



# *Clear Opinions*

Consumer Research on Health,  
Taste and Environmental Concerns  
Regarding Food and Beverage Packaging

November 2013

A Report by



glass  
packaging  
institute

## Introduction

When a consumer considers options in making a product purchase, there are a number of factors that influence the final decision, including presentation and pricing to name a few. But what about questions of safety and environmental impact?

To perhaps an unprecedented degree, in recent years consumers have been exposed to headlines about a vast array of scientific studies on the materials that come into contact with our food and beverages – such as the study of potential effects of exposure to Bisphenol-A often present in many plastics and epoxy liners.

In the glass industry, when it comes to food and beverages, it is often said that the container for the product can be just as important to the consumer as what it contains. The Glass Packaging Institute (GPI) endeavored to learn the extent to which that maxim was actually true.

To do so, GPI partnered with EcoFocus Worldwide Research, a leading expert on green and sustainability consumer trends, to conduct a sample of 4,046 nationally representative adults ages 18 – 65 to ask them very specifically what factors are considerations for them when thinking about the purchase of a food or beverage as it relates to packaging, particularly when it comes to concerns regarding the health or the environment. The survey was conducted during the spring of 2013.

### **What we found is that for consumers increasingly believe packaging does matter.**

In the survey we sought to assess preferences for food and beverage packaging in three key areas to compare attitudes and beliefs:

**Is there a health impact consideration?**

**Is there a taste consideration?**

**Is there a preference regarding the environmental impact?**

When it comes to food and beverage packaging, consumers appear increasingly discerning and aware of the issues associated with the packaging. In short, the qualities of the packaging that contains a food or beverage is for many just as important as the qualities of the food or beverage itself. Quite simply, packaging most certainly matters to many consumers.

## Part 1: Health and Taste

In general, American consumers are increasingly health-conscious when it comes to making choices about the products they purchase and use. While pricing is always a factor in making a purchase, there is a huge sensitivity to the health aspects of a product as well.

**Nearly two-thirds of men and nearly three-fourths of women said that health factors – such as thinking about better nutrition, safer materials or ingredients, and natural qualities to protect their own or their family’s health, played a role in their product choices.**

Overall, **69.4** percent of consumers surveyed indicated that health reasons either usually played or always played a role in choosing a product for purchase – a statistically significant increase of nearly 6 percent from 2010;

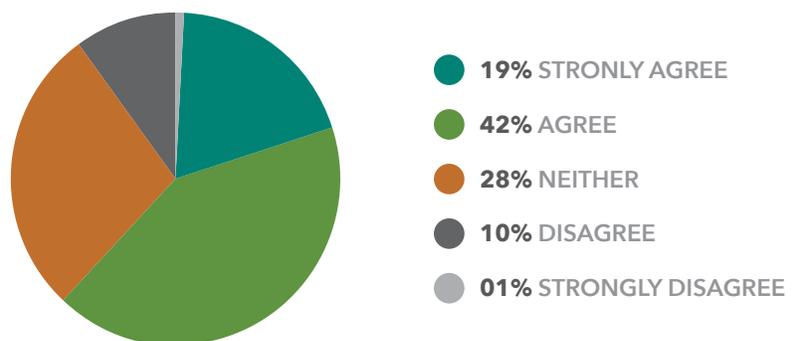
**63.8** percent of men stated that it played a role while **74.4** percent of women indicated that it always or usually played a role;

Fewer than **1 in 10** consumers – 8 percent – indicated that health considerations never or rarely played a role.

Moreover, by nearly the same percentage who said that health played a role (69.4 percent), consumers agreed with the statement that it was worth paying more for healthier products if necessary (69.3 percent).

### Packaging is a factor that consumers consider when making healthier choices

*“I have changed what I buy in order to reduce our exposure to chemicals from food or beverage packaging”*



In the face of a cascade of ongoing studies related to various safety and health aspects of packaging materials, consumers are increasingly aware of potential threats. Nearly two-thirds of consumers are trying to lessen their exposure to chemicals that may be contained in the packaging of their food and beverage products, with nearly six in 10 consumers stating that they have changed what they buy in order to reduce exposure to chemicals.

