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Survey finds public support for a ‘national recycling standard’

The results of a massive UK-wide survey published today reveals the British public supports packaging that is 100% recyclable and is collected for recycling by councils wherever people live in the UK.

This builds on calls last week for a ‘national recycling standard’ by leading UK retailers speaking at the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. The demonstration of public support links to the Government’s proposals for ‘consistent recycling collections’ in its three-month consultation that ended in May 2019.

The survey of over 6,000 citizens across the UK builds on previous research carried out in 2012. It is one of the world’s largest public surveys into attitudes on food waste and packaging jointly commissioned by INCPEN (Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment) & WRAP (Waste Resources Action Programme) and supported by the Packaging Federation, the Kent Resource Partnership, the British Retail Consortium and the Food and Drink Federation.

Public understanding of the role and value of packaging in ensuring hygienic and unbroken delivery of products into homes is high, including greater recognition over the last six years of reducing food waste and keeping food ‘fresher for longer’. When asked to select up to five food issues that most concern them, 40% of respondents chose ‘food waste’ (ranking second, and an increase from 33% in 2012).

This increase in citizens’ recognition of the issues has also seen concern about the ‘way that food products are packaged’ rise from 16% to 28% in six years (though this concern is in 7th place behind the price of food, food waste, and how long fresh food lasts for).

The results support the direction of The UK Plastics Pact, led by WRAP, to ensure 100% of plastic packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025, and to eliminate problematic or unnecessary packaging.

Paul Vanston, CEO at INCPEN said, “In this survey the public has picked up a giant megaphone and amplified the calls by retailers, brands and the government for a National Recycling Standard. Delivering what the public wants requires a massive and speedy joint effort by all parts of the packaging value chain. We can take confidence that the packaging reforms proposed by all four nations in the recent consultations, as well as the work of the UK Plastics Pact and Courtauld 2025, are all in line with what citizens want policy makers and the value chain to get on and deliver.”

Peter Maddox, Director at WRAP UK said, “Food packaging remains high on the news agenda, and in the minds of the public who want to see action. Through The UK Plastics Pact, our members are driving systemic change which is the only way we will tackle plastic pollution at scale. It is important to remember that well designed packaging is very effective, and demonising it is not helpful. So it is heartening to see that almost half of respondents want to see packaging that is fully recyclable as their topmost action. We must also keep the role of packaging in preventing food waste front of mind, and the dire impacts on climate change that food waste could have if we do not tackle it urgently.”

Dick Searle, CEO at the Packaging Federation said, “Food waste is a massive global issue with 40% of food never eaten contributing hugely to global warming. Packaging plays a vital role in preserving food in the supply chain and the home and it’s great to see growing recognition of this by consumers. In the UK we are privileged to have a plentiful supply of inexpensive food but a huge amount is still wasted in the home. We can all do our bit to reduce this by following the storage instructions on the packaging to keep our food “Fresher For Longer”.

END

Editor’s Notes

1. The principal commissioners of the survey were INCPEN and WRAP, supported by The Packaging Federation, the Kent Resource Partnership, the British Retail Consortium and the Food and Drink Federation.
2. Icaro Consulting were contracted to carry out the survey work during November and December 2018. 6,214 citizens participated in the survey: England 3000; Scotland 998; Wales 996; Northern Ireland 206; London 1180 (booster survey) and Kent 221 (booster survey).
3. A report titled, [‘Citizens’ attitudes to food waste, packaging and plastic packaging: UK survey 2019’](#) is published alongside this news release that provides detailed information about the survey and the results.
4. First established in 2000, WRAP is a not for profit organisation which works with governments, businesses and citizens to create a world in which we source and use resources sustainably.
5. WRAP’s impact spans the entire life-cycle of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the products we buy, from production to consumption and beyond.
6. For more information about WRAP visit www.wrap.org.uk and The UK Plastics Pact visit www.wrap.org.uk/ukplasticspact