



# Sustainable Packaging Innovation Forum USA

**October 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> 2025 | Chicago**

*Reduce, reuse, redesign:  
Packaging strategies and solutions that scale*

## **Day 1, Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>** From silos to systems: Integrated solutions and enabling infrastructure

### **9.00am-9.30am The commercial case: How to drive business resilience and brand value through packaging sustainability**

According to RRD's 2024 report, 83% of packaging decision-makers say their firms have advanced sustainability targets, with 81% citing packaging as a key contributor. Nearly 90% plan design changes in the next two years, and 73% of respondents are doing so due to consumer demand for eco-friendly, minimalist packaging. Regulatory pressure to disclose packaging emissions and circularity strategies for materials and waste is also mounting on a local and global level, further embedding packaging into core corporate planning.

In this opening session, we'll explore what this operational context means for packaging producers, consumer brands, and their coordinated work across the value chain. We'll also look beyond material risk to the commercial opportunities in packaging innovation to add brand value.

### **9:30am-10:10am Upcoming, enforced and revoked legislation: The impact on business operations, planning and packaging strategy**

The regulatory environment has been in a state of flux. Global businesses need to be aware of what is happening (and what isn't) on a national and a local level across a huge number of markets. So, a lack of consistency and harmonization risks draining resources and preventing a long-term, coordinated approach.

In this session, a panel of experts will guide us through the global legal landscape. We'll assess how leading brands and packaging manufacturers can adapt to stay compliant now, whilst planning for what's coming next to keep ahead of the regulatory curve.

### **10:10am-10:30am The business of innovation: How leading brands are turning technological breakthroughs into market-ready solutions**

Packaging innovation has the potential to deliver sustainability whilst improving the consumer experience, adding brand value and securing a commercial advantage. But often breakthroughs in R&D don't translate into real world solutions.

In this Q&A session, we'll assess the common barriers to adoption and reflect on the trajectory of innovation ahead. We'll look at examples of where packaging innovation has worked and where it hasn't. We'll discuss:

- The cross-functional collaboration required to scale existing solutions and foster a culture of innovation
- What investment is required to drive innovation, who should bear the cost and who should see the ROI?
- How to bridge the gap between technical feasibility, consumer acceptance and business viability

### **10:30am-11:10am Break and speed networking**

11:10am-11:50pm **Material choice framework: Balancing availability, sustainability, functionality and cost**

Fiberization has been one of the biggest trends in packaging in recent years. Across the industry, there's been a marked shift from traditional plastic packaging towards fiber based, monomaterials and above-ground feedstocks. However, whilst these alternative materials are often perceived as 'more sustainable' by consumers, there is often more nuance in decisions and trade-offs are inevitable.

In this session, we'll highlight how leading brands make decisions on material choices in packaging. A panel of practitioners will describe the research and process they use, and discuss:

- Practical examples of frameworks and metrics that inform decision making
- Trade-offs between carbon, circularity and cost, and how to balance trade-offs
- How to anticipate consumer acceptance and ensure their experience remains at the center of packaging innovation
- Local considerations from cultural norms to recycling infrastructure

11:50am-12:30pm **The consumer is king: How to place experience at the center of packaging innovation**

Consumers don't like packaging waste. But while the concern is there, action is still lagging. If consumers don't play their part to close the loop, then it all misses the point. The consumer, as always, is king.

From the choice of materials to (re)use, to packaging strategies more broadly, this conversation explores how solutions can be designed around real societal challenges. By placing consumers' needs and experience as the starting point for research and innovation, progress can be oriented to reach these people-centered goals.

- Examples of innovations that have worked for consumers, and those that backfired completely
- How to ensure the core function of packaging across contexts (e.g. food safety, transport, reuse, hygiene, end-of-life) is incorporated into the development of solutions
- Communicating value: how product development and storytelling work together for impact

12:30pm-1:30pm *Lunch*

*At Innovation Forum, we take a unique, participatory learning approach to our breakout sessions, ensuring that both our expert panels and attendees contribute to the discussion. Through diverse learning formats, we foster an environment where everyone has a voice.*

*The Solution hub is a space where you can get best practice from leading organizations and share insights from your business reality. We'll set the tone with a 25 min introductory panel, and dive deeper through follow-up focused discussions chaired by each panelist.*

1:30-2:30pm **Solutions hub 1**

1. Design for circularity – **Rethinking materials and processes**
2. Supply chain data – **How to deal with conflicting data points, trade-offs, and inconsistent metrics**
3. Partnerships for innovation – **Tracking and communicating change: How brands and industry organizations are collaborating for smarter labels and infrastructure solutions**

2:20pm-3.30pm **Solutions hub 2**

1. Material complexity, market reality – **Flexibles, films and hard to recycle plastics**
2. AI and packaging innovation – **What smarter sorting means for EPR, PCR and the bottom line**
3. Partnerships for innovation – **Making new markets: How leading companies are collaborating towards more circular pharmaceutical packaging**

3:30pm-4:00pm *Break*

4:00pm – 17:00pm **Solutions hub 3**

1. The future of waste: **Rethinking value and work in the circular economy transition**
2. Numbers that inform strategy – **A look into the costs, the benefits and the ROI of sustainable packaging**
3. Partnerships for innovation – **City-wide circular packaging systems: Assessing progress, obstacles and the case for scale**

5:00pm-6:00pm *Networking drinks*

## **Day 2, Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>** Innovation, adaptation and opportunities for value-creation

### **9am-9:30am US EPR and the roadmap to implementation: Steps for a clearer distribution of responsibility, costs and revenues**

7 U.S. states have active Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws for packaging: California, Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Minnesota, Washington, and Maryland. This number is set to expand and the direction of travel is quite clear.