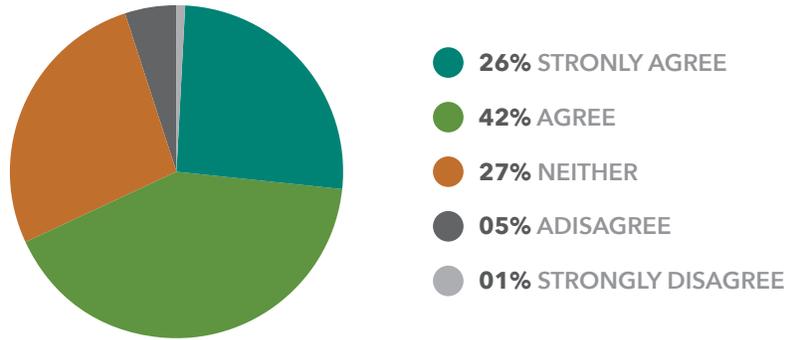
In fact, a clear majority (56.1 percent) of all consumers stated that when they are shopping for food, a packaging container’s health impact has an influence on their purchase. Similarly, just over half (50.9 percent) stated that the packaging container’s health impact influences their purchase when shopping for beverages.

**The use of plastic in packaging appears to be an increasing concern for consumers in general, particularly with respect to the use of Bisphenol-A (BPA).**

When asked about any safety concerns related to plastic generally and the presence of BPA with respect to packaging for food and water, consumers had similar levels of concern. Nearly 40 percent of consumers expressed concern about plastic generally, up from 32.6 percent in 2010 and 38.3 percent of respondents expressed concern about the presence of BPA specifically, up from 31.4% when the question was last asked in 2011.

	Extremely or Very Concerned Plastic	Extremely or Very Concerned BPA
<b>ALL</b>	<b>39.30%</b>	<b>38.30%</b>
Men	34.80%	34.80%
Women	43.40%	42.30%
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
Less than College Grad	37.60%	34.40%
College/Tech Grad or more	40.80%	41.50%
<b>INCOME</b>		
Less \$35,000	37.90%	34.40%
\$35,000 – \$74,999	39.50%	38.90%
\$75,0005+	40.70%	41.50%
<b>RACE</b>		
Caucasian	36.10%	36.10%
African American	47.90%	45.30%
Asian	50.50%	49.50%
Hispanic	43.50%	39.30%
<b>AGE</b>		
18-20	33.60%	27.20%
21-35	42.20%	43.00%
36-45	38.50%	38.10%
46-55	38.00%	33.30%
55-65	37.90%	38.30%

*"I want to minimize my child's exposure to plastic in food and beverage packaging"*



When considering children's exposure to plastic, concerns were even more pronounced with over two-thirds of people with children indicating that they want to minimize their child's exposure to plastic in food and beverage packaging.

**These sentiments have had an impact on consumer behavior with 57 percent of consumers stating that they try to buy beverages that use less plastic in their packaging.**

When consumers were asked to rank the positive health impact of various packaging containers for both food and beverages, there was a clear preference for glass over other types of packaging in both categories.

	Food Packaging	Beverage Packaging
<b>Glass bottle or jar</b>	53.50	52.10
<b>Recycled paper box</b>	52.70	
<b>Refrigerated carton</b>	32.40	32.00
<b>Aluminum can</b>	30.50	31.10
<b>Flexible pouch</b>	22.30	21.60
<b>Steel can</b>	22.10	22.60
<b>Plastic bottle, bag, wrapper or tray</b>	17.80	21.40
<b>Styrofoam cup</b>		9.0

Part of the reasoning for the positive outlook regarding glass may be due to the fact that an overwhelming number of consumers believe it is likely that some packaging materials are leaving behind chemicals in the food and drink they consume.

**Eight in 10 consumers said that some packaging containers can leave undesirable chemicals in their food and beverages and that some containers can change the taste.**

Which packaging containers can leave undesirable chemicals in your food or beverage?

