



Turning the Tide on Plastic Pollution

Environment America Research & Policy Center, U.S. PIRG Education Fund and a coalition of organizations are calling on Whole Foods to put ‘planet over plastic’ by eliminating all single-use plastic packaging from its operations.

Companies, such as supermarket chains, have an important role to play in the reduction of plastic trash. But while some companies have made efforts to eliminate such unnecessary plastics as grocery bags and straws, the industry has generally lagged behind on tackling packaging.

In a 2020 report by *As You Sow*, a non-profit shareholder advocacy group, Whole Foods received an F for its policies and practices on reducing plastic waste.

The *As You Sow* report outlined three key areas where Whole Foods is lagging on tackling plastic waste. They are: packaging design, reusable packaging, and packaging transparency.

Getting the plastic pollution crisis under control starts with reducing packaging wherever possible, including redesigning packaging to omit single-use materials. *As You Sow* found that Whole Foods hasn’t adopted a company-wide goal to reduce plastic packaging. The report found that the supermarket also lacks a goal to reduce use of virgin plastics.

The report also concluded that Whole Foods has failed when it comes to embracing reusable packaging. The chain currently hasn’t set a goal to increase reusable packaging delivery systems and has taken no known action to implement reusable packaging, as reported by *As You Sow*.

Finally, the *As You Sow* report found that Whole Foods has failed when it comes to packaging transparency. Notably, the company has not reported anything on its plastic footprint, including tonnage and volume of packaging materials, units of plastic packaging, or percentage of sales that use reusable packaging.

Whole Foods Market Once Led the Supermarket Industry in Tackling Plastic Waste

Whole Foods was the first U.S. grocer to eliminate plastic bags at checkout in 2008 and removed plastic straws in their stores in 2019.

But in the *As You Sow* report, Whole Foods ranked behind other stores, such as Walmart and Kroger. Without a company-wide goal to reduce plastic packaging, we believe that Whole Foods is not living up to its reputation as a sustainable, environmentally-conscious company.

Whole Foods can once again be a national leader on tackling plastic pollution. Smaller, regional grocers, such as Giant Eagle, have committed to eliminating single-use plastic by 2025. Whole Foods can put wildlife over waste by committing to concrete steps that eliminate single-use plastic packaging from its operations.

Whole Foods Market

	Packaging Design	
	Recycled Content	
	Supporting Recycling	
	Failed Sustainable Packaging Commitment	No Penalty
	Reusable Packaging	
	Packaging Transparency	
	Producer Responsibility	

Whole Foods Market got an F on eliminating single-use packaging
In the As You Sow, “Waste and Opportunity 2020: Searching for Corporate Leadership” report, it scored poorly in several areas.

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Single-use Plastic Packaging

Nothing we use for a few minutes should be allowed to pollute our rivers and oceans for hundreds of years—especially when we don't really need it.

Single-use plastic packaging, like shrink wrap, food wrappers, and other plastic food packaging, is notoriously difficult to recycle. Just 13% of single-use packaging materials make their way back into new products. The rest is burned or sent to landfills—where it can make its way into the environment. In 2019, the Ocean Conservancy found that food wrappers were the number one item picked up on beaches world-wide.

This single-use plastic packaging is a glaring example of a culture that prioritizes a moment's convenience over the health of our oceans. We don't need it, and to protect wildlife we need to move beyond it.

Plastic Waste is Piling up in the Environment

About 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced since the 1950s—the weight of roughly 80 million blue whales. Only 9% of plastic has been recycled, 12% has been incinerated, and the remaining 79% has ended up in landfills or the environment. In 2018, global plastic production reached 359 million metric tons—50% of which was for single-use purposes. Single-use plastic products are used just once but can pollute our rivers and oceans for hundreds of years.



Plastic fragments have been found in 44% of all seabird species
It's easy for a bird, fish or turtle to mistake small pieces of plastic for food—especially when there are millions of pieces of it floating in our waters, forming enormous garbage patches in our oceans.

Plastic Pollution Harms Wildlife

Every year, another 8 million metric tons of plastic end up in our oceans—the equivalent of a garbage truck dumping a load of plastic waste into the ocean every single minute.

For a bird or fish or turtle, it's easy to mistake a small piece of plastic for food—especially when there are millions of pieces of plastic floating in our waterways.

Scientists have found plastic fragments in hundreds of species, including:

- 86% of all sea turtle species
- 44% of all seabird species, and
- 43% of all marine mammal species.

Ingesting these fragments is often fatal. When animals ingest plastic waste, it can block their digestive tracts. As a result, they starve.

Toxic chemicals in plastic can harm animals' health—and people can ingest these chemicals as they make their way up the food chain. Our oceans -- and the whales, dolphins and sea turtles that live in them—can't wait. We need to turn off the tap on plastic pollution, and we can start by eliminating unnecessary forms of plastic.



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