

Circularity Leadership: Closing the Loop with Fibre-Based Packaging



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In a world striving for sustainability, closing the loop in packaging has become an urgent priority. Achieving circularity demands continuous effort from all stakeholders in the value chain. From raw materials to collection and recycling, forest fibre-based packaging is setting the standard for circularity leadership.



#Closing the Loop: #A Collective Responsibility

Circularity begins right at the source. The raw materials we choose, the processes we employ, and the infrastructure we develop all play critical roles in a sustainable life cycle for packaging. Achieving true circularity involves three main requirements:

1. Materials that can be recycled easily
2. A well-established collection and recycling system
3. Consumer trust, acceptance, and participation

Fibre-based packaging excels on all three counts, making it a leading material in the race for a circular economy.

#Why Fibre-Based Packaging Leads #in Circularity

Apart from disparities across a few countries, Europe overall provides a prime example of fibre-based packaging's leadership in circularity. With its well-established collection systems, fibre-based materials are effectively gathered and recycled. Germany and Switzerland, for instance, set exemplary benchmarks with their separate collection systems for fibre-based materials – including cartonboard and paper – ensuring high-quality fibres reach recycling facilities and are reused multiple times. Mixed collection systems, in contrast, cause cross-contamination, degrading the quality of recovered fibres and complicating recycling efforts.

Consumer confidence in fibre-based packaging recycling is strong. Pro Carton's 2024 Consumer Packaging Perceptions Survey found that 88% of consumers expressed confidence in recycling fibre-based packaging, surpassing glass recycling (85%) for the first time.¹ This trust aligns with improving recycling rates, as paper and cartonboard materials in Europe have reached an impressive 83.2%, with Germany achieving rates as high as 86%.² The packaging industry has set an ambitious goal of a 90% recycling rate by 2030 — a target within reach, thanks to fibre's unique properties and widespread consumer participation.

¹ Pro Carton's 2024 Consumer Packaging Perceptions Survey: https://issuu.com/procarton/docs/pro_carton_report_2024_v6

² Statista, [Recycling rate of paper and cardboard packaging waste in the European Union \(EU-27\) from 2005 to 2022](#).
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The Resilience of Fibre-Based Packaging

With its exceptional durability in the recycling process, fibre-based packaging is also designed for the purpose of being recycled several times. A Graz University [study](#) revealed that wood fibres can be recycled more than 25 times without significant degradation.³ This resilience ensures that fibres remain in circulation longer, reducing the need for virgin raw materials while also supporting multiple recycling loops.

Achieving the Next Level of Circularity

While the current recycling system demonstrates remarkable progress, further improvements are essential to fully realise the potential of fibre-based packaging. For example, fully harmonising collection systems and implementing uniform rules across Europe could eliminate inefficiencies and enhance recycling outcomes.

Furthermore, prioritising material sorting through separate collection systems would reduce cross-contamination and ensure higher-quality fibres reach recycling sites. Mandatory collection targets could further encourage compliance and drive innovation across the value chain.

Consumers and Industry: Partners in Progress

A circular economy is only possible when all stakeholders actively contribute. Consumers have shown their willingness to participate by increasingly recycling their waste and opting for environmentally friendly choices. Sustaining this trust and collaboration will enable the industry to enhance recycling outcomes and align more closely with consumer values.

As a member of **#GreenSource** – a coalition dedicated to climate-neutrality within the EU forest fibre-based industry – we are committed to promoting fibre-based packaging as a sustainable solution that embodies circularity. Together with consumers, industry players, and policymakers, we will lead the transition to a circular economy, proving that sustainable packaging is not just a goal — it's an achievable reality.

For more information on fibre-based packaging and our sustainability efforts, visit Pro Carton: www.procarton.com



³ Dr Rene Eckhart, Technische Universität Graz, [Recyclability of Cartonboard and Carton](#). Translation of study in 'Wochenblatt für Papierfabrikation 11/2021' December 2021

Who is #GreenSource?

#GreenSource is a coalition of Europe's forest-based industries, uniting the pulp, paper, packaging, and sawmill industries, and driving the transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral future. By championing renewable, low-carbon, and circular solutions, we actively advance the bioeconomy, reduce reliance on fossil-based materials, and support forest growth, CO₂ absorption, and biodiversity protection.

From sustainable forestry to innovative products, we're shaping a greener economy —because responsible products start with a green source. Learn more at eugreensource.org.

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