Effective legislation is essential to level the playing field and drive a more competitive market for sustainable packaging. In this session, we'll assess what effective legislation actually means in practice for business. We'll take a look at existing laws, what is coming down the track, and how we can collectively ensure EPR delivers the right impact.

### **9:30am-10:15am Towards a circular economy for packaging: The opportunities in innovation and market transformation**

This session explores how circular economy principles offer a proactive response to economic pressures, including material tariffs, supply chain volatility, and efforts to address packaging waste pollution. As circularity thinking matures, business conversations must evolve from compliance to strategic transformation: What does circularity really mean for the redesign of products, processes, and the broader systems in which we operate? And crucially, what kind of future are we building toward?

Circular packaging systems present not just a way to improve existing models, but a platform to develop entirely new value propositions, markets, and modes of delivering functionality. This session explores packaging circularity as both a response to current pressures and an opportunity to shape what's next.

The expert panel will guide a forward-looking reflection on:

- Economic and resource case for circularity: How circular models reduce exposure to volatility, drive material efficiency, and support long-term resilience in supply chains and resource access
- Emerging value chains: A look at how reverse logistics, digital traceability, and closed-loop manufacturing are opening up new value chains and business opportunities
- Cross-industry relevance: How to leverage cross-sector insights and shared infrastructure to coordinate local market solutions with global operations and strategies

10:15am-10:55am *Networking break*

### **10:55am-11:35am The packaging fix: How to connect packaging circularity with climate action**

Climate has the attention of boardrooms. As we approach 2030, this is only set to increase and carbon tunnel vision is already a very real phenomenon.

Packaging has a huge role to play in business reaching their climate targets. But often the trade-offs in packaging design can come down to climate vs circularity. So, it's not always as straight forward as it seems.

In this session, we'll look at how to harness the momentum around climate to drive sustainable packaging strategy. We'll assess the risk that a narrow focus on carbon can hold, whilst discussing how brands can collaborate across their value chain to align packaging innovation with broader climate action, to ensure a unified approach.

For more information or to get involved, please contact Lia Da Giau at [lia.dagiau@innovationforum.co.uk](mailto:lia.dagiau@innovationforum.co.uk)

11:35-12:05pm **Innovators spotlight: Changing packaging in a changing world**

In this dynamic Shark Tank-style session, innovators will pitch their solutions to a panel of industry experts and thought leaders, showcasing how their products address critical sustainability challenges. Our "sharks" will probe into key factors such as reliability, scalability, and affordability while sharing actionable insights to help overcome hurdles to market entry.

This session will also invite contributions from the audience, leveraging the collective expertise in the room to tackle key challenges such as:

- *Barriers to market access*: Can we address cost and scalability effectively, without losing sustainability value along the way?
- *Adaptability*: Innovation often stalls at the point of costly changes. What makes innovation adaptable enough to be a smart investment in times of uncertainty?
- *The case for open innovation*: What role should offtake agreements and brand partnerships play, and how to make open innovation work for commercial success?

12:05pm-12:30 **Reusable, returnable and refillable formats: How to make them work for business and consumers**

There's a common critique that business is too focused on recycling. Within the waste hierarchy, reuse is a step that is often skipped altogether or one that gets stuck in pilot mode. There are challenges around cost, logistics, experience, convenience – it's not easy.

In this session, we'll take a step back. We'll look at a series of practical examples where reuse and refill has worked and assess what can be learnt and what can be applied into different contexts. We'll also highlight the opportunity in new business models and debate where reuse and refill can (and ultimately can't) play an effective role in packaging strategy.

12:30pm-1:30pm *Lunch*

1:30pm - 3:00pm **Roundtables**

Roundtable A - **The case for investing in innovation: Assessing the market competitiveness of sustainable packaging solutions**

Roundtable B - **The role of labels to communicate value: How to balance impact claims and consumer education**

Roundtable C - **Emerging markets: Challenges and opportunities in post-consumer recycled**

Roundtable D - **Microplastic crisis: What does the latest science tell us about impact?**

Roundtable E - **Unmasking the unseen: Confronting toxicity, microplastics and chemicals of concern**

Roundtable F - **The impact of 'invisible packaging' (B2B, glues, additives) on packaging sustainability**

Roundtable G - **Hidden risks across the packaging value chain: Discussing human rights, reputational and legal considerations**

Roundtable H - **Alternative fibers and biomaterials: How to reach a common ground on standards and performance?**

3:00pm-3:30pm **Roundtables wrap-up**