Resource efficiency

To tackle the issue of resource scarcity, the European Commission published a Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe in September 2011. This initiative sets the framework for EU policies to support the shift towards a resource-efficient and low carbon economy, a key pillar of the EU 2020 Strategy. The food and drink value chain and waste management across Europe are sectors highlighted for action. The UK Government in its recently published Waste Prevention Programme for England welcomed the Commission's approach under this initiative.

More broadly, the Waste Prevention Programme for England sets out how businesses, government, the wider public sector, civil society and consumers can play their role in making better and more efficient use of available resources. Resource efficiency is part of the Government's wider agenda of waste prevention and is a key priority in order to achieve sustainable economic growth, while at the same time mitigating the negative effects of waste production on the environment.

ACE UK position on resource efficiency

The Alliance for Beverage Cartons & the Environment (ACE) UK supports the principles of resource efficiency and waste prevention. Our members – Tetra Pak, Elopak and SIG Combibloc – take a life cycle approach to measuring and managing environmental impacts across all stages of the value chain, and resource efficiency forms a key part of this.

The contribution packaging makes to resource efficiency is intrinsically linked to its contents. Its value relates inextricably to the food it safely preserves and the food loss it prevents. Measures seeking simply to reduce resource use through reducing packaging are, therefore, counterproductive.

Beverage cartons are inherently lightweight and space efficient, but as an industry we seek to improve the resource efficiency of cartons through sustainable sourcing of materials and supporting recycling, so that the value of used packaging materials is recaptured.

Our members are committed to the sustainable sourcing of their main raw material, wood fibre, from responsibly managed forests. This is ensured through rigorous traceability systems, independently verified and certified annually according to 'Chain of Custody' (CoC) standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Furthermore, the management practices employed in responsibly managed forests ensure that we have enough resources for today and tomorrow. In Sweden and Finland, where the majority of wood fibre for European beverage cartons comes from, net wood volume is actually increasing year on year.

All the materials used in beverage cartons are recyclable at the end of their life, enabling a better use of raw material resources. The life of the wood fibre is extended into other paper products, with the carbon locked within them for a greater period of time (thus avoiding CO_2 emissions). The aluminium foil and polymers in beverage cartons can be used in a number of different applications, ranging from composite materials for products such as roof tiles to industrial raw materials or energy recovery.

In the UK, the Sonoco Alcore paper mill in Stainland, West Yorkshire, takes advantage of the strength and quality of the wood fibres found in cartons by using them to manufacture industrial-strength coreboard. This is then made into 100% recyclable tubes and cores, around which are wound paper, man-made fibre yarns, and metal and plastic film for industrial applications.