

Alternatives to single-use plastics: Appendix A Alternatives to single-use plastics matrix

Alternative to plastic	Food safety (including; contamination, physical damage, shelf life, traceability and allergen concerns)	Convenience and acceptance (including labelling, branding, consumer perceptions and acceptance)	Circularity (including biodegradability, recyclability, reusability)	Production costs (incl material, la infrastruct requiremen
Paper	Slightly worse: not sealable/airtight, moderate physical protection, regular shelf life, traceable, no allergen concerns, permeable.	Mixed or similar performance: suitable for labelling and branding, not transparent, perceived as sustainable by consumers, well known.	Slightly better: Biodegradable (can release methane, a strong green-house gas, if buried in a landfill)[ii], recyclable, but not if contaminated with food, crease or plastic coating [iii], limited reusability.	Mixed or similar performance: chemicals, and energy production[deforestation infrastruct available.
Glass	Mixed or similar performance: sealable, strong physical protection, extended shelf life (oxygen, moisture and UV light barrier), traceable, no allergen concerns, impermeable	Slightly worse: stickers required for labelling and branding, transparent, well known by consumers, heavier than alternatives and risk of shattering[vii].	Slightly better: non-biodegradable, recyclable, food and grease contaminations and not preventative, [viii] indefinite reusability.	Mixed or similar performance: intensive pr recycling, a materials[x] scaled and

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Metal	Mixed or similar performance: sealable for packaging, strong physical protection, extend shelf life, traceable, no allergen concerns, impermeable.	Mixed or similar performance: stickers required for labelling and branding, not transparent, well known by consumers, light and convenient (aluminium foil).	Slightly better: non-biodegradable, cost effective recycling compared to new production [xii], long term reusability.	Slightly worse: intensive production, harder to obtain materials compared to other alternatives, infrastructure requirements available.
Natural fibrous material such as bamboo, cotton, jute	Significantly worse: not sealable, moderate physical protection, shortened shelf life, tracing difficulties, allergen concerns from source material and permeable.	Slightly worse: stickers required for labelling and branding, not transparent, no evidence found on acceptance.	Slightly better: biodegrades in natural conditions, non-recyclable, medium term reusability,	Slightly better: production, material, high land requirements, certain materials like cotton[xv], food agriculture
Synthesised from biomass; Seaweed polysaccharides	Mixed or similar performance: sealable, weak physical protection, extended shelf life (antimicrobial and antioxidant properties), traceable, allergen concerns from source material	Slightly worse: stickers required for labelling and branding, transparent, no evidence found on acceptance	Significantly better: biodegrades quickly in natural conditions, non-recyclable, limited reusability, limited knowledge on the ecological impacts of seaweed farms [xvi].	Slightly better: fast growing source which is not affected by ocean acidification, high production, continued investment needed for

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Synthesised from bioderived monomers: Polylactic acid (PLA)	Mixed or similar performance: sealable, strong physical protection, regular shelf life, traceable, allergen concerns (dependent on source material), impermeable.	Mixed or similar performance: stickers required for labelling and branding, transparent, some evidence of bioplastics perceived as unsustainable[xx], consumers unlikely to be able to differentiate between bio-based and petroleum plastics[xxi].	Slightly worse: biodegradable only in industrial conditions at temperatures of at least 55 degrees [xxii], waste PLA can contribute to plastic litter in terrestrial and marine environments [xxiii], recyclable, but not currently at scale[xxivxxvxxvi], risks contaminating current plastic recycling systems[xxvii], reusable, PLA can derive from fossil-based sources or food waste/by-product[xxviii].	Mixed or similar performance: material source significant water input[xxix], cost for food production, impact on food environment using pesticides and fertilisers[xxx].

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Produced by microorganisms: Polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHAs)	Mixed or similar performance: sealable, strong physical protection, extended shelf life, traceable, allergen concerns (dependent on source material)	Mixed or similar performance: stickers required for labelling and branding, transparent, some evidence of bioplastics perceived as unsustainable[xxxiii], consumers unlikely to be able to differentiate between biodegradable PHA and non-biodegradable plastics[xxxiv].	Slightly better: Biodegradable under natural conditions[xxxv], recyclable but not widely recycled[xxxvi], can be made from fossil-based sources or food waste/by-product[xxxvii], no evidence on reusability of material.	Slightly worse: production associated with energy and carbon sources[xxxviii] of chemical research required to identify cost-effective innovations
Reducing packaging (either no packaging or less packaging)	Significantly worse: contamination risk, physical damage risk, reduced shelf life, some tracing difficulties, allergen concerns from cross contamination of exposed foods such as nuts.	Slightly worse: labelling and branding limitations, product visibility, growing consumer trend[xliii], less convenient, especially for wet foods and liquids. Consumers may have to bring their own packaging.	Significantly better: less materials and resources used, less waste, requires bulk packaging products for example, dispensers.	Slightly better: lower inputs, require less infrastructure

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Reusing packaging	Slightly worse: potentially sealable, strong physical protection, regular shelf life, some tracing difficulties, allergen concerns depend on packaging type	Mixed or similar performance: stickers required for labelling and branding, can be transparent, growing consumer trend[xlv], less convenient[xlvi].	Significantly better: reuse circularity, requires bulk packaging products for example, dispensers.	Slightly better: input requirements, investment in store infrastructure, for example, dish washing services, transport logistics[xlv].
Recyclable packaging and systems	Mixed or similar performance: sealable, strong physical protection, extended shelf life, traceable, no allergen concerns	Mixed or similar performance: stickers required for labelling and branding, can be transparent, accepted by consumers[l].	Slightly better: recycling circularity, process inefficiencies and energy costs, not feasible for some materials for example, multicoated wrappers, thin plastics.	Slightly worse: input requirements, virgin material, sustain durability, material[l], with current separation infrastructure.
Active packaging	Slightly better: antimicrobial and/or antioxidant, extended shelf life, traceable, allergen concerns from source material	Novel to consumers, convenience from extended shelf life, consumers are unfamiliar with a mild to slightly positive attitude to this technology[liv].	Slightly worse: biodegradability varies per product, not recyclable, not reusable.	Slightly worse: research costs and production significantly higher.

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Intelligent packaging	Slightly better: potential to extend shelf life, increased visibility of food data throughout supply chain[lvii].	Slightly better: Add on for labelling and branding, convenient for suppliers, retailers and consumers, consumers are unfamiliar with a mild to slightly positive attitude to this technology[lviii].	Slightly worse: Biodegradability varies per product, not recyclable, no evidence on reusability.	Slightly worse research co and produc significantly

Note: Alternatives are rated by category, with conventional plastics as the benchmark. Dark red means that the alternative performs significantly worse than plastics in that category, orange is slightly worse, beige is similar or mixed performance, light green is slightly better, and dark green is significantly better.

This rating system was designed through consultation with the FSA, expert advisors and desk research. In some instances, value judgements had to be made regarding what is more important in each category, so that we could determine a rating.

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