



Allies from organics industry sought for sustainable plastic packaging

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"We use 100 percent used plastic for our packaging, 20 percent of which comes from the Yellow Bag," said Timothy Glaz, Head of Corporate Affairs at Werner & Mertz, at Biofach, the world's leading trade fair for organic foods. "Unfortunately, such sustainable packaging is seldom found in the organics market."

His comments came during the panel discussion "Plastic Planet? What's happening with packaging and recyclability in the organics market?" sponsored by the association UnternehmensGrün, which sees itself as the political voice of the sustainable economy. Dr. Katharina Reuter served as discussion moderator as UnternehmensGrün members Glaz, Martina Merz (merz punkt), Dr. Annett Kaeding-Koppers (akk-INNOVATION) and Sascha Rieth (Bio-Company) presented their views on sustainable packaging.



During a panel discussion on packaging in organic supermarkets, Timothy Glaz, Head of Corporate Affairs at Werner & Mertz, promoted a closed-loop recycling system in which plastic can be repeatedly processed for high-quality reuse. Photo: Werner & Mertz / Matthias Merz



Glaz made his appeal for allies in the organics industry, saying that the focus should be on sustainable formulas and sustainable plastic packaging. In the future, packaging made of bioplastic or compostable material with a verifiably poor ecological impact similar to conventional plastic should not be touted as an environmentally friendly solution. As far as compostable plastic is concerned, all panel members agreed that it does not constitute sustainable packaging. "That is a sham! Compostable plastic makes material sorting more difficult. Because it is not recognized as compostable plastic, it is not separated or eliminated and in the end it is burned anyway," said Glaz.

The solution is the development of high-quality recycling

Glaz promoted the solution from Werner & Mertz, which was represented at Biofach by its Frosch brand and trade fair booth. The Mainz-based manufacturer of cleaning products established the Recyclate Initiative in 2012 and has dedicated itself to processing and re-using plastic for high-quality applications. Theoretically, a plastic detergent bottle can be made into a detergent bottle over and over. Werner & Mertz has proven that this approach works in practice. Thus far the company has produced more than 240 million plastic bottles from used plastic. "Our Initiative was set up purposely as an Open Innovation project. We are very eager to find more allies, including from the organics industry, to join us," said Glaz.

Design for Recycling

In the organics market, however, there is still room for improvement not only in the use of recyclates, but also in the recyclability of packaging. Panel members reported on packaging of apparently environmentally friendly paper that turns out to contain a required plastic layer, which makes the composite difficult or impossible to recycle. "We develop our packaging in accordance with a design-for-recycling approach," Glaz explained. "That means that we make sure our packaging can be processed into high-quality recyclates."

The most recent example he presented was a completely recyclable stand-up pouch with a removable label which Werner & Mertz had developed jointly with the global packaging and paper company Mondi and other partners. The pouch, pouring spout and lid are all made of a single material, namely, polyethylene. With such a mono-material product, recycling yields a recyclate of nearly the same quality as the original material.

Demands for price incentives for the use of post-consumer recyclates

In still another area the panel members all agreed that sustainable packaging and recyclability are a macrosocial issue which requires statutory regulations that advance implementation. "UnternehmensGrün wants to act on a political level to push through price incentives for the use of recyclates," said Dr. Reuter. One option could be a reduction in the value-added tax.

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