

Huhtamaki

Sustainability. Responsibility.
Transparency.

Welcome to the Age of Accountable Packaging.



Huhtamaki

Packaging is facing a new reality.

Today, the stakes are higher, scrutiny is more intense, and sustainability promises must be proven, not just printed. QSRs, K-12 programs, and campus dining operations are all navigating the same pressures – evolving bans, complex EPR frameworks, and rising disclosure requirements.

Sustainability alone isn't the headline anymore – compliance is.

Packaging must not only protect food. It must help protect the brand itself.

Three trends are redefining the packaging industry.

Together, they are raising the standard for what packaging must do and prove.

Trend 1

Bans are the new baselines.

From coast to coast, states are tightening what can be used along with when and where. The list only continues to grow.

Trend 2

EPR is rewriting responsibility.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is transforming the conversation around packaging from a materials discussion into a financial and legal one, expanding who is accountable across the value chain.

Trend 3

Transparency starts at the label.

Labels, disclosures, and QR codes are turning packaging into a communication device. Claims must be clear, credible, and proven.

Trend #1

Bans are the new baselines.

What began as simply local policy has now become national operating reality. Foam bans. Single-use utensil reduction laws. Recycled content mandates. They are accelerating and momentum is continuing to build.

Compliance isn't coming. It's here.

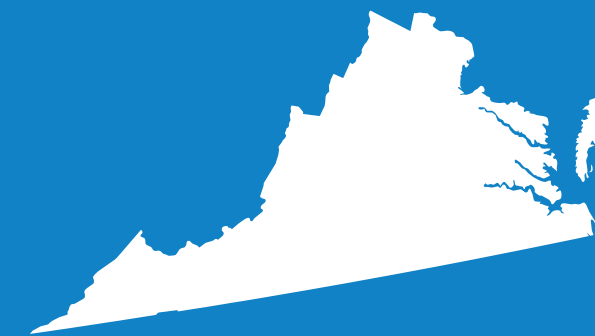
For QSRs, K-12 programs, and campus operators, packaging is no longer just a supply decision – it's a compliance requirement.

New Jersey



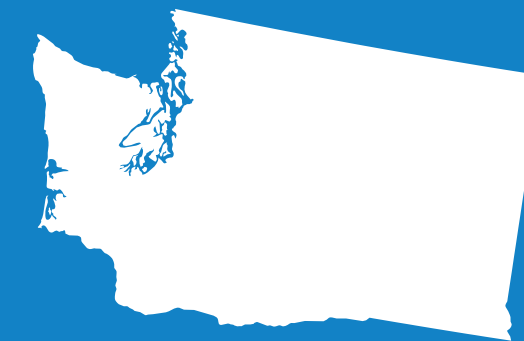
The "Skip the Stuff" law prohibits automatic inclusion of single-use utensils, condiments, and napkins with takeout orders. Effective August 1, 2026.¹

Virginia



The EPS foam container ban applies to all food vendors by July 1, 2026. Businesses with 20 or more Virginia locations were prohibited starting July 1, 2025.²

Washington



Customers now pay 12 cents per plastic film carryout bag at all retailers and restaurants. Paper bags require a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content.²

Traditional packaging is out. Sustainable packaging is in.

As restrictions continue to tighten, the industry is answering by evolving. QSR brands are moving from traditional single-use plastics toward compostable and recyclable packaging.³



Rolled out compostable cups across 14 states as part of its 2030 goal to make all customer-facing packaging recyclable or compostable.⁴



Committed to sourcing 100% of primary guest packaging from renewable, recycled, or certified materials. Currently testing compostable and fiber-based alternatives across markets.⁵



Committed to making all packaging recyclable or compostable by 2025, with formal sustainability reporting tracking progress.⁶



Implemented fully compostable serviceware and collection systems across multiple restaurant locations.⁷

Packaging is proof of compliance.

With more regulatory pressure, your packaging is more than a container. It is your proof of compliance and operational safeguard.

