

2020 FOOD AND BEVERAGE SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING TRENDS

Based on results from the 2019 EcoFocus Trend Survey*



how Millennials will
change packaging forever

evergreen[®]
packaging

What Millennials think, say and do will dominate all aspects of businesses for many years to come — including the packaging of the beverages they drink and foods they eat. The reason? Millennials are putting a significantly higher priority on sustainability than have the generations before them and will reward brands and businesses that understand how to align packaging with their eco-focused needs. That is the finding of EcoFocus Worldwide’s 2019 U.S. Trends Survey.

As a result, this generation is expecting the companies it does business with to protect natural resources, use renewable materials, and practice sustainable forestry and regenerative agriculture. And according to President and CEO of EcoFocus, Linda Gilbert, Millennials have taken the lead on the sustainable packaging conversation with the expectation that brand owners do their part to deliver eco-friendly solutions.

“I don’t want to look back 50 years from now and think, ‘What happened?’”

– Kman23, male, 35 years old, West Chester County, NY

The 5 keys to understanding how Millennials will change sustainable packaging forever:



A healthier planet means a healthier me



Healthier foods & beverages are even healthier in sustainable packaging



Foods & beverages need to come in packaging that supports sustainable practices



Brand owners will build trust by acting more responsibly towards the environment



It is worth paying more for eco-friendly products

*The EcoFocus Trends Survey is an annual tracking survey, conducted since 2010, examining wellness and sustainability trends impacting the food and beverage industry. The survey is conducted online annually among 4,000 adults. The data is nationally projectable to the U.S. adult population, ages 18 to 65 years, with a margin of error of +/- 1.55 points at the 95% confidence level in 2019.



A healthier planet means a healthier me

The EcoFocus Trends Survey shows a strong belief among U.S. adults that “a healthier planet means a healthier me,” with Millennials being the generation who feels this most strongly. More than three out of four Millennials agree or strongly agree that better personal health is a big benefit of an eco-friendly lifestyle, compared to 65% of baby boomers.

“Being eco-friendly can help ensure my health... and my family’s as well.”

– dancegirl21, Female, 36 years old, Philadelphia, PA

Compared to other generations, Millennials see the strongest connection between being eco-friendly, being healthy, and having a better quality of life. Being eco-friendly is a way to improve their quality of life according to 80% of Millennials, nearly 10 percentage points more than baby boomers. That kind of eco-attitude transfers directly to their shopping habits and expectations.



Healthier foods & beverages are even healthier in sustainable packaging

The EcoFocus Trends Survey shows that a majority of U.S. shoppers say healthier foods and beverages should meet healthier and more sustainable packaging standards.

At a rate higher than any other generation, Millennials agree that foods and beverages with healthier ingredient lists should use packaging materials that are healthier too. When making purchase decisions, they are positively influenced by a company’s decision to use only packaging that is plant-based. Nearly 57% of Millennials say that they try to buy products in packaging that is made with plant-based materials.

MILLENNIALS EXPECT CLEAN, RECYCLABLE, PLANT-BASED

Shoppers feel that healthier foods and beverages should deliver a higher packaging standard. Shoppers expect clean label products to use **healthier packaging** that offers an **alternative to plastic** and is packaged with **renewable or plant-based materials**.

Total grocery shoppers		
68%	agree that foods and beverages with healthier ingredient lists should use packaging materials that are healthier too	71% for Millennials 64% for Boomers
65%	agree that healthy beverage brands need to do a better job of providing alternatives to plastic packaging	69% for Millennials 60% for Boomers
60%	are influenced when making purchase decisions by a company’s decision to use only packaging that is plant-based	69% for Millennials 51% for Boomers
59%	agree that natural and organic products need to do a better job of packaging their products with recyclable materials	65% for Millennials 54% for Boomers
47%	agree that they try to buy products in packaging that is made with plant-based materials	57% for Millennials 32% for Boomers

ECO-FRIENDLY PACKAGING FITS WITH HEALTHY FOODS

Perception of food & beverage containers fits well with healthy foods			
	Grocery Shoppers	Millennials	Baby Boomers
Glass bottles or jars	69%	73%	70%
Refrigerated cartons	52%	57%	47%
Cardboard boxes	50%	54%	46%
Paper tubs	50%	52%	48%
Shelf-stable cartons	47%	51%	42%
Paper cups	46%	49%	41%
Flexible pouches	38%	48%	24%
Aluminum cans	42%	46%	39%
Plastic bottles	38%	46%	27%
Plastic trays	30%	40%	17%
Styrofoam trays	27%	37%	13%
Styrofoam cups	26%	35%	10%

Foods & beverages need to come in packaging that supports sustainable practices

Social-media-savvy Millennials have a demonstrated ability to effect changes in business’s practices. The EcoFocus Trends Survey indicates that Millennials’ focus on long-term sustainable solutions will be a game-changer when it comes to packaging. While baby boomers feel positively about choosing products or services from companies whose packaging aligns with desirable practices such as recycling, the Millennial generation is calling for packaging that supports sustainable practices — particularly recyclable packaging made with renewable materials — or that is biodegradable, compostable or plant-based.

