



As part of our vision to be a positive force for change, we've produced a series of factsheets to help our customers better understand sustainability issues, and what we're doing about them.

## Overview

The first fully synthetic plastic, Bakelite, was created in 1907, quickly followed by a range of different materials with the world's most abundant plastic, polyethylene, being created in 1932. There are thousands of different types of plastic, grouped into 7 different categories, which have different properties and uses.

Plastic is extremely versatile and has been particularly useful in the food industry to extend shelf life, protect products and improve portability. Although there are other alternatives for plastic packaging, like cardboard, glass, and metal, the benefits of plastic packaging usually outweigh those of alternatives, making it difficult to switch away from.

## What's the problem?

Plastic is created from fossil fuels (excluding bio-plastics), and large amounts of greenhouse gases are emitted during extraction of these fuels, and manufacture of plastic. This causes air pollution and contributes to climate change – see our factsheets 1 and 2 for more information on this area. Alongside this, large amounts of plastic ends up in our environment and waterways, which can harm wildlife and damage the ecosystem. Plastics take hundreds of years to decompose, and turn into microplastics, often consumed by animals which build up in the food chain and have been linked to toxic and physical effects on living organisms.

Most plastic can be recycled two or three times, and by reusing these products their environmental impact is then vastly reduced. However in 2021, only 44% of plastic packaging was recycled in the UK.

Bioplastics are plastics made from renewable materials such as corn starch and potatoes, and they typically have a lower carbon footprint and biodegrade more quickly than other types of plastic. However they can be difficult to recycle – needing industrial composting, which has limited availability in the UK. Consumers may also be confused about how to dispose of them, causing contamination in current recycling streams.

Switching from plastic packaging can only be done with suitable alternatives for manufacturers to switch to. However current alternatives such as paper, glass or aluminium are not straightforward swaps. Plastic is great at protecting things, keeping them airtight, watertight and hygienic - essential for meeting health and safety standards and keeping food fresh (Cucumbers last an amazing 15 days longer when shrink-wrapped). It also prevents damages during transport and storage. Both properties in turn reduce food waste. Plastic is lighter than other packaging options which reduces carbon emissions during transport. It can be made into any shape, it's not fragile like glass or paper, and it's easy to print usage and warning labels on. The unfortunate reality, therefore, is that plastic can do things that other materials can't – for the moment, at least.

## Share your feedback

We hope you find this fact sheet helpful, we'd love your feedback using the QR code or by clicking [here](#)



### Our Vision

To be the best foodservice provider  
and a positive force for change

because we care about...

- OUR PEOPLE
- OUR PLANET
- OUR CUSTOMERS
- OUR COMMUNITIES
- OUR PRINCIPLES

## Our targets and plans

We're aligned to the Objectives of the [UK Plastics Pact](#), and are working to 4 targets, which are detailed below, along with an update on our progress against them

**TARGET 1 – eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging:** We've removed all polystyrene and PVC, plastic straws and stirrers, and black / non detectable plastics

**TARGET 2 - 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging:** 97.3% of all packaging is now recyclable. Mono materials options are being evaluated to remove complex laminates and mixed materials components

**TARGET 3 - 70% of plastic packaging effectively recycled or composted:** Currently 83% of our plastics are recyclable; we aim to influence, but can't control what happens to waste one we've delivered it to customers

**TARGET 4 - 30% average recycled content in plastic packaging:** This has been the most challenging target as post-consumer recycled content plastic has limited availability, particularly plastic which is food contact safe. We are continuing to work with industry on this area.

## What can you do?

Make sure you recycle all plastic where possible. Review your operations to identify any areas where plastic isn't recycled and address any concerns this highlights. Often companies notice cleaners merging all waste together – check the reason for this and provide training if required. Ensure you have the appropriate bins and signage throughout your business (your account manager will be able to explain Bidfood's range if required) and speak with your waste contractor to ensure they have appropriate recycling facilities for your waste materials. Reducing the amount of plastic you use will also help – can you bulk buy any products, or switch to ones using less plastic? [WRAP](#) has a lot of information in this area and you could consider joining their Plastics Pact for further help and support.