



Packaging at Unicorn

The world of disposable packaging is an unfortunate one indeed, and we wish it didn't exist. Where possible, we offer non-disposable versions and we know you know the reasons to reuse – like the 5p discount per deli pot! – but this isn't feasible for everyone, all the time, for all foodstuffs.

After exhaustive research into the lifecycles of different materials, we have a good idea of the pros & cons of various types of packaging, but we still haven't found a perfect solution. It's a question under constant review as new alternatives arise. For the curious, here is what we know so far.

What is the ideal disposable packaging?

It doesn't exist, mind, but if it did it would be...

- Made from recycled goods (although 100% plastic isn't suitable for unwrapped food), or perhaps an industrial byproduct (like sugar cane bagasse, although processing methods are uncertain)
- Made locally (ideally from local recycled goods and not via the Far East, while remembering that studies suggest long distance ship freight can be more efficient than European lorry freight)
- Produced using methods that don't require much energy, water, chemical inputs or pollution (debates rage about recycled vs. non-recycled goods, paper, cellophane, bamboo)
- Fully recyclable (although Manchester only takes plastic bottles)
- Fully degradable (although degradable plastic risks weakening the plastic recycling stream and may just release methane faster, and cornstarch isn't really compostable at home)
- Suitable for what's inside (e.g., airtight or oil-proof), robust, light, good-looking on the shelves (card or paper struggle here)
- Not supportive of oil companies (plastic), GM farming (corn starch), oppressive regimes or land clearing (renewable sources).

What do we use?

Keep in mind, especially on the deli, options change as we test alternatives.

On the tills

- Reused carrier bags. As long as they're clean and the right size, these nearly new bags are perfectly useful. Happily though, people are using less disposable carriers so supply has dwindled in recent years.
- Sturdy, recycled Lancashire-made 'keepsake' carrier bags. We know we're not the only ones who pop in unexpectedly or buy more than expected, so this is a non-disposable, affordable option, made from the plastic that wraps pallets of goods shipped to the UK.

On the deli

- 50% recycled, recyclable (but not in Manchester) plastic tubs – we're searching for a UK-made version. As a backup we still use the 'compostable' corn starch tubs.
- Recycled, UK-made paper bags, same as you find in the veg section.
- Paper with plastic film for more oily snacks – we'd love an alternative but haven't yet found it.
- Compostable soup cups (paper with cornstarch lining & lids) and recycled paper clutches.
- Sugar cane bagasse tubs for jackets. Sustainably sourced wood forks.

In our packed goods range

- Biodegradable, reusable, recyclable (within 18 months) Yorkshire-made plastic. We are still working on the grip seal bag however.

What should you do with your rubbish?

- Reuse veg bags, carrier bags, packed goods bags and deli tubs (not forgetting the 5p discount) until they give up the ghost.
- Bring in broken 'keepsake' bags, we'll replace them for free & put them into our recycling (to be made into bin bags by the Co-op).
- Other plastics go in the bin, until Manchester changes its policy.
- Paper can be recycled or composted.
- Soup cups & lids, jacket potato boxes, old jute bags (wash first to remove the plastic lining) and corn starch tubs should compost, but may take some time in your home compost heap.