It's also proof of credibility.

Consumers are paying attention. Composting programs and packaging are building the kind of credibility with consumers that earns preference.

The shift to accountability is only just beginning.

Across the U.S., states are expanding bans on EPS foam, tightening rules around single-use accessories, and introducing more mandates on what packaging can be made of, how it can be distributed, and what claims can be printed on it.

In the age of responsible packaging, success isn't just about switching materials. It's about building packaging systems that can hold up under regulation, scrutiny, and scale.

Trend #2

EPR is redefining responsibility.

Under most EPR laws now active in multiple U.S. states, "producer" does not mean manufacturer.⁸ It means any brand owner, distributor, or retailer that places packaging into a state.

New role. More responsibility.

The question isn't whether this applies to you anymore. It's are you prepared for it? For a national QSR chain that means being accountable for every cup, wrapper, bag, and tray in every market you operate.⁹



This policy conversation
has now become a
legal one.

—
And for operators, it is no longer
optional to understand.

**This is not a future reality.
It's already here.**

EPR is a current operating reality for any brand running packaging at scale across multiple states. The compliance infrastructure, reporting obligations, and material sourcing decisions – all are now a part of every operation.

Brands positioned to lead are not switching materials as a reaction. They are building packaging systems designed for accountability from the start.

Brands that treat

EPR

as a design requirement
will not just stay compliant.

They will stay ahead.

Trend #3

Transparency starts at the label.

The package used to carry your brand. Now it carries your credentials. For QSRs, K-12 programs, and campus dining operators, this creates a new design challenge. Every inch of the package has to work harder than it ever has before.

More requirements. Same surface area.

Nutrition
Facts

Allergen
Disclosures

Ingredient
Transparency

Handling and
Safety
Statements

Federal requirements are expanding, state proposals are advancing, and the physical space on a cup, wrapper, or clamshell is not getting any larger.

Coming to a label near you.

01

Mandates are increasing.

The FDA is considering mandatory front-of-package nutrition labels. Transparency requirements are moving from guidance to mandate.

02

Disclosures are getting stricter.

Proposed legislation like the Food Labeling Modernization Act seeks enhanced front-of-package labels and stricter ingredient disclosures, with momentum that could extend into restaurant food policy.

03

Allergens are being added.

U.S. law now requires disclosure of the top nine allergens. Sesame was added in 2023. The list has only grown.

04

QR code usage is growing.

Because packaging real estate is limited, QSRs increasingly rely on QR codes to link customers directly to full nutrition panels, ingredient sourcing, and sustainability claims that no printed label could hold.

Packaging is now a transparency platform.

Transparency requirements are increasing with proposals advancing at the federal level. Combine that with the consumer expectation for clarity and that means what is on your packaging, and what it can verify, will only matter more.

For QSRs, K-12 programs, and campus dining operations, the question is not whether to invest in smarter packaging. It is whether your current packaging can hold up to the scrutiny already here.

In an era of scrutiny, the most credible brands design packaging that can answer questions the moment they are asked.



The age of responsible packaging is here.

Material bans, transparency mandates, and EPR frameworks are reshaping the packaging landscape.

These are not separate pressures – they are all happening at once. For QSRs, K-12 programs, and campus dining operators, the brands that win won't be the ones that react the fastest. They will be the ones that designed for this from the start.

The days

of packaging

just protecting food

are over.

Packaging for what's next.

The pressures outlined in this report are expected to continue and increase. Bans will expand. Transparency requirements will tighten. EPR obligations will reach more states and more operators.

The brands that lead through this will not do it alone. They will work with packaging partners who understand the regulatory environment, material science, and operational demands of foodservice.

Huhtamaki designs and manufactures packaging that solves for compliance, credibility, and performance. Our packaging meets today's requirements while adapting to tomorrow's.

Connect with us.

Let's navigate the age
of responsible
packaging, together.

Sources

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