“Simple things add up — like using paper over plastic, reusing products that are intended to be disposable or not using disposable products, or recycling products in my home.”

– owlalon012, male, 26 years old, Tallahassee, FL

SHOPPERS CHOOSE PACKAGING THAT SUPPORTS DESIRABLE PRACTICES

Shoppers feel positive about choosing products or services from companies whose **packaging aligns with desirable practices** including **recycled, renewable resources**, as well as **biodegradable, compostable**, and **plant-based packaging**. This is especially the case with Millennials, who are more likely to view packaging in a positive light if it aligns with desirable practices.

Shoppers feel positive towards companies that only use packaging that is...



Recyclable

71% Total

76% of Millennials

65% of Boomers



Made with recycled materials

68% Total

74% of Millennials

61% of Boomers



Made with renewable resources

67% Total

72% of Millennials

61% of Boomers



Biodegradable

67% Total

72% of Millennials

62% of Boomers



Compostable

64% Total

71% of Millennials

59% of Boomers



Plant-based

60% Total

69% of Millennials

51% of Boomers

Millennials are the most likely group to say they support packaging that aligns with their values. Baby boomers are less likely to say so.

The Millennial generation has an intense focus on sustainability that creates great innovation and communication opportunities for businesses and organizations. For those who make it easier for Millennials both to understand their company commitments to sustainable practices and to find the products they want in the packaging they want — well labeled — the rewards of brand loyalty should be long-lasting.

EVALUATING ECO-FRIENDLINESS OF PACKAGING

Perception of food & beverage containers as extremely or very eco-friendly			
	Grocery Shoppers	Millennials	Baby Boomers
Glass bottles or jars	54%	59%	52%
Paper cups	43%	46%	39%
Cardboard boxes	42%	44%	39%
Paper tubs	39%	43%	37%
Shelf-stable cartons	35%	41%	25%
Aluminum cans	34%	40%	29%
Refrigerated cartons	35%	40%	29%
Flexible pouches	28%	38%	15%
Plastic bottles	25%	32%	14%
Plastic trays	23%	32%	10%
Clear bottle carafes	23%	30%	12%
Styrofoam cups	22%	30%	7%
Styrofoam trays	21%	30%	7%



Brand owners will earn trust by acting responsibly towards the environment

This is a generation which supports choice more than restrictions in most areas of their lives and does not tend to trust institutions as much as baby boomers. Still, the EcoFocus Trends Survey shows that Millennials do think companies can and should do more.

This generation is particularly sensitized to climate change and expects action from brands and retailers. Compared to baby boomers, Millennials are significantly more likely to be EXTREMELY concerned about the threat of climate change at 43% vs 32% for boomers.

Millennials want these institutions to be selective about what is on the store shelf and to offer a greater variety of favorite foods and beverages in sustainable packaging. They see a role for brands, when it comes to consumer education, in how to dispose of packaging responsibly, and for retailers in making eco-friendly shopping decisions easier for the consumer.

“Businesses need to be conscientious of the packaging and items they use in their packaging and keep it all to a minimum, and use mainly eco-friendly options.”

– Sdrimones, male, 32 years old, Jersey City, NJ

SHOPPERS WANT TO LEARN FROM MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS

Shoppers are eager to learn from consumer packaged goods companies when it comes to **recycling and disposal directions** for products as well as general information such as **making eco-friendly choices**. Shoppers feel positive toward companies who are educating consumers on ways to be eco-friendly.

