



PAPERTECH

FRESHTRAYS  
PRODUCE

# A Guide to Sustainable Paper Trays for Fresh Produce:

How to Meet Consumer, Retailer and Regulatory Demand by Successfully Switching to Pressed Paperboard



# Shoppers want more fresh produce.

Consumers are shifting to fresh, health-focused diets and data shows they're willing to pay a premium for them. Meanwhile, states are tightening packaging mandates and costs are rising. However, many fresh produce companies are cautious about adopting "sustainable paper trays" because of concerns about moisture degradation and structural collapse.

## The good news?

Switching to sturdy, moisture-resistant and recyclable paperboard trays is now simple, especially for produce such as corn, bell peppers, zucchini and mushrooms. FRESHTRAYS paper trays deliver the performance, compliance and sustainability you need to meet market demands. You can keep up with harvest schedules, protect your produce quality and preserve your brand's reputation — all while staying ahead of changing consumer behaviors and regulations.

## This guide will show you:

-  Why regulations and consumer behavior are making sustainable packaging a business necessity
-  How paper trays engineered with moisture-resistance can give your fresh produce better shelf appeal
-  How pressed paperboard trays can integrate seamlessly into existing production lines
-  Why domestic suppliers are critical to a successful transition



## Certified Sustainable:



# Plastic and foam are piling up.

## 400 M Metric Tons

of plastic are produced worldwide every year  
*Less than 10% is recycled*

Paper packaging in the U.S. has a recycling rate of **74%**

Plastic packaging in the U.S. has a recycling rate of **5%**

This massive recyclability gap isn't just an environmental statistic. It's a warning sign. Regulators, retailers and consumers are demanding a change because living in a world with landfills full of plastic and foam is not sustainable.

**Switching to sustainable paper trays keeps you ahead of regulations before they catch up to your operation, making it a strategic business move that goes far beyond just going "green".**

Paper trays are recyclable and made from renewable fiber, which demonstrates a commitment that resonates with consumers, retailers and a company's sustainability goals. This helps you reduce risk and secure long-term stability while staying cost-competitive with traditional plastic.

# New laws are emerging.

Non-recyclable packaging is becoming more costly.

**12 States** have introduced EPR legislation for packaging

**7 Packaging Bills** have already been passed in the U.S.



## What is EPR?

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws shift the financial burden of packaging waste from cities to the companies that produce it. For food processors, this means non-recyclable packaging can trigger compliance fees, higher disposal costs and regulatory scrutiny — which will be passed down to your company.



# Shoppers' habits are evolving.

Sustainability directly impacts purchasing decisions.

## Consumers want packaging they can feel good about.

This is a huge opportunity for brands that want to project a healthier image and stand out on the shelf.

## PaperTech's sustainable paperboard trays are ideal for processing fresh produce.

Our paper trays not only match an organic look and feel with a natural paper appearance, but they also have the structural rigidity and moisture-resistant barrier coating to preserve product integrity for fresh produce.

### Big Retailers Demand EPS-Free Sustainable Packaging

Produce suppliers who don't meet these standards risk losing shelf space entirely.



Flags EPS as a priority material to replace with recyclable alternatives



Eliminated 198+ tons of plastic by switching to fiber-based packaging



Specifies non-EPS formats for produce packaging



Committed to 100% sustainable packaging goals by 2030

Consumers are choosing brands that match their values. Packaging is the first impression — and paper trays send the right message.

90%

are more likely to buy from a brand with eco-friendly packaging

10% more

is what consumers are willing to pay for sustainably produced goods

## The benefits start immediately:



**Loyalty and repeat business:** Shoppers reward values-driven brands, turning purchases into advocacy.



**Retailer support:** Sustainable products make it easier to secure shelf space and strengthen partnerships.



**Business meets purpose:** With consumers willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, you can invest in sustainability — creating a win-win where your business can thrive and consumers feel good about their purchase.

# More shoppers are choosing fresh produce.

They also want it packaged in recyclable trays.



Your customers want eco-friendly packaging, but they still want their produce to stay fresh and appealing. Our durable, moisture-resistant paperboard trays are engineered for that reason.

**78%** of Gen Z say they're eating more fresh produce




**75%** of Millennials say they're eating more fresh produce

## Consumers want more fresh produce in their diets.

Packaging plays an important role in how today's shoppers choose their fresh produce. With sustainable paper trays, you give customers what they want: high-quality produce in natural-looking packaging they can feel good about. The result? Stronger brand recognition and advocacy that can turn switching to sustainable packaging into a cost-neutral (or even profitable) choice.

## FRESHTRAYS paperboard trays are purpose-engineered for fresh produce.

Engineered with moisture-resistant coating, our sustainable trays deliver the performance processors are looking for to build shopper confidence.

-  **Produce arrives at the store looking fresh because our paperboard trays are built to withstand packing, distribution, cold-chain handling and retail display.** The result is vibrant, natural-looking produce that builds shopper confidence and encourages purchase.
-  **Strong, well-constructed paperboard trays with no cracks, dents or flimsy corners signal quality at first glance.** When packaging looks sturdy and premium, shoppers are more likely to perceive the produce as worth the price.
-  **You can fit up to 250% more trays per truck compared to foam.** Because paper trays are more space-efficient, that means fewer trucks on the road, lower transport costs and a stronger alignment with your sustainable image.

