

The need for sustainable boxing of fresh produce



ABOUT THREE WEEKS ago we had Victorian organic asparagus arrive from a wholesaler and the boxes were wedge-shaped plastic corflute. They were cleverly designed and all interlocked yet completely non sustainable.

The polystyrene organic broccoli boxes are used at least two or three times, as they have lids. Of late though, I have seen a new type that is thinner and breaks more easily. This is a good outcome for the box supplier but not for the environment! They are unable to be recycled.

I work at the end of the supply chain where I can see how much waste there is in boxing and packaging.

I believe a lot of the problem is growers unable to source or not bothering to research alternatives. If they were forced to adhere to a standard, better solutions in boxing and packaging would become more available.

If the demand is there for improved alternatives, someone will step up with the answer. All it takes is the will. Polystyrene shouldn't be used, especially the single use varieties.

I understand the challenge of transporting broccoli on ice from Tasmania to Brisbane for example, but if no one is attempting to research more responsible packaging, it will remain a system that perpetuates itself, wastefully.

I would like to know how the BFA is addressing this issue.

David Whyte.

**The Organic Gold Coast Farmers Market,
Miami, Qld.**

Dear David,

You are correct in thinking the organic industry and the movement should do more to improve such packaging practices. The

challenge is that there appear for some of the more delicate produce items that are best catered for (in protecting the product or keeping product cool) by packaging such as this, there are few alternatives as effective and readily available in Australia.

The standards state that packaging considerations need to include environmental aspects such as recycling and biodegradability where practicable. Packaging also cannot rely on certain plastic forms such as PVC.

We would welcome our other readers to add their suggestions on this topic – hopefully there are some innovative packaging companies who may take up this challenge. Certainly some are now producing and using compostable bags based on starches. It would be excellent to see similar innovations in the boxing area.

**Dr Andrew Monk,
BFA Standards Convenor**

New research on BPA toxins in packaging

A recent study by Associate Professor Scott Belcher (Department of Pharmacology) and his team at University of Cincinnati (USA) found that when the same new and used polycarbonate drinking bottles were exposed to boiling hot water, an environmental oestrogen (Bisphenol A) was released more rapidly than before exposure to water. Previous studies have shown that if you repeatedly scrub, dishwash and boil polycarbonate baby bottles they release BPA. They also concluded that if the same bottles were used for up to nine years, they released the same amount of BPA as the new bottles.

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which alter the function of the endocrine system by mimicking the role of the body's natural hormones. Hormones are secreted through the endocrine glands and serve different functions throughout the body.

BPA, widely used in products such as re-usable water bottles, baby bottles, food can linings, water pipes and dental sealants, has been shown to affect reproduction and brain development in animal studies. There is a large body of scientific evidence demonstrating the harmful effects of very small amounts of BPA in laboratory and



animal studies. There is a very strong suspicion in the scientific community that this chemical has harmful effects on humans.

The above study clearly indicates that we really need to revert back to the classic “glass bottles and jars” for the sake of our health as well as the health of our future generations.

In light of this new research, in the case of using the classic “food can” for organic products, manufacturers should be looking at using the “retortable pouches” which work just as efficiently and effectively as the “canned product” for sterilisation of foods.

These are widely used in countries such as Japan and are only just coming on the scene in Australia. This technology will assist in preventing any BPA from entering organic food products currently packed in food cans.

New studies conducted by US based Consumers Union (CU) have revealed that significant levels of BPA have been detected in a wide variety of canned foods including in goods labeled as organic and BPA free.

Dr Ajay Shah

Director, AAS Food Technology Pty Ltd ◀◆