

Recycling of Food Packaging and Sustainability: the Consumer's Role

Juan Moreno Rodríguez

Unión de Consumidores de Andalucía (UCA-UCE), Spain

***Corresponding author:** Juan Moreno Rodríguez, President, Unión de Consumidores de Andalucía (UCA-UCE), Spain;
E-mail: presidencia@uniondeconsumidores.com

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to raise awareness among consumers and make them conscious of the important role they play in the process of waste management. It is of vital importance to move towards a society in which consumers are the first link in the recycling chain.

The recycling of these food packaging is strongly associated with environmental sustainability. The treatment of containers requires a refinement of the consciousness and the involvement of all consumers.

For this reason, an organization such as "Unión de Consumidores" must commit itself to this cause day-to-day. This paper first identifies which action areas most concern us and analyses working programmers about food in different fields such as nutritional education, agricultural policies, the defense of biodiversity, public health and economy in general.

Then, themes such as the Spanish legislative framework for waste management and treatment, the costs of integrated waste management systems or the open debate of whether or not we should embark upon a deposit-return system as is done in Germany are discussed.

Finally, we attempt to identify the actions that should be carried out by consumers according to their social responsibilities. There, consumers are strongly encouraged to get involved in the treatment of food packaging in order to reach the goals of environmental sustainability.

Received date: September 12, 2016

Accepted date: February 27, 2017

Published date: March 7, 2017

Citation: Rodriguez, J.M. Recycling of Food Packaging and Sustainability: The Consumer's Role. (2017) J Environ Health Sci 3(1): 1- 2.

DOI: 10.15436/2378-6841.17.1088



Introduction

The necessary wager for sustainability

Nowadays there seems to be a consensus when referring to the term sustainability as "the capacity to last over time in harmony with human, economic and environmental resources in local and global terms.

That is why Unión de Consumidores, an organization whose main purpose is to defend the legitimate rights and interests of consumers and users, with whom we are fully committed, fervently believe that many areas related to the defense of sustainability in the field of nutrition are incumbent upon us. In that regard, our bets on sustainability are clearly reflected in programmers such as^[1]:

Nutritional education programmers: Collaborating with the development of programmers such as (1)Estrategia NAOS or (2)

PERSEO, developing actions in different fields such as community nutrition and international cooperation.

Agricultural policies: Putting emphasis on developing and defending organic farming.

Biodiversity: In many instances, its defense will entail the struggle for the preservation of native seeds, crops and plants, in contrast to the disrespectful development of GM products.

Public health: involved in the defense of legislation concerning food security and nutrition (3), defending the importance of a well-balanced diet, as in the case of the Mediterranean diet.

Economy: defending fair relations in the value chain of agro-food production, where all points, from production to consumption occupy a fair position.



State plan for management framework of residual waste

Addressing the problem of packaging recycling, its sustainability and the consumer's role is a challenge in this country that should necessarily be done in light of the new forecast of the "Plan Estatal Marco de Gestión de Residuos"^[2]. Last year, the Spanish State, according to EU directives, approved this state plan for the management framework of residual waste, whose fundamental objective is to progress in circular economy, which is called to encourage recycling^[3].

This plan provides the roadmap for successful waste management for the next 6 years, as well as all the necessary measures to meet community objectives in this matter. Additionally, it aims to improve coordination between administrations, transparency and information about this subject, inspection and control of rubbish, and social awareness.

Its main target is to transform Spain into an efficient society, and to replace the current lineal economy based on producing, consuming and disposing for a circular economy that harnesses waste in order to continuously produce new products.

The plan seeks to be an instrument to reorganize Spanish waste policy in the coming 6 years and to promote actions that provide a better environmental result, ensuring that Spain complies with its legal objectives. One of these goals is to devote 50% of household waste to re-use by 2020. According to data received in 2012, just 29% of household waste is currently destined for this cause. In the food field, it is important to note that the plan proposes the separate collection of waste, focusing on the partition of municipal organic waste.

We should not forget that there are not only environmental but also social and economic benefits at stake, such as the protection of human health, the climate, etc. These benefits are related to increased economic activity, higher availability of raw materials, and employment creation as a result of waste preparation for re-use^[4,5].

Topics for discussion

There are many new issues to be debated that arise in the context of this new scenario. Thus, a consumer's representative organization such as Unión de Consumidores must respond to all of them.

Increased demand entails greater costs

Controversy is assured and today many municipal administrations say that costs are not passed on to the consumers. Because of the shortfall that has been created, it is questionable whether these costs must be the responsibility of consumers or manufactures. We are not quite sure, but what we are clear about that:

Before deciding, we must know not only the price of waste management and its recycling process, but also the profit we can make from it. We demand greater cost transparency in collection services, treatment and destination.

In conclusion, sustainability is contingent on the strict adherence to the targets.

Currently, integrated systems such as ECOEMBES or ECOVIDRIO finance the costs

Regarding this matter, the plan "Plan Estatal Marco de Gestión de Residuos" predicts significant advances in managers' commitment, expecting better control of their proceedings.

Regarding deposit systems, refunds and returns

It is argued that water, beer, soft drinks and juices should use a deposit and return system, a practice which is already common in Valencia. The aim would be to avoid the disposal of cans and bottles in order to protect terrestrial and marine environment. In recent years, some societies are betting on return systems in such a way that beverages which are subject to deposit are sold again. This could be a step forward in the framework of wastes management and circular economy.

At some point, this could have been a great opportunity for Spain, but it did not succeed. For this reason, Unión de Consumidores fervently believes that it would not be beneficial to retrace our steps^[5].

According to opinion polls, we believe that Spanish consumers are not in favor of this previous proposal, since this could pose problems such as^[6]:

- The need for more waste bins
- A greater number of routes
- Larger queues in supermarkets
- Economic losses for faulty containers

The consumer's role

In short, and regarding the relationship between consumers and sustainability, from Unión de Consumidores we can say that:

The food sector must consider sustainability a critical issue, as well as decisive element in the fight against climate change.

The whole society must be actively involved in defining the factors which influence sustainability and assume their responsibility in environmental matters.

Unión de Consumidores supports the initiative "Declaración de Gran Canaria" about nutritional sustainability, including aspects related to packaging recycling.

Finally, we are fully aware that our present and future actions, as well as our work must be marked by consumers' training, covering areas such as nutrition, sustainability and environment.

References

1. Ecoembes: El PEMAR apuesta claramente por la recogida selectiva y la sensibilización ciudadana.
[CrossRef](#)
2. Consumo responsable y residuos. Jaime Rodríguez Laguna
[CrossRef](#)
3. Agencia Europea de Medio Ambiente: Residuos Alimentarios.
[CrossRef](#)
4. El reciclaje, la transformación social y la economía circular
[CrossRef](#)
5. Directiva 2008/98/CE del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de 19 de noviembre de 2008, sobre los residuos y por la que se derogan determinadas Directivas.
[CrossRef](#)
6. Resolución de 16 de noviembre de 2015, de la Dirección General de Calidad y Evaluación Ambiental y Medio Natural, por la que se publica el Acuerdo del Consejo de Ministros de 6 de noviembre de 2015, por el que se aprueba el Plan Estatal Marco de Gestión de Residuos (PEMAR) 2016-2022.
[CrossRef](#)