	Food Packaging	Beverage Packaging
<b>Glass bottle or jar</b>	6.9%	7.60%
<b>Recycled paper box</b>	1%	
<b>Refrigerated carton</b>	18.70%	17.90%
<b>Aluminum can</b>	39.40%	35.40%
<b>Flexible pouch</b>	30.40%	26.00%
<b>Steel can</b>	43.40%	39.20%
<b>Plastic bottle, bag, wrapper or tray</b>	62.80%	53.80%
<b>Styrofoam cup</b>		59.70%

Apart from the health considerations, there is also a matter of taste related to consumer preferences.

Which packaging containers can change the taste of your food or beverage?

	Food Packaging	Beverage Packaging
<b>Glass bottle or jar</b>	6.60%	7.5%
<b>Recycled paper box</b>	1.60%	
<b>Refrigerated carton</b>	22.90%	19.70%
<b>Aluminum can</b>	50.90%	46.60%
<b>Flexible pouch</b>	24.40%	21.20%
<b>Steel can</b>	55.30%	52.60%
<b>Plastic bottle, bag, wrapper or tray</b>	47.70%	38.50%
<b>Styrofoam cup</b>		44.00%

## *Part 2: The Environment*

Just as American consumers are increasingly health-conscious concerning their packaging, a majority indicate that their choices in packaging are also guided by environmental concerns – though they are less driven by the environment than they were by concerns about health.

**Over half of all consumers said that environmental factors – such as thinking about saving energy, reducing waste, avoiding chemicals or pollutants, and so forth – played a role in their product choices.**

Overall, 52.2 percent of consumers surveyed indicated that environmental issues either usually or always played a role in choosing a product for purchase;

Environmental factors were a greater concern for women than for men; 55.20 percent of women indicated that environmental factors always or usually played a role while 48.8 percent of men concurred.

Only 3.3 percent indicated that environmental considerations never or rarely played a role.

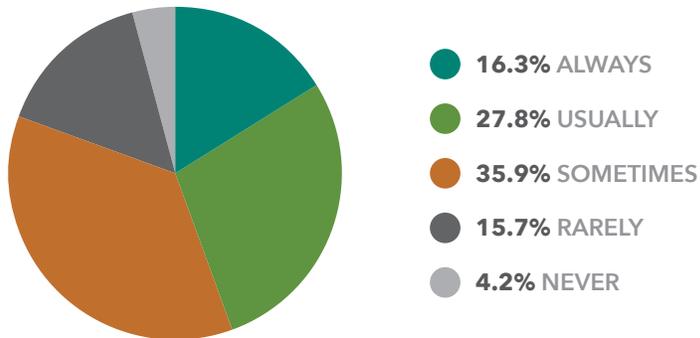
Moreover, half of consumers indicated that it was worth paying more in order to get eco-friendly products

Slightly over half (51.2 percent) of consumers said that the environmental impact of a food container did influence their purchase, while nearly half (47.5 percent) said that it impacted their beverage purchase.

**Environmental issues have changed the way consumers are making shopping choices; nearly three out of four consumers are looking for ways to make home and lifestyle more eco-friendly.**

---

*"I think about the environmental impact of packaging before I purchase products"*



---

### **How does this translate to packaging?**

Nearly half (44.1 percent) of consumers are always or usually taking into consideration the environmental impact of the packaging of a product before making a purchase, a sentiment held by nearly the same percentage of men as women. Conversely only a combined 20 percent stated that they rarely or never take the environmental impact of packaging into consideration.

Well over half (58.4 percent) indicated that using less plastic was a priority for them.

### **Nearly six in 10 respondents (58.8 percent) stated that it was important to them to choose items that were packaged responsibly.**

In fact, when it came to the positive environmental impact of various forms of food packaging, glass received high marks from consumers, second only to a recycled paper box. Glass received the highest rank from consumers when it came to the environmental impact of beverage containers.

