

Background and Purpose

In the summer of 2019, CPMA surveyed members of the Plastics Packaging Working Group on the usage of plastic materials for produce packaging. Subsequent analysis, supported by the evaluation of domestic and international developments and trends in packaging¹, resulted in the creation of the CPMA Preferred Plastics Guide – May 2020 edition. Intended to help inform and support CPMA members in their packaging decision making processes, the CPMA Preferred Plastics Guide will be updated as developments in packaging materials, design and recycling capabilities warrant.

Unfavourable Unfavourable: Due to a lack of recyclability or effective reuse, CPMA members will seek to eliminate or replace the identified plastics by a defined period.	Minimize² Minimize: Although some recyclability or reuse may be possible, CPMA members will investigate alternatives or substitution for the identified plastics, or continue their use where required.	Preferred Preferred: Given the potential or existing capability to recycle or reuse, CPMA members will continue to use the identified plastics and consider them as viable replacements for plastics identified as “unfavourable.”
PVC and polystyrene	OPP (Oriented polypropylene)	PET (Polyethylene terephthalate)
Oxy-degradable plastics	PP (Polypropylene) ³	HDPE (High-density polyethylene)
Rigid water-soluble plastics	Complex laminates/multi-layer films	LDPE (Low-density polyethylene)
Polycarbonate	PVdC (Polyvinylidene dichloride) ⁴	PE (Polyethylene)
Acrylic		rPET and other PCR-containing preferred plastics ⁵
Black or dark coloured plastic ⁶		

1. A Landscape Review of Plastics in the Canadian Fresh Produce Sector, CPMA Technical Report, 2019

2. Recycling of select plastics can vary considerably across Canada, with some jurisdictions (e.g., B.C.) having established recycling capacity, whereas other areas (e.g., Saskatchewan) do not have sufficient volumes to warrant a dedicated recycling stream, or are in the process of introducing dedicated recycling capacity. Members are encouraged to consult local or provincial recycling officials to confirm if changes (increases or decreases) in recycling rates are planned.

3. Unlike plastics identified under the “Minimize” category, PP is being increasingly recycled in various regions of Canada, with other areas actively considering increases from nominal levels. If recycling levels continue to increase across Canada, PP may warrant a change from “Minimize” to “Preferred” status in due course. The CPMA will continue to monitor these developments and provide updates to the Preferred Plastics List when warranted.

4. PVdC, not to be confused with PVC, is typically used as a coating to limit moisture and oxygen diffusion. PVdC is not recyclable, but PVdC coatings are relatively common in various packaging applications.

5. Preferred plastics which incorporate post-consumer recycled content (PCR) and continue to meet produce packaging requirements are also considered as “preferred.”

6. Although the plastics used in black or dark coloured packaging may be recyclable, the majority of recycling facilities lack the ability to detect and properly triage black or dark coloured plastics, resulting in the opaque packaging being redirected to landfill. Members are invited to confirm if local or regional efforts are underway to improve detection during recycling when making decisions on the use of black or dark coloured plastics.

CONSIDERATIONS

Labels

- Key considerations for labels applied to packaging or directly to food are the choice of material and adhesives used. Although labelling materials are increasingly recyclable, adhesives used may inadvertently contaminate recycling streams. CPMA members are encouraged to discuss options to minimize adverse impacts of labelling whenever possible.
- Some labelling solutions propose composting as a means to mitigate the environmental impacts of labels. However, due to seasonal variations and relatively cold climate, home composting conditions in Canada are generally regarded as unsuitable or insufficient to effectively and efficiently decompose compostable materials whether plastic based or other. CPMA members are encouraged to confirm with vendors the impact of compostable labels on local industrial composting capabilities or recycling.

Packaging Design and Form Factors

- Considering light-weighted packaging designs and/or exploring alternative packaging designs, which reduce the ratio of packaging weight to the weight of packaged produce, are both best practices which can result in measurable and demonstrable reductions in total plastic packaging.
- CPMA members are encouraged to discuss with vendors the pros and cons of such packaging options to determine the impact on other key factors such as mitigating food waste in transit, maximizing produce shelf life and limiting unforeseen impacts on the commodity in question.

Plastic Substitutes, Bioplastics and Renewable-based Packaging Materials

- An increasing number of plastic substitutes is emerging, ranging from bioplastics and biodegradables to renewable-based packaging materials and traditional wood/paper-based packaging. The benefit of the majority of these options rests on the availability of suitable collection and composting conditions – either residential or industrial in nature.
- Due to seasonal variations and relatively cold climate, home composting conditions in Canada are generally regarded as unsuitable or insufficient to effectively and efficiently decompose compostable materials whether plastic-based or other. Industrial composting capabilities vary considerably between jurisdictions in Canada.
- CPMA members are encouraged to discuss with vendors the anticipated life cycle impacts of alternative materials when compared to current preferred materials. To inform such discussions, CPMA will be releasing a material selector guide in 2020 to support members in dutifully assessing options between plastics and alternative packaging materials.

Source: Adapted from Tesco Preferred Materials List (2019)