

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

CASE STUDY **Albertsons, Inc**

The Switch to Recyclable Coated Packaging for Poultry



Based in Boise, Idaho, Albertsons, Inc. is part of one of the world's largest food and drug retailers. The parent company Supervalu operates approximately 2,600 retail stores in 48 states. As a company, Albertsons recycles more than 50 percent of its waste stream, including over 300,000 tons of OCC (cardboard) and over 12 million pounds of plastics in 2005. A portion of the cardboard recycled by Albertsons includes boxes with alternative recyclable coatings. Albertsons has been an industry leader in switching from traditional non-recyclable wax-coated boxes to recyclable coated packaging options for a variety of the commodities it purchases and sells. These commodities include the majority of their produce, case-ready poultry and beef, and other deli items like salmon, catfish, and chicken.



One of the commodities Albertsons receives in recyclable coated packaging is cut-up poultry. The cut-up poultry is received in recyclable packaging year-round and it arrives refrigerated. Albertsons recently renegotiated its contracts with suppliers so that by the fall of 2006, 100 percent of their cut-up poultry will be supplied in recyclable coated boxes.

During the process of switching to recyclable coated boxes, Albertsons had to identify a source for the recyclable packaging and then conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Initially, the new boxes were more expensive than wax-coated boxes, but the reduction in waste hauling costs and increased recycling revenue more than offset the additional cost. Trials were conducted to test the stacking, slide, arrival condition, insulation, moisture retention, storage, and product condition properties of the packaging. Albertsons found the recyclable packaging performed at a level that was comparable to, if not better than, that of the traditional wax-coated boxes.



Finally, Albertsons trained its employees to handle the new packaging. Since the new packaging is recyclable, employees only had to be trained to identify the new packaging and divert it to the recycling stream instead of the trash.

According to Albertsons, the most difficult part of the transition was finding a viable, nearly cost-neutral alternative and convincing the commodity suppliers to change the packaging. As more grocers have switched to recyclable coated boxes

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for their commodity shipments, the number of options has increased and the price of these recyclable boxes has decreased. Now, having switched portions of their commodities to recyclable coated packaging, Albertsons recycles up to 75 percent of all the corrugated packaging it receives. The increased recycling revenue and decreased waste hauling fees have resulted in substantial cost savings for Albertsons.

If all retailers that receive poultry products switched to recyclable coating packaging similar to that used by Albertsons, an estimated 615,000 tons of corrugated material could be recycled annually.

Albertsons has received numerous awards and recognition for its leadership and innovation in the use of recyclable coated packaging, including:

- EPA WasteWise Honorable Mention Award for the Very Large Business Category.
- The California Integrated Waste Management Board Waste Reduction Award Program (WRAP) award (seven times), WRAP of the Year winner in 2001.
- An America's Marketplace Recycles! Award from the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), November 2005.
- The National Recycling Coalition Innovative New Product or Material Award for 2000.
- The National Pollution Prevention Roundtable 2000 Most Valuable Pollution Prevention Award, Second Place.



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Agency

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (5306P)
Washington, DC 20460

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