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Plastic packaging in the food sector: Six ways to tackle the plastic puzzle

The use of plastic packaging is increasing. But there s no single solution to the plastic puzzle. In this report, we look in depth at the plastic problem and suggest six ways in which the food sector can tackle it

Executive summary

For food producers and retailers, plastic is an indispensable packaging material. Compared with other materials such as cardboard, cans or glass, plastic is light, flexible and inexpensive. It also promotes food safety and shelf life and facilitates the transport and use of products.

Plastic packaging also contributes to environmental problems; it is made from oil and gas and hardly decomposes when it ends up in the environment as litter. Since only some of it is recycled, valuable raw materials are lost and the burning of packaging leads to CO_2 emissions. Due to the increase in the amount of (non-reusable) plastic packaging, these problems are becoming increasingly pronounced. The environmental impact of and negative consumer attitudes towards plastic are powerful incentives for food producers and retailers to strive to use less packaging and better plastic packaging

The popularity of and problems caused by plastic have created a ‘plastic puzzle’.

Companies, consumers and government share responsibility for the problem and each has a piece of the puzzle in their hands. This study focuses on the role of companies. What can food producers and retailers do to reduce the use of plastic and improve their packaging? This report answers these questions based on desk research, expert interviews and results from the ING International Survey.

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