**68–72%** are willing to pay more for fresh produce in sustainable packaging

# Your production needs to continue running smoothly.



**\$30–50k**

is the average cost per incident due to halted lines from packaging malfunctions

**15–25%**

reduced output per hour from downtime caused by inefficient automation

**74%**

of consumers associate poor packaging quality with lower product quality, potentially affecting repeat purchases

## Make Your Product Stand Out with Print-On-Tray Capability

Our in-house printing allows you to eliminate steps in your process and deliver a product that truly stands out. How? Print brand details and QR codes directly onto your paper trays. Unlike plastic and molded fiber, paperboard provides a clean printable surface that delivers retail-quality results.



## Worried that switching to paper trays will slow your line or compromise product quality?

The truth is that with the right supplier and the right modern paperboard design, you can make the switch without dealing with tray softening, seal failures or cold-chain degradation that can derail your production and ruin the quality of your produce.

### **FRESHTRAYS are engineered to proactively address these problems.**

**Seamless integration with processing lines.** Designed to perform in high-speed overwrap machines, vacuum skin packaging (VSP) machines and manual handling, our sustainable FRESHTRAYS trays hold their form without collapsing or losing structure. This saves processors from costly slowdowns, rewraps and product damage.

### **Protect your product and brand with strong paper trays.**

Featuring enhanced moisture resistance and barrier coatings, our paper trays are designed to withstand cold environments and rigorous handling. This prevents cracking and deformation, and reduces the risk of accidental breakage and product damage. Reinforced pressed paperboard lowers breakage by up to 60% compared to EPS or thin plastic trays.

**Trays shaped to fit your produce.** Available in multiple sizes and depths (4P, 10S and 20S), our FRESHTRAYS can meet the shape requirements to fit your fruits and veggies, including corn on the cob, head of broccoli, portobello mushrooms, sweet potatoes and more.

# Your supplier should help you move faster.

**Global supply chains are unpredictable and peak harvest season waits for no one.**

Packaging delays can stall production, disappoint customers and cost you business. A U.S.-based supplier keeps that from happening.

## How does a domestic supplier help?

- Reliable supply without overseas delays
- No tariffs or hidden costs
- Lower carbon footprint, higher sustainability
- Strict quality standards you can trust
- Supports American jobs and communities

## Small enough to care. Big enough to deliver.

If a supplier is too small, they might not have the manufacturing muscle to handle your order. But if a supplier is too big, you might get slow responses and an impersonal customer experience.

During peak harvest season, when production lines are running, waiting weeks for overseas shipments isn't an option. Our U.S. manufacturing and customer-centric philosophy means you get what you need, when you need it.

**From our 150,000 sq. ft. facility in Ohio, we combine agility with scalable production to deliver a 98% On-Time and Complete Rate to our customers.**

- Proximity:** Reduced shipping delays and costs (Our facility sits one day's freight from 60% of the U.S. population and is strategically located near key growing regions)
- Capacity:** State-of-the-art equipment plus ongoing investments to increase output
- Speed:** Quick adjustments and consistent deliveries during peak harvest windows
- Expertise:** Engineers and specialists dedicated to your packaging process
- Confidence:** Domestic supply shields you from global shipping risks
- Sustainability:** Recyclability documentation and U.S. compliance expertise that international suppliers cannot match

**U.S. fresh produce market projected growth:**  
**\$44.4 billion** by 2032 (CAGR of 4.1%)

# Why are fresh produce processors switching to recyclable paperboard trays?



## The Market is Growing and So Are Expectations

78% of Gen Z and 75% of Millennials are eating more fresh produce, and they expect the brands they buy from to package it sustainably. They're even willing to pay more for it.



## Retailers Are Mandating Sustainable Packaging

Walmart, Costco, Whole Foods and Kroger have all made formal commitments to eliminate EPS and non-recyclable packaging. Non-compliance risks losing distribution entirely.



## Regulations Are Tightening Fast

Seven states have enacted EPR legislation, with more on the way. The financial burden of non-compliance, including fees, disposal costs and regulatory scrutiny, is growing every year.



## FRESHTRAYS Are Engineered for Fresh Produce

Our paperboard trays feature moisture-resistant barrier coatings, cold-chain-ready structural integrity and custom sizes for corn, broccoli, mushrooms, cucumbers, squash and more.



## PaperTech Delivers When It Counts

Our Ohio facility sits one day's freight from 60% of the U.S. population, we maintain a **98% On-Time and Complete Rate** and our team picks up the phone when you need support.

**Looking to keep your produce fresh and your packaging sustainable?**  
**Let's talk about integrating FRESHTRAYS seamlessly into your process.**

Scan the QR code or visit [papertrays.com/produce-trays](https://papertrays.com/produce-trays), and our team will quickly respond to your message. If you're interested in speaking with an experienced representative, just give us a call at **910-477-0460**.



## Sources

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