

Packaging innovation is the solution to creating a circular economy

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Manufacturers and retailers are looking to innovation to find sustainable solutions to replace single-use plastic. One such solution is the locally manufactured Freshpact range of paper punnets, developed by Mpact, the leading South African packaging manufacturer and recycler. This relatively new concept in fresh produce grocery packaging has given shoppers and brand owners an environmentally sustainable alternative to single-use plastic, while assisting in building a circular economy.



A linear economy takes, makes and disposes. A circular economy, meanwhile, is a model of production and consumption that involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products to ensure value is maximised and waste minimised. It is an industrial system that is restorative by intention and design, and which makes business sense and benefits the environment. Furthermore, this economic model empowers communities and boosts the local economy. For Mpact's products, this means that what cannot be reused should be collected, recycled and made into new products.

Made from food-safe, 100% FSC-certified paper material, the Freshpact punnets can be reused and recycled after use. The Freshpact trays offer stakeholders in the fresh produce market the attributes of the traditional trays with the added benefit of being biodegradable, curb-side recyclable and, thus, sustainable.

"Our cutting-edge, recyclable punnets contribute to the reduction of single-use plastics, create a circular economy and go a long way towards meeting the sustainability objectives of our clients," says Wouter Heunis, innovation and technical lead at Mpact Corrugated.

"Distinguishing factors include the brandability of our product, our revolutionary barrier coatings that are moisture and grease resistant and the rigidity of the punnets, all of which makes them ideal for withstanding cold storage and transportation," he continues.

Since the introduction of the range in October 2019, Freshpact has grown its range substantially and actively driven

sustainability by converting plastic to paper. To date, these efforts have saved approximately 1,200m³ of landfill space, an area as large as 480 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

“With our national footprint, are supplying the largest premium retail group in South Africa with 100% recyclable packaging for its exotic tomato range. We have supplied the tomato trays and punnets for two consecutive years and started the new line of Kraft Herb pots in 2021. Our innovative packaging has been well received by its customers,” says Heunis. “The design objective of the new Kraft herb pots is to annually save seven tonnes of single-use plastic from ending up in landfill.

“As part of our journey of innovation, we have had to overcome enormous technical challenges to develop our product, such as which paper to use, the technical design and barrier properties,” he explains. “The machines and tooling used to produce the punnets were conceptualised, designed and manufactured in-house, as they were not available off the shelf. We also had to ensure that all food safety regulations were strictly followed and adhered to.”

According to Heunis, Freshpact has expanded and diversified its niche and bespoke products to suit other fruit and vegetables. “We are all about developing smart and sustainable solutions, to continuously drive towards developing a true circular economy,” he says.

“The demand for sustainable packaging in the retail sector is rapidly increasing,” says Heunis. “Since 2019 we have grown the business year-on-year, and plan to grow this further by taking calculated next steps in diversifying our range. We’ve so far been very successful in launching many first to market concepts including Kiwi, Strawberry, Cherry and Blueberry formats. It is encouraging to see that we have been able to supply the alternatives needed when new legislation dictates a move to more sustainable formats. Mauritius and France are the latest examples of legislation banning single use plastics.”

“We will continue to offer the retail market a premium product, whilst always making sure that any further innovation is sustainable and makes financial and business sense,” says Heunis. “Our objective is to have a noticeable impact and actively drive a circular economy in our country, so that we not only benefit the environment, but also contribute to the local economy and create jobs.”

For more information on the Mpact Corrugated division, visit www.mpact.co.za/our-products/paper-business/paper-converting

About Mpact Corrugated

Mpact Corrugated is a division of the Mpact Group, the largest paper and plastics packaging manufacturer and recycling business in Southern Africa. Mpact Corrugated is a leading producer of corrugated packaging in South Africa. The business has nine corrugated packaging plants, eight of which are in South Africa, with the ninth in Namibia. Mpact Corrugated also owns two plants in Mozambique and Namibia that manufacture corrugated sheets.

The business is firmly committed to research, development and cost optimisation, as shown by its investment in skilled resources at its innovation centres. All packaging is custom-made, is specific to customer needs and can be printed on site, as required.

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