

## Corrugated - an indispensable ally of the food and drink industry



**By Andy Barnettson, Director of Packaging Affairs, Confederation of Paper Industries**

Food and drink is the very stuff of life. There could hardly be a more essential industry. Nowadays, retailers provide a huge amount of choice for the modern consumer, and this is made possible by the fundamental role that corrugated plays in transporting goods through the supply chain.

Since Albert Jones first wrapped his newly patented corrugated paper around glass bottles back in 1871, corrugated packaging has played an increasingly essential role in allowing the supply of food and drink in the UK to grow, diversify and, more recently, to become more sustainable.

In the early days, the primary and pretty much sole function of corrugated packaging was to protect goods from damage in transit. In some less advanced economies, damage and waste of goods in transit is in excess of 40%, compared to less than 3% in the UK. So it can be seen that this primary function of corrugated is not only being successfully accomplished but that it remains of fundamental importance.

According to WRAP, every year, 6.7 million tonnes of food waste is generated in the UK. What's more, of the 20 million tonnes of domestic waste dumped into UK landfills, nearly 20% was food waste – either out of date or leftovers. This is a far greater problem than used packaging and has a much more significant environmental impact.

There are many factors contributing to the amount of food that modern society wastes, but one thing is for certain, without corrugated's highly protective qualities the amount would be much higher.

The modern food and drink industry has been responsible for widening consumer choice in a way that would have been unimaginable by their Victorian forbears. It's easy to forget that only a few decades ago the average supermarket stocked around 3,000 different items. Now the largest retail outlets are offering more than 50,000 different items to consumers. The explosion of new products has seen corrugated come into its own as its inherent flexibility as a packaging material has allowed it to adapt to the ever changing needs of the supply chain. As the requirements of brand owners and retailers change, so the corrugated industry adapts with novel designs or other innovations.

So corrugated has not rested on its laurels. Far from it. As the food and drink industry has continued to innovate (it is estimated that around 8,000 new products are launched every year) corrugated has also showed its power to innovate by transforming the traditional brown box, used as outer packaging, to smart, beautifully printed retail ready packs that have allowed manufacturers and retailers to achieve new levels of efficiency.

Corrugated retail ready packs have enabled companies to optimise the total amount of packaging in the supply chain and have given a boost to in-store operations making products easy to find back of store, easy to open, easy to shop and easy to dispose of. The advances in print on corrugated helped to increase in-store sales and promote brand image.

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None of these significant improvements happened by magic. Quietly, in the background, the corrugated packaging industry has been undergoing a technological revolution of its own. For example, recycled papers have been manufactured at a higher and higher level of quality, enabling corrugators to replace virgin fibres to a much greater degree than previously. Papers have become stronger and lighter and this has allowed the corrugated industry to produce packs that carry more goods using less materials.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the development of new software allied to new design techniques has meant that corrugated packs can be perfectly optimised for individual supply chains. New die-cutting machines have been able to produce ever more complex shapes. It is this flexibility and efficiency that enables the corrugated industry to take carbon out of the supply chain. This is possibly the most fundamental reason for predicting that corrugated will continue to be essential to the food and drink industry as society recognises its environmental challenges.

The Courtauld Commitment from WRAP now sets a target of reducing the carbon impact of packaging by 10% in 2012 compared to 2009. The grocery sector is working towards saving 80 million HGV miles between 2010 and 2012. Members of the Institute of Grocery Distributors (IGD) have signed up to remove 75,000 tonnes of waste from their supply chains by the end of 2012. Everywhere you look in the food and drink industry there are commitments to reduce environmental impact.

For a number of reasons corrugated is ideally placed to help the food and drink industry achieve all its targets. The first goes right back to corrugated's inherent flexibility as a packaging material. Since it can be cut and shaped to virtually any format, it is possible for designers using the latest software to ensure pallets can be stacked to the maximum and lorries filled to the roof. This takes lorries off the road as fewer are needed to carry the same volume of products.

Just as important as its flexibility is corrugated's second important attribute – the fact that it keeps carbon locked in due to high levels of recycling (over 80% in the UK). In fact, the recycling process is so efficient that a food manufacturer's retail ready pack can be recycled and back on the shelf as part of another box within 10 days!

Whilst every packaging material has its own role to perform in the supply chain, corrugated is a very talented performer with many different roles.

There are over 6,000 food and drink companies in the UK alone. If the corrugated packaging industry could have its way, there would be many more. That's why, through its trade association CPI (Confederation of Paper Industries), the industry is supporting an initiative to encourage new Government policies that will promote the growth of UK manufacturing. Alongside other partners, including the Food and Drink Federation, CPI is lobbying hard and at the highest political level.



The corrugated industry has been providing an essential service to the food and drink industry for 140 years. Given the importance of its role in protecting and displaying products, as well as reducing carbon footprints, the corrugated packaging industry is looking forward to the next 140 years, helping customers to meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

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## Notes to Editors

- CPI is the voice of the paper industry in the UK, representing papermakers, tissue manufacturers, corrugated packaging producers and recovered paper merchants.
- CPI represents 73 Member Companies, with a combined annual turnover of £4 billion and 19,600 personnel.
- For additional information on the UK paper industry, in the first instance, please contact Annabel Acton, Communications Manager, on 01793 889612 or email [aacton@paper.org.uk](mailto:aacton@paper.org.uk). Alternatively, please visit: <http://www.paper.org.uk>.