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How Leading Suppliers Are Furthering Sustainability Efforts—and Helping Retailers Go Green, Too

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While safety and convenience remain high among grocery-store shoppers' priorities, environmental concerns are on the rise for many consumers—perhaps more than many retailers may realize.

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Amid the dynamic market, however, grocers may be leery of overhauling their operations to put sustainability at the forefront, and understandably so. Fortunately, small operational changes—and key partnerships—can help bring clarity to the process of adopting environmentally friendly practices while keeping profits high.

Strategic partnerships driving change

The demand for sustainable products and operations is undeniable: According to the *Meet the 2020 Consumers Driving Change report* (<https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/EXK4XKX8>) from IBM and the National Retail Federation, nearly 60% of consumers say they're willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact—and these values influence everything from the products they buy to the stores they patronize.

Businesses across markets are raising the bar for sustainability, and for some, this has meant joining the **U.S. Plastics Pact** (<https://usplasticspact.org/>)—a cooperative project focused on reducing and reusing plastic waste with initiatives rooted in setting a national goal toward a circular economy for plastics in the U.S. by 2025.

“In the U.S., we have more than 95 stakeholders who have committed to a common vision for a circular economy for plastics,” explains Tiana Lightfoot-Svendsen, Communications and Project Manager at the U.S. Plastics Pact. “That includes businesses, brands, government entities, nonprofit organizations, universities and other stakeholders that are seated together at the table... To really solve this problem, we have to have every single member of the plastics value chain working together.”

Choosing the right strategies to put sustainability goals into practice, however, isn't always clear. It's for this reason, among others, that global leader in packaging closure systems Kwik Lok expanded its sustainability efforts announcing a new reduced packaging initiative and joining the Plastics Pact at the beginning of the year. The collaborative scope of this project lined up directly with Kwik Lok's core values.

“When it comes to sustainability, we're making sure our carbon footprint continues to decrease rather than increase despite growing business,” says Karen Reed, Global Director of Marketing and Communications at Kwik Lok. “One of the reasons we joined the Plastics Pact is to partner with like-minded brands try to learn together how we can really move the needle.”

Sustainability in action

One such brand to join forces with Kwik Lok is Original Bagel, who recently made the switch to using Kwik Lok's Eco-Lok closure in an effort to boost sustainability while remaining competitive on the market.

“Pushing sustainability goals forward while simultaneously juggling everything that comes with managing a wholesale bakery can be a challenge, but it’s essential that sustainability progress is not ignored,” says Dave Harris, President at Original Bagel. “When a supplier hands me an eco-friendly alternative on a silver platter like Kwik Lok did with the Eco-Lok, that’s just awesome. It was so simple to make this small change to immediately reduce our plastic usage, so we just jumped on it.”

The addition of the Eco-Lok is part of a holistic effort to increase sustainability at Original Bagel. Other shifts have included switching bags from zero recycled plastic to 25% recycled plastic, installing solar panels on the bakery’s property, converting to a “cool” white roof to reduce energy demand and significantly reducing food waste. Harris sees this change as an investment—both in the future of the company and the environment.

“Our customers, especially the end consumer, didn’t know about our positive environmental change when we started using the Eco-Lok back in 2020,” he says. “But our employees are aware of our sustainability efforts, which is part of the reason they value where they work, and all those points of pride about our company comes through in the high quality of our bagels. Making small and big changes to improve sustainability is simply part of Original Bagel’s ethos, and our employees, vendors and customers can count on us continuing to make these improvements behind the scenes.”

Adds Harris, “The world is shifting more towards that way of thinking anyway: higher quality, better culture and better values, even if it means paying one or two cents more per bagel. We focus on super high-quality ingredients and more expensive processes than our competitors do, and that results in a better product that people are willing to pay more for. Over 25-plus years, that formula has worked.”

The Eco-Lok closure, made with less than 20% fossil fuel-based resin and requiring 20% less greenhouse gases to produce, is the industry’s first sustainable bag closure. Kwik Lok’s participation in the Plastics Pact involves a commitment to eliminate unnecessary packaging; use more recycled and bio-based materials; ensure all plastic packaging is 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable; and more by 2025.

“Kwik Lok has a really interesting viewpoint, because we work with so many different brands and producers across bakery and produce and more,” explains Reed. “By joining the Plastics Pact, we thought we could be a liaison back to our customers and make sure we’re bringing the latest knowledge to them and helping to unpack some of these really complex issues they’re grappling with.”

As more and more consumers join the ranks among those who prioritize sustainability when they shop, there’s no time like the present for retailers to become proactive in nurturing environmentally friendly operations. Solutions from the experts at Kwik Lok can help retailers adopt the practices that are right for them—and right for the planet, too.

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