Positive Rankings for Packaging	Food Packaging	Beverage Packaging
<b>Glass bottle or jar</b>	53.9	54.6
<b>Recycled paper box</b>	61.1	
<b>Refrigerated carton</b>	33.0	31.1
<b>Aluminum can</b>	35.3	36.6
<b>Flexible pouch</b>	22.3	21.7
<b>Steel can</b>	24.9	26.3
<b>Plastic bottle, bag, wrapper or tray</b>	18.6	22.8
<b>Styrofoam cup</b>		8.7

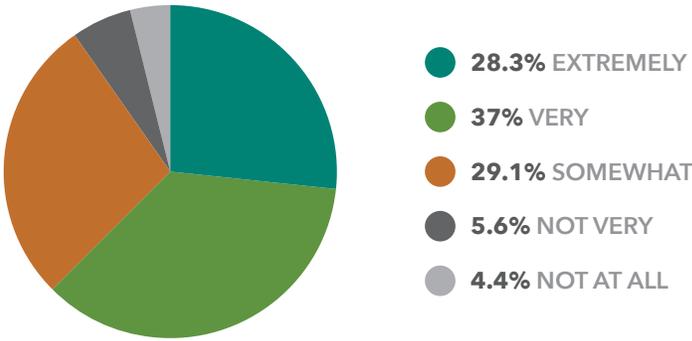
Conversely, when asked to rank those forms of packaging for food and beverages least environmentally friendly, glass again received high marks.

Negative Rankings for Packaging	Food Packaging	Beverage Packaging
<b>Glass bottle or jar</b>	10.3	10.2
<b>Recycled paper box</b>	6.2	
<b>Refrigerated carton</b>	21.0	24.1
<b>Aluminum can</b>	26.6	25.8
<b>Flexible pouch</b>	32.6	33.2
<b>Steel can</b>	31.9	31.8
<b>Plastic bottle, bag, wrapper or tray</b>	51.8	50.1
<b>Styrofoam cup</b>		67.7

With consumers ranking the environmental impact of glass so highly, it is important to next explore how that might affect their own outlook on manufacturers and their choice of packaging materials. We asked consumers whether or not using packaging that is made with renewable or recycled resources influences their choice of brands, products or services and found that consumers overwhelmingly indicated that it did, with a combined 65.30 percent stating that it was either an extremely or very positive influence over their choices.

---

Does use of renewable or recycled materials have an influence over your choice of brands, products?

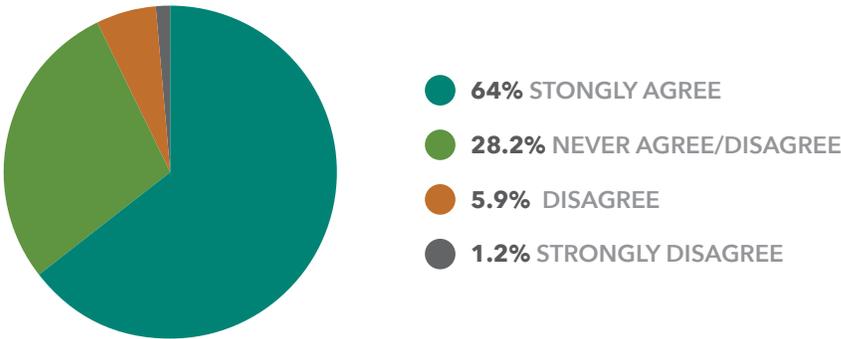


---

**There is also a clear consumer understanding about the role that glass plays as an environmentally friendly packaging choice with 64.7 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing that glass is 100 percent recyclable and can be recycled endlessly without loss in quality or purity.**

---

Glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled endlessly without loss in quality or purity



## *Conclusion*

Today's consumer has been faced with a barrage of news, studies and reports that discuss potentially toxic threats in our consumption of foods and exposure to chemicals, while at the same time becoming more and more aware of our impact on the environment through our everyday use of materials. The information gleaned from our survey reflects a growing understanding of this and corresponding growing concern on the part of the American consumer. A comparison of the data from 2010 with that of 2013 demonstrates higher levels of awareness of risks and threats and reveals a greater motivation on the part of consumers to do something. This may be best exemplified by the fact that in 2010, only 38.7 percent of consumers stated that it was worth it to pay more for eco-friendly products – a number that jumped to 50.8 percent by 2013.

This includes packaging. As seen in the report, increasing numbers of consumers are seeing glass as the responsible choice to protect the health and environment for generations that follow. In today's environment, glass has emerged as the trusted and proven packaging for health, the environment and even in matters of taste.



1001 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 301, Alexandria, VA 22314  
p: 703.684.6359 e: [info@gpi.org](mailto:info@gpi.org)  
[www.gpi.org](http://www.gpi.org)