



## CLIMATE ACTION RETAILER QUICK GUIDE ON PACKAGING

This month the Climate Collaborative's ReCAP Community welcomed the **Center for EcoTechnology**'s Ashley Muspratt who shared climate smart packaging considerations for retailers. The Center for EcoTechnology is an environmental nonprofit based in Western MA that works with people and businesses to save energy and reduce waste. To learn more visit their [website](#).



We wanted to share some of her takeaways below. You can watch the recording [here](#).

### Packaging Considerations for Retailers

**Overarching Message:** There is no quick, universal fix for retailers seeking to reduce the carbon footprint of their packaging, other than simply *using less packaging* and *switching to reusables*.

Beyond that, to assess the most climate-friendly packaging materials, retailers need to look at their own packaging waste profiles, and the waste infrastructure where they operate. It will be helpful for retailers to assess one or more of the following questions:

1. What do recycling markets look like around you?
  - Note: There is less uniformity here than there once was (i.e. In some places, plastic cups are recyclable, some places they are not, and black plastic isn't recyclable almost anywhere). If the commercial and recycling program is strong, this may be a good option.
2. What type of compostable options are you considering, and what is your local composting infrastructure?
  - Do you and your customers have access to composting facilities?
    - If there is industrial composting, does the facility accept the compostable-ware you're considering?
    - If there is no industrial composting infrastructure, can your packaging option break down in a backyard composting system? (Note: PLA-based bio-plastics do not breakdown in backyard compost systems)
    - Is there an option to have an in-store composting program, where consumers can return their compostable-ware, if no residential roadside composting pickup exists?
  - Notes:
    - PLA is the most common compostable-ware; it's corn-based, and where and how the corn was grown can affect the overall footprint

of the product. For instance, is the corn displacing other land uses? Are they using chemicals/pesticides? There are a lot of great options, but sometimes a recyclable plastic will come in far superior from a carbon impact standpoint.

- PHA is an example of a more nascent technology. PHAs are a natural polyester produced by certain bacteria during the fermentation of carbon feedstorks...including waste. There is active R&D into producing these polymers on a large scale to use for packaging. Early results indicate that PHAs breakdown quickly and easily in backyard systems.

3. Can you introduce reusable packaging?

- Allow customers to bring their own reusable containers and bags where possible.
- Use paper and paper board in place of plastic and bio-plastic.
- Incremental change is great! Go department by department to look for opportunities to eliminate packaging or improve the materials that you're currently using.

After selecting which packaging materials and practices will work best for you, **consumer engagement on disposal and/or recycling is vital.**

- Compostables in a recycling bin can ruin a whole load of recycling, so signage is CRUCIAL.
  - This is important for your staff and customers.
- Let customers know if they can bring their own bags and containers to use in the store, like in your bulk or produce departments.

**Resources:**

- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, [Packaging Attributes Study](#)
- [EPA Recycled Content \(ReCon\) Tool](#)
- Database for [BPI Certified Products](#) & [Other Food Serviceware](#)
- [RecyclingWorks Source Separation Best Management Practices](#)
- [RecyclingWorks Single Stream Recycling](#)
- [Recycle Smart MA's Recyclopeda](#)

**Would you like further assistance from CET on making smart packaging decisions or managing related food waste?**

- Browse the resources on their [Wasted Food Solutions website](#)
- Contact their hotline at: [wastedfood@cetonline.org](mailto:wastedfood@cetonline.org) or 888.813.8552