



What if Plastic Never Became Waste?

A Road Map to a World Without Waste

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In communities all over the world, circular recycling solutions provide a path to keeping plastic products out of our natural environments for good.

In the center of the Pacific Ocean, weighing more than 87,000 tons, is an amorphous vortex of trash known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. First discovered in the mid-1990s, it expands each year, collecting new pieces and particles. It's just one striking example of how the world is experiencing a direct threat from excess consumer waste, demonstrating the urgent need for sustainable solutions.



every bottle or can the company sells globally by 2030. Since launching in January 2018, the initiative has underwritten and implemented new recycling campaigns, as well as reinvented existing ones, from Estonia to Australia, Kenya to the United States, adhering to the values of a closed-loop circular economy: a system in which all of the plastic packaging the company produces is designed to be recycled, kept in the economy, and reused in food and beverage packaging.

These diverse programs provide valuable lessons that can be applied around the world. Ultimately, The Coca-Cola Company's progress proves that sustainable, circular recycling initiatives are possible—and valuable—for any country and any economy.

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From Mexico To The U.S., Strategic Investments Lead To Strong Solutions

It's estimated that over 1 kilogram (that's more than 2 pounds) of trash is generated per person, per day in Mexico. Much of that trash previously ended up in landfills, on the streets, or in the oceans. But over the last few years, Mexico has become "the leading country in Latin America in PET collection and recycling," according to a report from the online magazine *El Dictamen*. (PET is a clear and lightweight plastic used to make many plastic bottles). Now, 60 percent of Mexico's recycled PET is repurposed for the national market, and the rest is exported abroad.

Much of that can be attributed to a multiyear investment by The Coca-Cola Company and its bottling partners in Mexico. Significant investments in local infrastructures and efforts to make recycling a cross-industry initiative have radically changed both the local recycling ecosystem and the way bottles themselves are being made, so much so that the team recently launched a 100 percent rPET (recycled) bottle for The Coca-Cola Company's water brand in Mexico, Ciel.

Mexico has embraced a circular solution in which used bottles become new goods rather than waste in landfills. PetStar, based in Toluca, Mexico, has developed an

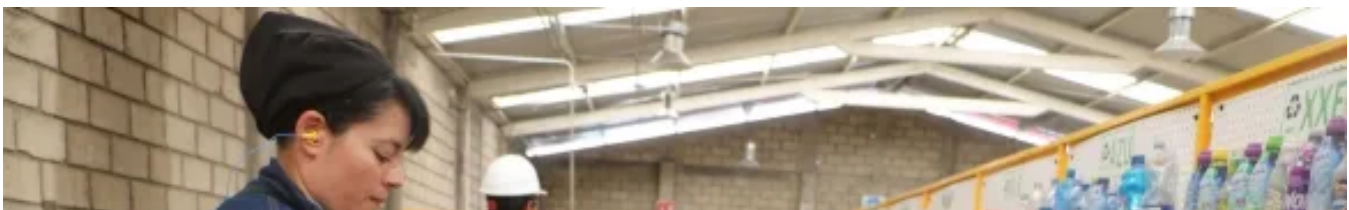
while also working with waste scavengers throughout Mexico to collect thousands of discarded plastic goods. While PET bottles can be recycled for fibers or other materials, bottle-to-bottle recycling has proven the most fruitful way of maintaining the value of the packaging. PetStar has invested heavily in technologies for extruding and decontaminating the materials the bottle is made from, so they can be reused.

The country's success is "a matter of investment, education, engagement and motivating consumers to be part of that infrastructure, as well as driving that infrastructure and making it more efficient," said Ben Jordan, senior director of environmental policy at The Coca-Cola Company, who points to the fact that emerging infrastructures are often more flexible, and better able to accommodate new initiatives, than established economies.

Mexico's project is an example of how strong, tactical programs can grow out of economic investment. It shows that, while the goals may vary from region to region, success will come, ultimately, from finding innovative, circular solutions that work in each market. That's why The Coca-Cola Company is investing in projects like Circulate Capital, which will empower people throughout South and Southeast Asia to create sustainable solutions to the plastics crisis in the world's oceans.

And in the U.S., partnerships such as the Closed Loop Fund (a predecessor to Circulate Capital) aim to increase recycling rates across the country by strengthening existing infrastructures. The Coca-Cola Company and The Coca-Cola Foundation have awarded grants to the Closed Loop Fund and the Recycling Partnership to help expand curbside recycling and provide recycling education to more than 500 communities. They have also donated public-space recycling bins to more than 1,000 communities across the country. This has led to more than 730 million pounds of recyclables being diverted from landfills. The Coca-Cola Company recently celebrated the placement of its 1 millionth recycling bin as part of this broader effort.

In Memphis, Tenn., for example, the Closed Loop Fund has helped the city achieve new levels of waste management, adding additional recycling containers and advanced processing methods to serve over 150,000 homes and collect 34 million pounds of recyclables for reuse.





