

CASE STUDY

UNPACKING THE ISSUE OF SUPERMARKET WASTE

This case study outlines how John Lewis Partnership has used circular thinking to reduce the impact of single use plastic and other packaging waste at Waitrose.

What was the issue?

Products being over-packaged is not only wasteful but a common source of complaints from consumers. Supermarkets, in particular, are not designed to sell goods that are not packaged.

What did Waitrose do about it?

In 2019, the John Lewis Partnership launched its 'Unpacked' scheme in their Waitrose Botley Road shop in Oxford. The aim was to remove unnecessary packaging and test how customers might be prepared to shop differently. Packaging was removed from more than 200 products using a 'Reduce, Reuse, Refill' model. Unpacked included:

- An extensive range of loose fresh fruit and vegetables (the largest of any national supermarket).
- 28 varieties of dried goods, from pasta to cereal, were available in dispensers.
- Customers could choose from six types of loose frozen fruit to pick and mix.
- Four beers and four wines were offered on tap.
- Four blends of coffee which could be dispensed and ground in store.
- One detergent and one washing up liquid to dispense and refill.

Outcomes and impact

98%

of single-use plastic packaging was eliminated across Unpacked products

41%↓

reduction of total packaging (including plastic, glass, and card)

The initial concept has been expanded to three additional shops and also includes new lines.

What did Waitrose learn?

- A common language and approach are important for consistent, rapid progress.
- Investment and innovations in automated measuring equipment is important to help align with the weights and measures legislation, which does not currently accommodate random measures.
- Providing customers with clear product information is essential.
- More quantitative research is required to identify the impact of removing packaging and refill models on food waste in the home.



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