Opportunities		
75% 73%	for Millennials for Boomers	agree that manufacturers need to do a better job at making recycling directions & information more prominent on packaging
75% 72%	for Millennials for Boomers	agree that manufacturers need to do a better job at telling shoppers how to recycle or dispose of their packaging
76% 67%	for Millennials for Boomers	feel positive towards companies who are educating consumers on ways to be eco-friendly
62% 38%	for Millennials for Boomers	agree that retailers are doing a good job of making it easier to make eco-friendly choices

MILLENNIALS FAVOR SUSTAINABILITY-MINDED COMPANIES

Millennials are significantly more likely than baby boomers to be influenced in their shopping decisions by corporate commitments to sustainable practices:

Millennials influenced by corporate efforts around...			
	Reducing pollution		Reducing waste
	Sustainable forestry initiatives		Using only packaging that is made of renewable resources such as paper or other plant fibers
78% 78%	for Millennials for Boomers	78% 75%	for Millennials for Boomers
72% 65%	for Millennials for Boomers	72% 61%	for Millennials for Boomers

“Millennials will reward and be loyal to companies who make commitments to what they see as desirable behavior. And they are willing to boycott companies who behave poorly or act opportunistically,” advises Linda Gilbert, CEO of EcoFocus Worldwide. “This is a generation who will themselves make positive environmental decisions and is willing to invest in the environment.”

PAPER IS TOP OF MIND

Some shoppers make it a point to **choose paper packaging** when they are shopping for foods, beverages and other products. When it comes to recycling, the majority of shoppers say they recycle paper packaging including **drive-through packaging, beverage cartons, cups and paper tubs.**

Shoppers choosing paper packaging...		
46%	look for foods & beverages in packaging made entirely or mostly from paper	55% 33% for Millennials for Boomers
48%	try to buy products in packaging that is mostly made of paper	57% 39% for Millennials for Boomers

One area in which Millennials show a particular interest and strong feelings is that of sustainable forestry. Shoppers, particularly Millennials, want to support and to learn more about sustainable forestry and feel that by choosing paper packaging, they are helping to support sustainable forestry.

“The Millennials are recognizing that just because something is recyclable does not mean it is sustainable. The research suggests that the Millennials will lead the demand for recyclable or compostable packaging made with renewable materials, packaging practices that renew or protect natural resources, and production practices that are regenerative and sustainable,” forecasts Linda Gilbert.



It is worth paying more for eco-friendly products

The EcoFocus Trends Survey shows that more than 8 out of 10 shoppers agree that reducing waste and pollution is “Common Sense.” A majority of shoppers, including Millennials, say they are trying to save energy and water as a part of their everyday life. While Millennials are on par with other consumers on these issues, what sets them apart in a dramatic way is that **64% of Millennials say that “to them it is worth paying more for eco-friendly products,” compared to just 38% of baby boomers.**

“I have definitely paid more to make a more eco-friendly choice. There are multiple brands that cost more but are better for the environment. And I’m usually OK with that...”

– bbosque5, Female, 31 years old, San Diego, CA

Why pay more?

61% says it is **worth paying more** for healthier products

68% for Millennials
50% for Boomers

53% says it is **worth paying more** for eco-friendly products

64% for Millennials
38% for Boomers

COMPANIES WITH PURPOSE COMMIT TO DESIRABLE PRACTICES

Shoppers are influenced by a company’s commitments to...



Reducing pollution

77% Total

78% for Millennials
78% for Boomers



Reducing waste

76% Total

78% for Millennials
75% for Boomers



Protecting natural resources

75% Total

78% for Millennials
73% for Boomers



Using renewable resources

72% Total

76% for Millennials
68% for Boomers



Sustainable forestry initiatives

68% Total

72% for Millennials
65% for Boomers

“Their willingness to pay more reflects a greater passion for correcting the eco-mistakes of previous generations,” observes Linda Gilbert.

Shoppers overall feel it is important to make their lives eco-friendlier (limiting the amount of their garbage, using less plastic and reducing their carbon footprint). This influences the choices they make at the store. Millennials put a higher priority on these actions than other shoppers. Only 52% of boomers say environmental reasons always or usually play a role in choosing products to buy and use, compared to 66% of Millennials.

“Millennials see value in doing business with companies that share their priorities and who are helping them to have choices that align to those priorities,” observes Linda Gilbert. “Manufacturers, brands, and retailers will be challenged to offer sustainable and economically viable solutions that offer real value to consumers.”

The Millennial generation will change packaging because it is making sustainability a priority and wants brands to offer sustainable choices. As a result, this generation is expecting the companies it does business with to protect natural resources, use renewable materials, and practice sustainable forestry and regenerative agriculture.

Evergreen Packaging makes and supplies paper and paperboard products globally, including gable top cartons. Fiber used in Evergreen Packaging products comes from forests in the U.S. where responsible forestry practices are used and where overall growth exceeds harvest. Evergreen Packaging cartons contain protective layers of plastic (including cap and spout). The data presented here is not intended to suggest that Evergreen Packaging products have all attributes discussed in this piece. This publication presents data on consumer perceptions because consumer perceptions matter when shoppers choose which products to purchase.