South Africa Provides a Vision of Sustainability

Since South Africa's opening to the global trade market in the 1990s, the country has rapidly become one of the major economic forces in Africa. Along with this growth has come an increase in plastic waste and a need for a more sustainable recycling infrastructure. PETCO, the national voluntary extended producer responsibility company that supports and promotes PET recycling, has helped moved the country forward in this regard.

The Coca-Cola Company, in partnership with PETCO, has provided the required tools of the trade, including bailing machines, scales and trolleys for collection centers, and resources for coastal cleanups, such as bags and trailers for the cleaners.

“One of the keys to South Africa's success,” said Casper Durandt, head of sustainable packaging and agriculture for the Coca-Cola Southern and East Africa Business Unit (SEABU), “is the voluntary contribution towards PETCO via a resin levy and grants from brand owners, resin producers and retailers in the country.” These funds are channeled through contracted recyclers and ultimately provide an incentive to bottle collectors. An estimated 65,000 people in South Africa generate an income from this unique funding model, keeping interest in the collection of plastic bottles growing and the overall volume of plastic bottle waste in landfills to a minimum. Auditing results for 2017 show that PETCO helped the country achieve a 65 percent recycling rate, which is on par with EU standards.

PETCO now has a total of 11 recycling partners across South Africa. These recyclers produce food-grade PET from recycled bottles in three state-of-the-art, bottle-to-bottle recycling plants. The Coca-Cola Company in South Africa now uses up to 25 percent recycled content in its new bottles via a closed-loop structure.

a project to accelerate Kenya’s [recycling rates] from 16 percent to 50 percent within one year, and we think it’s possible,” he said, optimistically.

In June of this year, PETCO Kenya introduced a series of PET collection initiatives. Given these successes, there is plenty of reason to believe that this system can be replicated throughout Africa—and in many other countries around the world.

In Estonia and Australia, Consumers Drive Successful Recycling Collection Networks

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the tiny Baltic nation of Estonia has quietly become one of the most technologically advanced countries in the region. Early adopters, they’ve not only built an internet infrastructure and startup culture to rival Silicon Valley, they were also the first country in Eastern Europe to wholly embrace a closed-loop circular economy.

Estonian leaders looked to their neighbors in Sweden and Norway to adopt parts of their successful collection systems that engage producers, retailers, consumers and local governments. (Sweden did this so successfully that it now has to import trash to convert to energy to power its recycling plants.)

Based on these learnings, Estonia’s own success as one of the E.U.’s most dedicated recyclers can be attributed to its creation of a win-win-win ecosystem that involved establishing a network of recycling vending machines at major gathering points throughout the country. Through this approach, people can exchange plastic, glass, and cans for cash or charity donations, which is widely popular and highly effective.

“The key to its success was that it was very collaborative, with all the necessary market players involved—producers, retailers and local governments,” said Nele Normak, Coca-Cola’s public affairs and communications manager for the Baltic region. “The success of these vending machines has less to do with any design or technology innovation than simple convenience: Consumers can easily find and use the machines, making the recycling process feel like a simple trip to the ATM.”

Other nations with developed recycling infrastructures have also benefited from a collection network driven by consumers. Take Australia, for example. Since 2017, the country has started to change how it recycles containers, working to ensure that as many as possible are collected in some way, shape or form—either through a network of

circular-economy approach.

One of Australia's greatest successes has been in opening up the collection market to competitive bidding. "We find that instead of one collection methodology dominating, we can open the market and encourage innovation in the way the collection is done," said Jeff Maguire, group head of container deposit scheme implementation and sustainable packaging at Coca-Cola Amatil, the company's bottling partner. This offers opportunities for nonprofit organizations, especially those that have a preexisting collection infrastructure for used clothing and goods, to use the collection model to supplement their existing work. An example is in the newly commenced Queensland program, where nearly half of the 307 collection points are run by charities.

Recently, the system has been expanded from South Australia, where the program has been operating for 42 years, to other Australian states. "With the exception of two states, by the middle of 2020 the majority of the country will be under similar collection models," said Maguire.

Australia's vast and often remote geography is a challenge, with many smaller towns unable to provide recycling infrastructures on a level with larger cities.

Putting Circular Solutions into Action

"That's where we have to concentrate on innovative ways to make the collection system more convenient for those consumers," said Maguire. "We've been taking the South Australian approach and updating it, making modifications to ensure it's more efficient, easier for consumers to recycle, and has the many options that technology now enables to make those models friendlier and more accessible."

Sustainability and closed loop cycles must now become a global priority, from emerging nations to the world's largest economies. Companies at the forefront of sustainability are thinking creatively to address this growing concern. If the success of innovative closed loop circular systems in Estonia, Australia, South Africa, Mexico and the United States are any indication, no country or market is too small, large, or even remote to adapt more sustainable recycling models based on the unique socioeconomic factors and governmental policies in each region. These solutions ultimately help create a closed-loop system that benefits the environment, serves communities and begins the path to solutions for this generation. As each of these examples demonstrates, these goals do not have to be mutually exclusive.



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