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WPS INSIGHT

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EDITORIAL

The packaging industry is entering a phase where sustainability is no longer defined by intent alone, but by the ability to execute at scale.

Across global markets, regulatory mandates are reshaping packaging design, manufacturers are investing in recycling infrastructure, and material innovation is delivering solutions that balance circularity with performance.

At the same time, next-generation packaging is expected to meet increasingly stringent compliance requirements without compromising operational efficiency. Together, these developments signal a decisive shift from sustainability as a strategic aspiration to sustainability as a measurable business capability.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

◆ Sustainability compliance is becoming a strategic business function.

Packaging decisions are increasingly being shaped by Extended Producer Responsibility requirements, recycled content mandates, chemical regulations, and multi-state compliance

◆ Commercial-scale recycling is accelerating the circular economy.

Investment in advanced recycling technologies, manufacturing capacity, and integrated recycled-content solutions is enabling brands to adopt circular packaging without disrupting production efficiency.

◆ Material innovation is delivering both sustainability and performance.

New cellulose-based substrates and advanced PET films demonstrate that next-generation packaging can improve recyclability, reduce environmental impact, and maintain the functional performance demanded by food applications.

◆ Competitive advantage will increasingly depend on execution.

Organisations that integrate regulatory readiness, sustainable materials, operational efficiency, and long-term investment into their packaging strategies will be better positioned to respond to evolving market expectations.



From Sustainability Commitments to Regulatory Accountability

WHY IT MATTERS

Packaging sustainability is rapidly evolving into a regulatory and commercial imperative. As Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation expands across the United States, businesses must move beyond environmental commitments and establish robust compliance strategies that influence packaging design, material selection, sourcing decisions, and long-term investment planning.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- Seven U.S. states have enacted EPR legislation, transferring responsibility for end-of-life packaging management from municipalities to producers.
- Companies must determine producer status, identify covered packaging materials, register with approved Producer Responsibility Organisations, and fulfil reporting obligations.
- California's SB 54 establishes one of the most comprehensive packaging compliance frameworks, requiring Individual Source Reduction Plans by 1 August 2026 alongside mandatory reductions in single-use plastic packaging.
- California has established collective reduction targets of 10% by 2027, 20% by 2030, and 25% by 2032, supported by proposed financial incentives and penalties linked to source reduction.
- New Jersey's recycled content legislation will increase demand for post-consumer recycled materials as exemptions for food packaging expire in January 2027.
- Ongoing legal challenges across Oregon, Colorado, and California have created regulatory uncertainty. However, producers remain responsible for compliance while litigation continues.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- Regulatory oversight is extending beyond recycling to include chemicals of concern such as PFAS and microplastics, increasing the scope of packaging compliance.
- Businesses are encouraged to assess producer obligations across all applicable states, prepare California source reduction plans, strengthen recycled-content sourcing strategies, evaluate PFAS exposure, and develop coordinated multi-state compliance programmes.



LESSONS & ACTIONABLES

Regulatory compliance is becoming a competitive capability. Organisations that proactively integrate EPR readiness, recycled-content planning, and chemical compliance into packaging strategy will be better positioned to manage risk while supporting long-term business growth.

Recycling Innovation Simplifies Food-Grade Circular Packaging

WHY IT MATTERS

Commercial adoption of recycled-content packaging depends on solutions that simplify manufacturing without compromising quality or regulatory compliance. UFlex's integrated rPET technology demonstrates how process innovation can accelerate circular packaging at industrial scale while supporting evolving sustainability regulations.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- UFlex has introduced an FSSAI-compliant single-pellet rPET solution for food and beverage packaging.
- The technology combines recycled PET and virgin PET into a single pellet, eliminating separate material blending during production.
- The solution delivers high purity, mechanical strength, and thermal stability required for food packaging applications.
- It supports compliance with both Extended Producer Responsibility requirements and FSSAI sustainability guidelines.
- UFlex has also received USFDA approval for recycling rPET, rPE and rPP for food-contact applications.
- The company is investing in two additional recycling plants in Noida to strengthen plastic waste management capabilities.
- UFlex currently operates recycling facilities across India, Poland, Egypt and Mexico, and continues to expand its expertise in post-consumer recycled applications and mixed flexible waste recycling.

