack development work continues to focus on the importance of food preservation and minimising waste," adds Burgess. "As part of this, it is vital that the packaging and food industries take steps to explain to both retailers and consumers the work that is being carried out and has already been undertaken to develop lighter weight packs and other sustainable solutions – whatever the material involved. Any new pack formats introduced in the future must never be to the detriment of shelf-life." →