LESSONS & ACTIONABLES

Packaging innovation creates greater value when sustainability also improves manufacturing efficiency. Integrated recycled-content solutions can help brands accelerate adoption while simplifying production and supporting regulatory compliance.



Transparent Cellulose Material Redefines Sustainable Packaging Performance

WHY IT MATTERS

The next generation of sustainable materials must deliver environmental benefits without compromising functionality. Transparent paperboard developed from cellulose demonstrates that renewable materials can achieve durability, recyclability and marine biodegradability while supporting closed-loop manufacturing systems.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- Researchers from JAMSTEC and partner organisations have developed transparent paperboard using biodegradable plant-based cellulose.
- The material is transparent, recyclable and biodegradable, including in deep-sea marine environments.
- It can be manufactured using cellulose waste from worn textiles, recovered paper and low-value wood.
- The production process supports a closed-loop system in which materials, water and chemicals are recycled.
- Despite costing approximately three times more than conventional paper, production generates roughly half the carbon emissions associated with plastic manufacturing.
- Strong wet tensile strength and thermal resistance enable the material to hold boiling water without requiring internal coatings.
- Successful biodegradation at a depth of 757 metres demonstrates its potential to reduce long-term marine plastic pollution.



LESSONS & ACTIONABLES

Material innovation is increasingly focused on delivering environmental performance alongside functional performance. Renewable materials capable of integrating into circular manufacturing systems will continue to gain strategic importance.

Cellulose Investments Accelerate Renewable Packaging Scale

WHY IT MATTERS

Sustainable packaging is increasingly supported by long-term investments in manufacturing infrastructure rather than product innovation alone. Ence's strategy illustrates how capacity expansion, renewable materials and speciality pulp production are converging to strengthen circular packaging ecosystems.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- Ence has introduced moulded cellulose packaging designed to replace plastic in food applications.
- The portfolio includes compostable and recyclable trays for fresh and ready-meal packaging, with commercial availability expected during FY25.
- The company has committed an initial investment of €12 million (US\$13.6 million).
- Production capacity is expected to reach 40 million containers annually by 2026.
- Ence is shifting its business towards speciality pulp products, which accounted for 35% of Q1 2025 sales and are projected to exceed 60% by 2028.
- The Navia Biofactory project will introduce its first fluff pulp production line in late 2025 to support Europe's absorbent hygiene market while reducing carbon emissions through locally sourced compostable fibres.
- The company has also received environmental approval for its As Pontes recycled biofibre project in Spain.

LESSONS & ACTIONABLES

The transition to renewable packaging requires sustained investment across manufacturing, fibre production and supply chains. Organisations building integrated production capabilities today will be better positioned to meet future market demand.

High-Performance PET Films Advance Sustainable Food Packaging

WHY IT MATTERS

Packaging manufacturers increasingly need solutions that satisfy both operational efficiency and sustainability requirements. KM Packaging's latest mono PET lidding film demonstrates how lightweight materials can improve manufacturing performance while supporting recycled-content compatibility and regulatory compliance.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

- KM Packaging has launched K-Peel 4G, a mono PET lidding film developed for food packaging applications.
- The film achieves reliable sealing at 110°C with a dwell time of 0.3 seconds, improving packaging line efficiency.
- It continues to seal effectively even when contamination is present, helping maintain product integrity.
- The material is compatible with PET trays, including recycled PET and post-consumer recycled variants, while accommodating varying tray thicknesses and sealing areas.
- Suitable for ambient, chilled and frozen food applications, the film is oven-safe and incorporates anti-fog properties.
- It complies with OM7 migration testing for food-contact safety.
- Available in 21 and 25 micron gauges, the film enables manufacturers to reduce material usage while supporting sustainability objectives.
- The lightweight mono PET structure also aligns with Extended Producer Responsibility requirements and broader industry efforts to improve recyclability.



LESSONS & ACTIONABLES

Packaging performance and sustainability are becoming complementary objectives. Lightweight materials that simplify recycling while improving operational efficiency will play an increasingly important role in food packaging innovation.



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